



NCCA

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

The Redeveloped Primary School Curriculum in Ireland

Charting the Redevelopment Process

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April 2025

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The purpose of this report is to delineate and document the process undertaken by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in redeveloping the primary school curriculum up to the point of finalising the specifications for the five curriculum areas in March 2025. In essence, this marks the culmination of the curriculum redevelopment process which will inform the curriculum and assessment advice for the Minister for Education on the primary school curriculum. Documenting the journey of curriculum redevelopment is important to ensure that the process is transparent and captured for those in Ireland and internationally who wish to understand the individual and collective steps taken both in the contemporary context and for future historians of education. The document is also designed to support the NCCA as a learning organisation to reflect on its own processes over time. While much of this process is apparent through a myriad of NCCA publications, the aim of this document is to synthesise these developments.

Context and background

Historically, curriculum development at primary level in Ireland has been characterised more by revolution than evolution. The typical pattern has been a significant revision of the philosophy and content of curricula following long periods of time. This has resulted in three significant curriculum revisions to date since the advent of political independence in 1922. These can be summarised¹ as follows:

- **1920s:** Significant curriculum revisions were introduced in the 1920s following the achievement of political independence (National Programme Conference, 1922; 1926). These revisions placed a significant emphasis on the revival of the Irish language through the school system and reduced the emphasis on progressive and child-centred pedagogies that had underpinned the preceding curriculum.
- **1971:** The curricula from the 1920s were enacted for close to 50 years in primary schools in Ireland, with some minor modifications in 1934, 1948 and 1951. The Department of Education's² Inspectorate led a review of the curriculum from the late 1960s, resulting in the introduction of the Primary School Curriculum in 1971 (Department of Education, 1971). This resulted in a more holistic, broad-based and child-centred curriculum for primary school pupils.
- **1999:** Following close to a decade of curriculum development activities, a revised Primary School Curriculum was introduced in 1999 (Government of Ireland, 1999). This built largely on the principles and content of the previous curriculum, providing much more extensive guidance to teachers in terms of its aims and objectives. Following 1999, additional curriculum guidance was provided in the form of programmes, guidelines, strategies and toolkits to extend and amplify existing curriculum guidance.

These curriculum revisions, coming decades apart, generally represented significant philosophical, conceptual, structural and content changes for the education system, particularly for teachers whose daily practice was informed by curriculum provisions. However, as with all policy changes, a change in curriculum policy did not necessarily result in a concomitant change in practice (Alexander, 2022; Walsh, 2012).

¹ For a more comprehensive overview, see Walsh (2022:11–41).

² The nomenclature of the Department of Education in Ireland has changed in recent times. From 1924 until 1997 it was known as the Department of Education. From 1st October 1997, it became known as the Department of Education and Science (DES). On 2nd May 2010, it was renamed the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and on the 22nd of October 2020, it was renamed the Department of Education. The relevant name/abbreviation will be used throughout the report for the relevant time period.

By the early 2010s, the pace of societal and educational change in the contemporary globalised world prompted a reflection on the priorities and provisions of the 1999 curriculum. The curriculum redevelopment process was informed by advancements in research and understandings on children's learning and development since the 1990s, as well the desire to ensure the curriculum remained reflective of and responsive to local and global societal changes. The primary curriculum review was also informed and inspired by wider educational developments across a range of sectors in Ireland. These include the significant developments on the early childhood education landscape in the previous two decades, particularly the publication of *Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2009)³ which interfaced with the primary school curriculum in the infant classes of primary schools. The update of *Aistear*, completed in 2024, has provided an opportunity to align the principles of the early childhood curriculum framework and the redeveloped primary curriculum, as well as to focus on the continuity of learning experiences and outcomes from early years settings into the infant classes. The review and publication of revisions to post-primary education, particularly the Junior Cycle (Department of Education and Skills [DES], 2015), also impacted upon reflections as to the priorities and purposes of primary education along the continuum of education. Significantly, these wider developments prompted a conversation around the structure and format of the primary school curriculum given the shift to curriculum frameworks and a learning outcomes approach at other levels of the education system. Overall, the education system in Ireland is experiencing significant simultaneous curriculum shifts at all levels and sectors, requiring systematic attention to issues of coherence and supported sense-making.

The focus of this paper relates to the process undertaken to support the redeveloped curriculum in Ireland between 2012 and March 2025, by which time the *Primary Curriculum Framework* (Department of Education, 2023) has been published and the final specifications for each of the curriculum areas have been finalised. It is envisaged that the redeveloped curriculum will be introduced within primary and special schools from September 2025.

Structure of the report

In terms of structure, this report charts the redevelopment process across four distinct but interrelated strands that have been identified by the NCCA as the “four interconnected areas of activity” (NCCA, 2022a:14) which inform its development of advice on curriculum and assessment to the Minister for Education:

- **Research and policy developments** – this documents the key research and policy papers that were developed or commissioned by the NCCA to inform the redeveloped curriculum.
- **Consultations** – this documents the formal consultative processes facilitated by the NCCA to gather the views of children, parents, teachers, school leaders, boards of management, patrons and wider stakeholders in relation to the redeveloped curriculum.
- **Networking** – this documents the wide array of networking opportunities developed and availed of by the NCCA to garner the views of the education sector in terms of curriculum redevelopment.
- **Deliberations** – this documents the internal processes within the NCCA in terms of working with the totality of evidence garnered through research, consultations and networking to make decisions in terms of producing the redeveloped primary school curriculum.

³ The *Aistear* framework was updated in 2024. See <https://tinyurl.com/bdh4xpuy>.

Within each of these strands, the process will be charted chronologically for the most part. While these strands are useful in terms of documenting the key pillars of redevelopment, there are often overlaps in terms of these processes (e.g., research reports often informed consultation processes or networking events). As the processes and timelines for the development of the *Primary Language Curriculum* and *Primary Mathematics Curriculum* differed from the other elements of the redeveloped curriculum, these are treated separately within each relevant section.

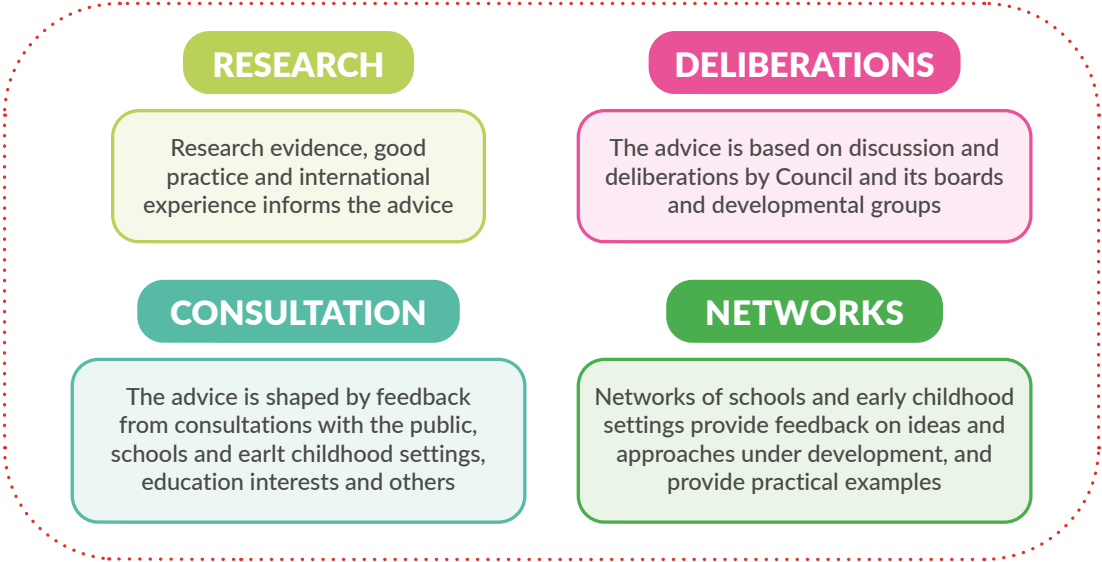


Figure 1: The Development Process

Strand 1:

Research and policy developments

The NCCA generates, uses and shares diverse forms of research, including research reviews, longitudinal studies and literature audits, to inform and advance its work relating to curriculum and assessment advice for the Minister for Education. Early research underpinning the redevelopment of the primary school curriculum can be traced back to the initial reviews of the implementation of 'Revised Curriculum' introduced in 1999. This research was undertaken or commissioned by both the NCCA (NCCA, 2005a; 2008; Varley, Murphy and Veale, 2008a; 2008b) and the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science (DES, 2005). The future direction of the redeveloped curriculum was also shaped by the seminal literacy and numeracy strategy published by the DES in 2011, *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* (DES, 2011). This Strategy tasked the NCCA with revising the primary language (Irish and English) and mathematics curriculum as a matter of priority and also heralded the introduction of a learning-outcomes based approach to curriculum development.

Primary Language Curriculum research and policy development

The NCCA advanced the work on the primary language curriculum by commissioning a series of research reports on language and literacy in the primary school curriculum. These included:

- *Effective Language Teaching: A Synthesis of Research* (Harris and Ó Duibhir, 2011).
- *Oral Language in Early Childhood and Primary Education (3–8 Years)* (Shiel et al., 2012).
- *Literacy in Early Childhood and Primary Education (3–8 Years)* (Kennedy et al., 2012).
- *Towards an Integrated Language Curriculum in Early Childhood and Primary Education (3–12 Years)* (Ó Duibhir and Cummins, 2012).

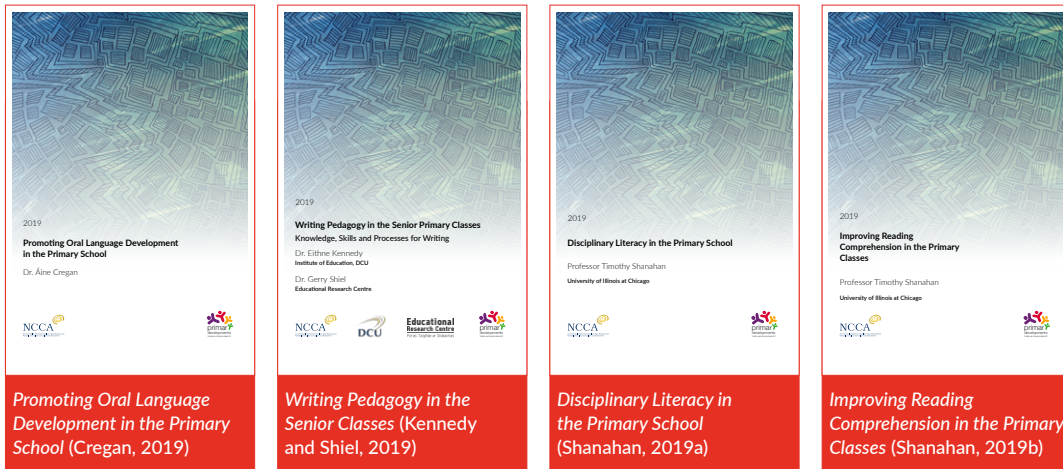


In addition, a collated Executive Summary of the three research reports from 2012 was also published by the NCCA (NCCA, 2012a).

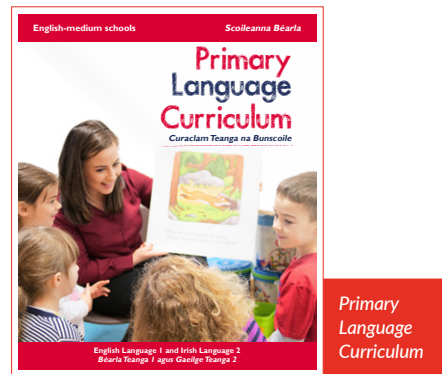
The NCCA prepared a *Draft Primary Language Curriculum*, covering both English and Irish, for English-medium schools in 2014 to inform a consultative process (NCCA, 2014a). This resulted in the publication in late 2015 of the *Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile for Stages 1 and 2 (junior infants to second class)* (NCCA, 2015a). This was introduced to schools in 2016. In November 2016, a Meitheal Forbartha (working group) was established to develop the Primary Language Curriculum for Stage 3 and Stage 4. To support the further development of the Primary Language Curriculum, the NCCA commissioned a suite of research reports to inform developments across a range of areas.

These comprised:

- *Promoting Oral Language Development in the Primary School* (Cregan, 2019).
- *Writing Pedagogy in the Senior Classes* (Kennedy and Shiel, 2019).
- *Disciplinary Literacy in the Primary School* (Shanahan, 2019a).
- *Improving Reading Comprehension in the Primary Classes* (Shanahan, 2019b).



Following the publication of the outcomes of a consultation process for Stage 3 and Stage 4 of the *Primary Language Curriculum* in September 2018 (NCCA, 2018a), the *Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile* (DES, 2019a) was published for English-medium schools and *Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile/Primary Language Curriculum* (DES, 2019b) was published for Irish-medium schools, including revisions to the curriculum for Stage 1 and Stage 2. The *Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile* has been enacted in schools since 2019.



To inform understanding of the history of Irish language teaching in primary schools, two research reports on the teaching and learning of Irish in English-medium schools were commissioned by the NCCA, the first reporting on the time period 1878 to 1971 (Dunne, 2020a) and the second on 1971 to 2020 (Dunne, 2020b). These were accompanied by an Executive Summary of both reports (Dunne, 2020c).

Primary Mathematics Curriculum research and policy development

Following the publication of the literacy and numeracy strategy (DES, 2011), the redevelopment of the mathematics curriculum was advanced by publishing an international audit of mathematics curricula in 2014 (Burke, 2014). This was complemented by two commissioned research reports which focused on children aged three to eight years old (Dooley et al., 2014; Dunphy et al., 2014). An Executive Summary of both reports was also published in 2014 (NCCA, 2014b). A conference on developing mathematical ideas with children (3–8 years) took place in late 2014 to explore ideas regarding the teaching of mathematics, the proceedings of which were published by the NCCA (NCCA, 2014c). These were followed by a NCCA background paper and brief for the development of the new Primary Mathematics Curriculum in 2016 (NCCA, 2016a).

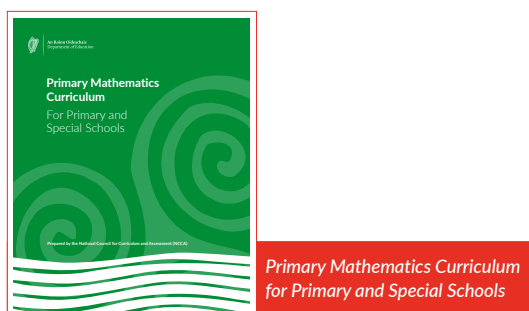
A draft specification for primary mathematics for children in junior infants to second class was published by the NCCA in 2018 (NCCA, 2018b). Based a consultation process (NCCA, 2018c) and on experience from the Primary Language Curriculum development process, a decision was made to prepare and publish a Primary Mathematics Curriculum for all classes simultaneously rather than in two tranches (i.e., junior infants to second class followed by third to sixth class) as had been undertaken for the Primary Language Curriculum.

As curriculum planning advanced for mathematics, an addendum was prepared to the earlier 2014 research reports which built on their findings and focused on children in the middle and senior classes (Dooley, 2019). This was followed by a suite of five short research papers which focused on each of the five key domains of mathematical learning in the senior classes, namely:

- *Algebra in the Senior Primary Classes* (Twohill, 2020).
- *Data and Chance in the Senior Primary Classes* (Leavy, 2020).
- *Measures in the Senior Primary Classes* (Nic Mhuirí, 2020a).
- *Number in the Senior Primary Classes* (Delaney, 2020).
- *Shape and Space in the Senior Primary Classes* (Nic Mhuirí, 2020b).



A finalised *Primary Mathematics Curriculum for Primary and Special Schools* was published in 2023 (NCCA, 2023a) and this has been introduced into all schools since September 2024.



Research underpinning the wider curriculum redevelopment process

Momentum in the wider redevelopment process beyond language and mathematics is evident from 2018. In terms of research, this was catalysed by a series of 14 research reports, either prepared or commissioned by the NCCA, to support the redevelopment process. These reports focused on both broad questions (e.g., values underpinning primary education) as well as a range of overarching considerations for the curriculum (e.g., the role of knowledge and key competencies). These research reports were completed by researchers based in Ireland as well as internationally in collaboration with the NCCA team. This series of research reports completed in 2018 and 2019 are:

1. *Curriculum Integration* (Bacon, 2018).
2. *Audit of the Content of Early Years and Primary Curricula in Eight Jurisdictions: Overview Report* (O'Donnell, 2018a).
3. *Audit of the Content of Early Years and Primary Curricula in Eight Jurisdictions – Key Findings Synthesis: Curriculum Breadth, Depth and Organisation* (O'Donnell, 2018b).
4. *Effective Pedagogies for a Redeveloped Primary School Curriculum* (Volante, 2018).
5. *Towards a Values-Led Redevelopment of the Primary Curriculum* (Irwin, 2018).
6. *Research-Informed Analysis of 21st Century Competencies in a Redeveloped Primary Curriculum* (McGuinness, 2018).
7. *Primary Curriculum Review and Redevelopment: Report of Main Findings from Parents on the Review and Redevelopment of the Primary Curriculum* (NCCA, 2019a).
8. *Preschool to Primary School Transition Initiative Final Report* (NCCA, 2018d).
9. *A Melange or a Mosaic of Theories? How Theoretical Perspectives on Children's Learning and Development Can Inform a Responsive Pedagogy in a Redeveloped Primary School Curriculum* (Ring et al., 2018).
10. *The Transition to Primary Education: Insights from the Growing Up in Ireland Study* (Smyth, 2018).
11. *Towards an Overview of a Redeveloped Primary School Curriculum: Learning from the Past, Learning from Others* (Walsh, 2018).
12. *The Place of Knowledge in Curricula: A Research-informed Analysis* (Wyse and Manyukhina, 2018).
13. *Aligning Assessment, Learning and Teaching in Curricular Reform and Implementation* (Lysaght et al., 2019).
14. *Curriculum Alignment and Progression between Early Childhood Education and Care and Primary School* (Shuey et al., 2019).

Arising from the process undertaken towards publishing the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* in February 2020 (NCCA, 2020a), further research reports were commissioned to support the finalising of the redeveloped curriculum framework. For example, systematic literature reviews were commissioned for four of the five curriculum areas:

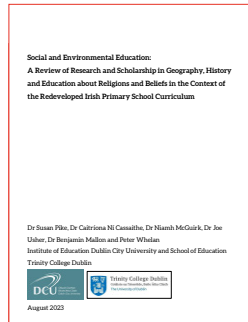
- Arts Education (O'Sullivan et al., 2023)
- Wellbeing (Nohilly et al., 2023)
- Social and Environmental Education (Pike et al., 2023)
- Science, Technology and Engineering Education (Murphy et al., 2023)



A literature review to support curriculum specification development for the area of Arts Education.



A systematic Literature Review to Support the Curriculum Specification Development for the area of Wellbeing.

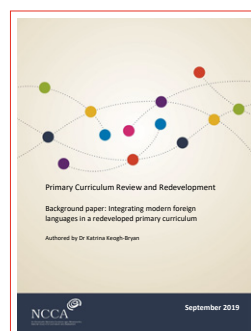


A Review of Research and Scholarship in Geography, History and Education about Religions and Beliefs in the Context of the Redeveloped Irish Primary School Curriculum.



Curriculum & Literature Overview & Primary Science Education: Systematic Literature Review.

A background report on *Integrating Modern Foreign Languages in a Redeveloped Primary Curriculum* (Keogh-Bryan, 2019) was used to inform the development of provisions regarding Modern Foreign Languages within the Primary Language Curriculum.



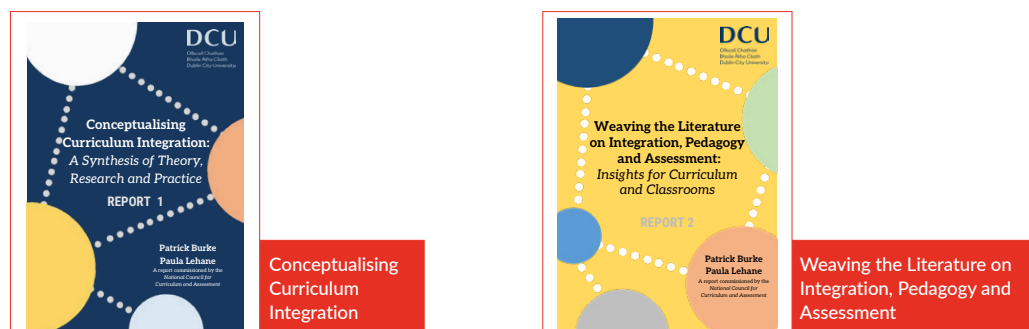
Background report on integrating Modern Foreign Languages

In addition to the systematic literature reviews relating to curriculum areas, cross-cutting research was also commissioned in areas requiring further clarification as highlighted by the development process. The NCCA and the National Parents Council (Primary) commissioned Marino Institute of Education to undertake a literature review relating to parental involvement in their child's education (O'Toole et al., 2019). In 2022, a series of research papers to support digital technology within the redeveloped curriculum were commissioned and published. These comprised:

- **Digital Technology:** *Being a Digital Learner* (Butler and Leahy, 2022).
- **Digital Technology:** *Interacting Safely, Ethically and Responsibly* (O'Neill, 2022).
- **Digital Technology:** *Using, Understanding and Creating* (Waite and Quille, 2022a).
- **Digital Technology:** *Using, Understanding and Creating – Technical Report* (Waite and Quille, 2022b).
- **Digital Technology:** *Design Thinking* (Kenna, 2022).



Reports on “Conceptualising Curriculum Integration” (Burke and Lehané, 2023a) and “Weaving the Literature on Integration, Pedagogy and Assessment” (Burke and Lehané, 2023b) were prepared, with each report further supported by an annex (Burke and Lehané, 2023c; 2023d).



Parallel to the research outlined to date, the NCCA commenced a five-year longitudinal study in 2019, **Children's School Lives**, in collaboration with the School of Education in University College Dublin.⁴ To date, the project has published nine substantive research reports on its work with children, teachers and schools:

- **Report 1:** *Children's School Lives: An Introduction* (Devine et al., 2020)
- **Report 2:** *Experience of Remote Teaching and Learning in Ireland during the COVID-19 Pandemic* (Symonds et al., 2020)
- **Report 3:** *Children's School Lives in Junior Infants* (Sloan et al., 2021)
- **Report 4:** *Children's School Lives: Preschool to Primary School Transition* (Sloan et al., 2022)
- **Report 5:** *Primary Pedagogies: Children and Teachers Experiences of Pedagogical Practices in Primary Schools in Ireland 2019–2022* (Devine et al., 2023)
- **Report 6:** *Curriculum and Assessment in Children's School Lives: Experiences from Primary Schools in Ireland 2019–2023* (Martinez Sainz et al., 2023)
- **Report 7:** *Children's School Lives: Children's Wellbeing in Irish Primary Schools (2019 to 2023)* (Sloan et al., 2024).
- **Report 8a:** *Children's School Lives: Equalities in Children's School Lives – The Impact of Social Background (2019 to 2023)* (Devine et al., 2024a).
- **Report 8b:** *Equalities in Children's School Lives: The Impact of Gender* (Devine et al., 2024b).



⁴ This study is Ireland's first in-depth study of primary schools contributing to the development of national policy, informed by the voices of children, their families, their teachers and school leaders. It explores the lived experiences of 4,000 children in 189 schools through their primary school years in order to learn about and from their experiences. It is funded by the NCCA and is conducted by the School of Education in University College Dublin. See <https://cslstudy.ie> for details.

Wider research that supported curriculum development

Wider curriculum developments and debates also prompted research on specific elements of the curriculum at this time. In terms of **Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics**, the NCCA commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research to produce an international audit of the provision of education about religions and beliefs (ERB) and ethics education (Grayson, O'Donnell and Sargent, 2014). This was followed by an overview of education about religions and beliefs (ERB) and ethics content in Patrons' Programmes in 2015 (NCCA, 2015b) and *Encountering Children in a Curriculum for Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics – A Review An Educational and Child's Rights Perspective* in 2015 (NCCA, 2015c).



Data from the **Growing Up in Ireland** study have been used on a number of occasions to distil learning for the redevelopment of the primary school curriculum, particularly in relation to child wellbeing and transitions (McCoy, Smyth and Banks, 2012; Smyth, 2015; Smyth, 2018). Educational **transitions** became a focus of research by the NCCA as part of the redevelopment process, and as actioned by the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (DES, 2011), focusing primarily on the transition from early childhood to primary education. This resulted in the publication of three commissioned research reports which reviewed the literature (O'Kane, 2016), audited policies and procedures for transition internationally (O'Kane and Murphy, 2016a) and audited transfer documentation developed in Ireland (O'Kane and Murphy, 2016b). In addition to the individual reports, an Executive Summary synthesising the key insights from each report was also prepared (NCCA, 2016b).

Following a ministerial request, the NCCA prepared or commissioned a number of research reports on approaches to integrating **coding and computational thinking** within primary schools. These included an international curriculum audit of 22 countries (NCCA, 2016c), a more focused review of six jurisdictions (NCCA, 2018e) and a literature review on computational thinking and its relevance for the redeveloped curriculum (Millwood et al., 2018). This research, interfaced with the experience of schools engaging with coding and computational thinking across two phases between 2017 and 2019, culminated in a final report outlining key discussion points and future directions in relation to integrating coding and computational thinking in a redeveloped primary school curriculum (NCCA, 2019b).

In 2019, the NCCA published a curriculum audit on **Traveller culture and history** across all levels of the curriculum (NCCA, 2019c). In the context of the Irish Sign Language Act 2017 and its implications for schools, the NCCA commissioned a report to investigate the teaching of Sign Language across six jurisdictions in order to support Irish Sign Language curriculum development in Ireland (O'Donnell, 2024). A Report on **education for sustainable development** (NCCA, 2019d) was published to highlight linkages for education for sustainable development education across the curriculum in 2019. The **intercultural guidelines** for primary schools (NCCA, 2005b) are currently under review and a report is expected in late 2025.

Strand 2:

Consultation

Leveraging the knowledge and expertise of all the partners in education, particularly that of children, teachers, school leaders and parents, is central to the curriculum development work of the NCCA. Consequently, consultation was a cornerstone of the curriculum redevelopment process to harness the voices, perspectives, expertise and ambitions of key stakeholders and the wider public in the educative process. As a statutory agency of the Department of Education, the NCCA has legislative rights and responsibilities in terms of education policy development under the Education Act 1998 (Government of Ireland, 1998). One such responsibility is the obligation to consult with the education partners when it is planning and developing significant policy changes related to curriculum and assessment. In the redevelopment of the primary school curriculum, a number of consultative approaches and formats have been employed, including online and in-person seminars, webinars, symposia, bilateral meetings, focus groups, online surveys and other fora.

Primary Language Curriculum consultations

As previously indicated, a consultative process followed the publication of the *Draft Primary Language Curriculum*, covering both English and Irish for junior infants to second class, in 2014 (NCCA, 2014a). Following the development of a draft *Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile* for third to sixth class, a further consultative process was undertaken and a report published in 2018 (NCCA, 2018a). This process resulted in revisions across the languages curriculum for all classes and the finalised curriculum was enacted in all schools from 2019 (DES, 2019a; 2019b).

Primary Mathematics Curriculum consultations

Given the NCCA remit to revise the primary mathematics curriculum in line with the actions of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (DES, 2011), the NCCA published a draft of the Primary Mathematics Curriculum for junior infants to second class in 2018 (NCCA, 2018b) and later reported on the outcomes of this consultative process in 2018 (NCCA, 2018c). A decision to pause the introduction of the primary mathematics curriculum led to a wider consultation in 2022 on all Stages of the mathematics curriculum with the publication of *Primary Mathematics Curriculum: Draft Specification for Consultation* (NCCA, 2022b), the *Primary Mathematics Curriculum: Draft Overview of the Primary Mathematics Toolkit* (NCCA, 2022c) as well as a range of ancillary support materials (see: <https://tinyurl.com/bdnh66ne>). The results of this consultative process were published in two reports in 2023: one relating to the wider consultative process (NCCA, 2023b) and the other relating specifically to the consultation with children (NCCA, 2023c). These processes supported the publication of the *Primary Mathematics Curriculum* (NCCA, 2023a) which has been enacted in schools since September 2024.

Consultations informing the wider curriculum redevelopment process

The key consultation that marked the beginning of the wider primary curriculum redevelopment process was undertaken in 2011 and invited participants to share their views on the priorities for primary education. The outcomes of this consultation were published in 2012 (NCCA, 2012b) and provided an orientation for further redevelopment work. This hiatus in development can be explained by the significant economic recession which impacted schools and wider stakeholders in this period. This was followed in 2016 by the publication of draft proposals, for consultation, on how the primary curriculum might be structured differently and how time might be used across the curriculum (NCCA, 2016d). A final report on the outcomes of this consultation was published in 2018 (NCCA, 2018f) as well as an Executive Summary of the report (NCCA, 2018g). Alongside these reports, the written submissions of organisations and individuals that consented to publication were also published in a separate report (NCCA, 2018h). All of these consultative reports were instrumental in shaping the direction and shape of the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* published in 2020. In tandem, the NCCA published a paper on consulting children as part of curriculum developments (NCCA, 2019e).

Following the publication of the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2020a), two phases of consultation were planned and held with various partners and stakeholders. The design and duration of the consultation were influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, with a report on all elements of the consultative process published in 2022 (NCCA, 2022d). This was accompanied by a technical report which provided further insights into the data gathered and analysed (NCCA, 2022e). In terms of written submissions that were analysed as part of the consultation report, 147 of the 174 authors consented to their publication and these were published online under seven broad categories:

1. Inclusion
2. Diversity
3. Language
4. Ethos
5. Subject Specific
6. Civic Society
7. General (mainly implementation/system issues) (<https://tinyurl.com/mpwej3w8>).

Marino Institute of Education was commissioned to undertake a parallel consultation with children on the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* and this report was published in 2022 (Kiely et al., 2022). As the development of the curriculum specifications progressed, separate consultations were held with children on a number of key curriculum changes:

- In 2023, children's views on the future of physical education and social and personal health education, which were being incorporated into a Draft Wellbeing Curriculum, were sought and published (NCCA, 2024a). A child-friendly version of the report was also published (NCCA, 2024b).
- In 2023, a consultation with children focused on the future of history and geography as part of the Draft Social and Environment Education curriculum (NCCA, 2024c). A child-friendly version of the report was also published (NCCA, 2024d).
- Building on its earlier work (Kiely et al., 2022), Marino Institute of Education undertook a wider consultation with children on their views and experience of the primary school curriculum, conducting case studies on children's experience across the five curriculum areas to inform the development of draft curriculum specifications (Kiely et al., 2024).

Based on wider NCCA partnerships and alliances, additional opportunities were availed of to seek the views of wider stakeholders during the consultative process. For example, two consultation events were jointly organised by the NCCA and the Burren College of the Arts in 2022, one entitled 'STEM Education and the Primary School Curriculum' (NCCA, 2022f) and another entitled 'Arts Education and the Primary School Curriculum' (NCCA, 2022g).

A separate consultative process was launched in March 2024 following the publication of the draft specifications for the five curriculum areas (NCCA, 2024e; 2024f; 2024g; 2024h; 2024k). This consultation was undertaken until summer 2024 and involved a number of components, including inviting written submissions, questionnaires on each specification for teachers and parents, a questionnaire on curriculum alignment, focus groups for teachers (both online and face to face at seven centres nationally), and an online focus group for parents. An invite to all primary and special schools was issued to participate in a schools' network for one of the five curriculum areas and the NCCA worked with these schools between March and June 2024 to gather school-based feedback on the draft specifications. A report on the outcomes of this consultation, including feedback through focus groups, bilateral meetings, a consultative conference, the Schools' Networks, questionnaires and written submissions, was published in December 2024 (NCCA, 2024m). Alongside this overall consultation report was a technical report detailing the verbatim questionnaire responses (NCCA, 2024n) and, where consent was provided, a verbatim account of the written submissions received on the draft specifications (NCCA, 2024p). Datasets from the consultation were published per the NCCA's Open Data Policy at <https://tinyurl.com/4vntkpmr> to enhance transparency, enabling stakeholders to review the macro data informing policy decisions.

More broadly, a series of commissioned and NCCA-developed research reports on education about religious beliefs and ethics (Grayson, O'Donnell and Sargent, 2014; NCCA, 2015b; NCCA, 2015c) informed an NCCA (2015d) consultation paper. This consultative process led to the publication of a report (NCCA, 2017), as well as the publication of the 172 written submissions that the NCCA had permission to publish (NCCA, 2016e) and an analysis by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) of the consultation data (Darmody and Smyth, 2017).

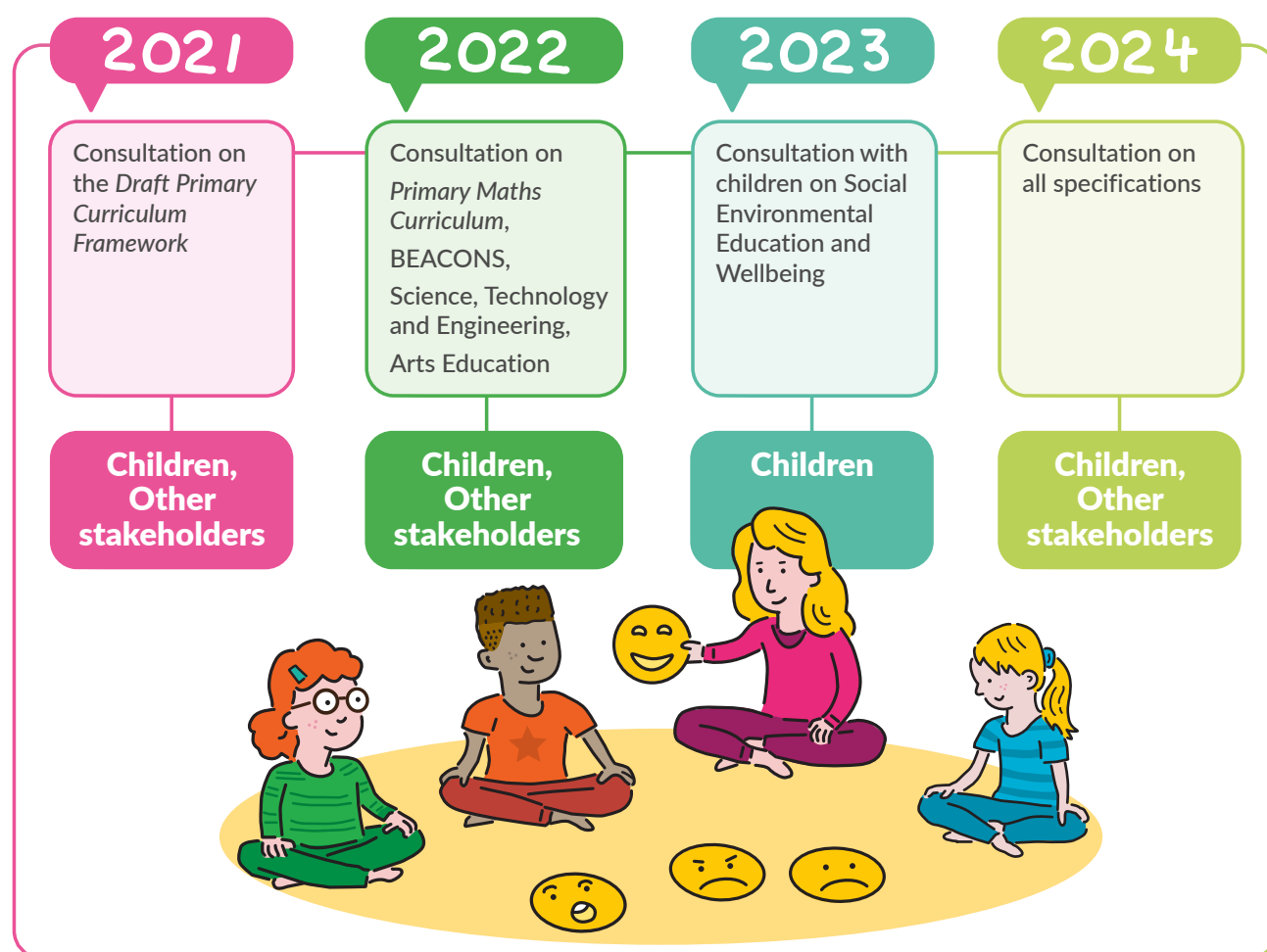


Figure 2: Consultations with Children and Other Stakeholders

Strand 3:

Networking

As a statutory agency of the Department of Education, the NCCA is firmly embedded within the education landscape in Ireland. In its development of advice for the Minister for Education, the NCCA employs a variety of approaches to interact and collaborate with children, teachers, school leaders, parents and wider stakeholders in reviewing, discussing and shaping curriculum and assessment developments. The NCCA is represented on a range of statutory and non-statutory bodies and structures and the representative nature of its own structures are also determined by the Department of Education (For an overview of the representation on NCCA Council and Boards, see <https://ncca.ie/en/about-ncca>). This provides a mechanism for the voice of the NCCA to be articulated in relation to wider education policy developments and for education partners and stakeholders to have an opportunity to contribute to policy developments relating to curriculum and assessment.

Curriculum Seminars (2018–2019)

To support engagement with and discussion of the aforementioned 14 research papers to support the redevelopment process, a series of five Curriculum Seminars was organised by the NCCA between March 2018 and January 2019. These were attended by a wide range of education partners and stakeholders (e.g., teachers, school leaders, support services, Department of Education and Skills and its agencies, National Parents' Council Primary, initial teacher education, early childhood organisations, Irish Primary Principals' Network [IPPN], Irish National Teachers' Organisation [INTO], patron and school management bodies).⁵ The main purpose of the Curriculum Seminars was to give participants an opportunity to consider the key points emerging from the research papers that were prepared to inform the curriculum redevelopment process, and to discuss and tease out these points from different perspectives. Each seminar included keynote presentations from the researchers relating to the 'big ideas' for the redeveloped curriculum, followed by roundtable and panel discussions.



⁵ For a detailed overview of the partners and stakeholders invited to each of the five seminars, see Appendix 1 of each of the five reports (NCCA, 2019f; 2019g; 2019h; 2019k; 2019m).

The format and focus of the five Curriculum Seminars were as follows:

Seminar	Keynote Presentation
Seminar 1 – March 2018 Curriculum Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr Thomas Walsh, Maynooth University – <i>Review of the Introduction to the Primary School Curriculum (1999)</i> (Walsh, 2018) • Dr Jones Irwin, Dublin City University – <i>Priorities and Values of Society</i> (Irwin, 2018)
Seminar 2 – May 2018 Powerful Synergies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professor Louis Volante, Brock University – <i>Pedagogy and Metapractices</i> (Volante, 2018) • Dr Karin Bacon, Marino Institute of Education – <i>Curriculum Integration</i> (Bacon, 2018) • Professor Emerita Carol McGuinness, Queen's University – <i>21st century Competencies</i> (McGuinness, 2018) • Professor Dominic Wyse, University College London – <i>The Role of Knowledge in Curricula</i> (Wyse and Manyukhina, 2018)
Seminar 3 – October 2018 New Horizons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bernie McNally, DCYA – <i>Context and Policy Developments in Early Years Provision</i> • Dr Harold Hislop, DES – <i>Current Provision and Future Challenges in Early Years Learning Experiences</i> • Prof Emer Smyth, ESRI – <i>Transition to Primary Education</i> (Smyth, 2018) • Dr Alejandra Cortázar, CEPI, Chile – <i>Curriculum Alignment and Progression</i> (Shuey et al., 2019)
Seminar 4 – November 2018: Enhancing Learning Journeys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr Emer Ring, Dr Lisha O'Sullivan, Marie Ryan and Patrick Burke, Mary Immaculate College – <i>Learning Theories</i> (Ring et al., 2018) • NCCA – <i>Parents' Perspectives on a Redeveloped Primary Curriculum</i> (NCCA, 2019a)
Seminar 5 – January 2019 Charting the Journey Forward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharon O'Donnell – <i>International Primary Curricula</i> (O'Donnell, 2018a; 2018b) • Prof Michael O'Leary and Dr Zita Lysaght, Dublin City University – <i>Aligning Assessment, Learning and Teaching in Curricular Reform and Implementation</i> (Lysaght et al., 2019)

A report synthesising the main discussions and themes from each Curriculum Seminar was published by the NCCA (NCCA, 2019f; 2019g; 2019h; 2019k; 2019m). In addition to the individual reports prepared for each Curriculum Seminar, a synthesis report distilling key themes and insights from across the five seminars was also published (NCCA, 2019n).

Leading Out Seminars (2019–2022)

As the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* approached publication, the NCCA organised a Leading Out Seminar Series between December 2019 and October 2022. Given the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of these seminars were held online. A list of the 32 stakeholder organisations attending the Leading Out seminars in 2020 was published by the NCCA (NCCA, 2020b). The main purpose of this series of seven Leading Out Seminars was to support stakeholder organisations to identify and to begin to cultivate the necessary conditions to support the introduction and enactment of the redeveloped Primary School Curriculum. Each seminar was organised to explore a key theme related to curriculum redevelopment and change, including 'The conducive conditions for curriculum change', 'Agency and flexibility', 'Policy alignment and coherence', 'System wide leadership', 'System wide learning' and 'Teacher agency and identity'. A synthesis report was published following each seminar (NCCA, 2019p; 2020c; 2020d; 2020e; 2021; 2022h; 2022k) and the seminar series was also instrumental in informing the *Supporting Systemwide Primary Curriculum Change* document (NCCA, 2022m). Ancillary materials from the seminar series such as presentation slides and associated podcasts and videos were also published (accessible at: <https://tinyurl.com/3dnuhfky>).

Reimagining Curriculum Seminars (2023)

The aforementioned networking seminars were complemented by three 'Reimagining Curriculum Seminars' which gathered key stakeholders and partners to explore and discuss implications for curriculum redevelopment emanating from research undertaken and commissioned by the NCCA, with a particular focus on the systematic literature reviews for the various curriculum areas. The seminar series was structured as follows:

- **Reimagining Curriculum Seminar 1:** The focus of this seminar, held in March 2023, was on exploring the findings and implications of research studies relating to Social and Environmental Education (Pike et al., 2023) and Arts Education (O'Sullivan et al., 2023). See NCCA (2023d) for a report of this seminar.
- **Reimagining Curriculum Seminar 2:** This seminar was held in May 2023 and explored the implications of research on Wellbeing (Nohilly et al., 2023) and STEM Education (Murphy et al., 2023) for the redeveloped curriculum. See NCCA (2023e) for a report of this seminar.
- **Reimagining Curriculum Seminar 3:** This third seminar, held in October 2023, explored issues arising from the research relating to Integration, Pedagogy and Assessment within the curriculum (Burke and Lehané, 2023a; 2023b) as well as recent reports from the aforementioned Children' School Lives study (Devine et al., 2023). See NCCA (2023f) for a report of this seminar.

A list of the approx. 50 partners, organisations and stakeholders attending each reimagining curriculum seminar is available in Appendix 1 of each of the reports (NCCA, 2023d; 2023e; 2023f).

School networks/Schools Forum

In terms of the primary curriculum redevelopment work, networking with schools has been a central component to the redevelopment process. Prior to 2018, the NCCA worked with a number of school networks as it developed various elements of curriculum and assessment policy. For example, a network of 12 schools worked with the NCCA Executive Team in 2017–18 school year on the development of the Primary Mathematics Curriculum. Further networks of schools (15 schools were involved in phase one while an additional 25 schools were involved in phase 2) also worked with the NCCA on the Coding in Primary Schools initiative from 2017 to 2019.

This was followed by the establishment of the Schools Forum in 2018 to support primary curriculum review and redevelopment. The Schools Forum currently comprises representatives from approximately 60 schools, including a cross-section of urban, rural, Irish-medium and both DEIS⁶ and non-DEIS schools. The majority of the representatives emanate from primary schools but a small number are education professionals working in early childhood education settings and post-primary schools (see <https://tinyurl.com/yekfnwyx> for a list of schools and settings, as well as an overview of its ongoing work). The Schools Forum worked with the NCCA Executive Team in the revision of the Primary Language Curriculum in 2018, ahead of its publication in 2019. Teachers and school leaders from the Schools Forum have continued to meet approximately five times each year (online meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic but mostly face-to-face meetings) to guide and help shape the primary curriculum review and redevelopment. Specifically, the remit and work of the Schools Forum has included:

- Creating a link and relationship between the whole school staff and the work of the NCCA in the primary curriculum redevelopment process.
- Contributing to discussions on curriculum introduction, enactment and implementation in primary and special schools.

⁶ DEIS stands for Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools. It is the Department of Education's main policy initiative to respond to educational disadvantage. The programme provides supports to schools with a concentration of disadvantaged students. For further information, see <https://tinyurl.com/4mp8p6r3>.

- Providing detailed feedback on proposals in the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2020a) and supporting the finalisation of the *Primary Curriculum Framework* (Department of Education, 2023).
- Encouraging neighbouring local schools to become involved in the consultation on the draft curriculum specifications.
- Providing detailed feedback on the proposals in the five Draft Primary Curriculum Specifications (NCCA, 2024e; 2024f; 2024g; 2024h; 2024k) and supporting their finalisation.
- Supporting local and regional awareness of the consultations (e.g., radio, newspaper, social media, District INTO branch meetings, IPPN county committee meetings).
- Informing the development of the Online Toolkits for each curriculum area.

Advisory Panel (Primary)

Alongside the existing structures, an Advisory Panel (Primary) was established to support the curriculum redevelopment process in 2020. This comprises four academics (three international and one Irish-based) who were selected given their expertise and experience in curriculum and assessment redevelopment processes. The members of the Advisory Panel (Primary) are:

- Professor Emerita Louise Hayward (University of Glasgow)
- Professor Jim Spillane (Northwestern University, Chicago)
- Dr Thomas Walsh (Maynooth University)
- Professor Dominic Wyse (Institute of Education, University of London).

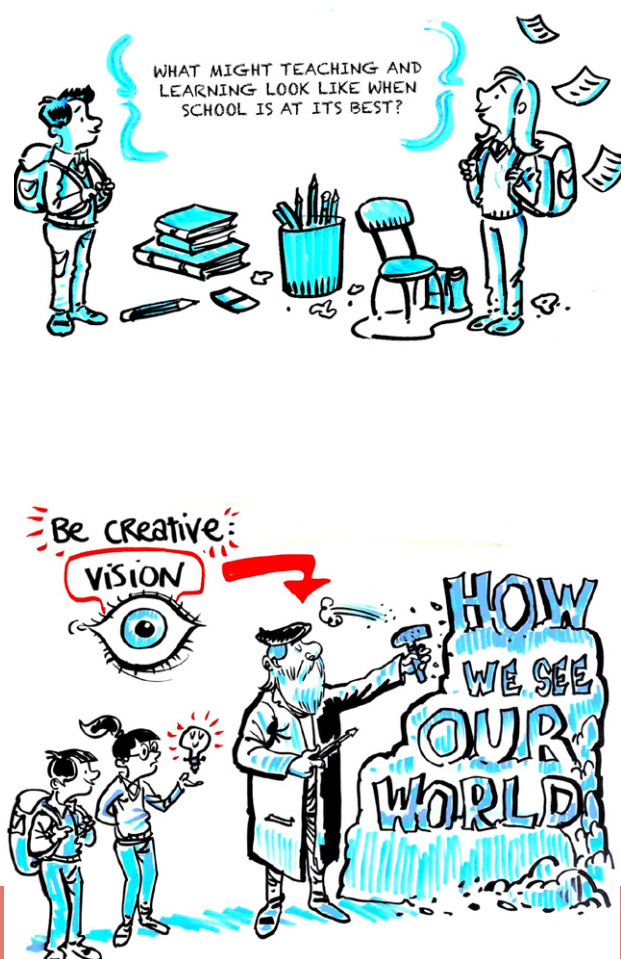
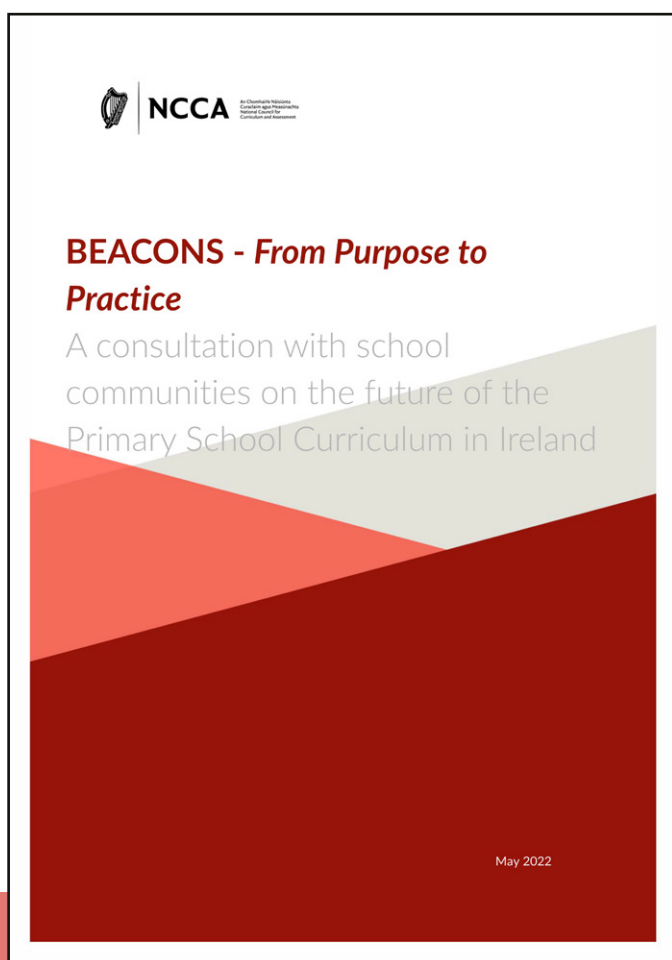
The appointment of the Advisory Panel was a deliberate effort on behalf of the NCCA to open up its curriculum redevelopment process to “cultural strangers” who brought particular insights and expertise relating to curriculum redevelopment from outside Ireland. Indeed central to the Panel’s remit was the questioning of assumptions and the problematising of solutions, part of an endeavour to progress the redevelopment process upon a pathway that was most likely to succeed in enacting meaningful and sustained change rather than to take the path of least resistance or complexity.

The Panel has met approximately eight times per year since March 2020 to explore, discuss and support the redevelopment process. It has also come together for residential meetings on four occasions in Ireland between March 2022 and September 2024 (three times in Dublin and once in Limerick) to meet with NCCA Executive Team members, Department of Education officials and wider education partners. During three of these residential meetings, the Advisory Panel members have worked with the Schools Forum around key issues such as agency, flexibility, pedagogy and assessment and their implications for teachers’ professional practice. The Advisory Panel has also engaged with initial teacher educators in terms of the implications of the redeveloped curriculum for teacher education. Members of the Panel have engaged individually and collectively with wider education partners in events such as panel discussions, meetings with Department of Education officials, engagement with chairpersons of the specification Development Groups, seminar and conference presentations, and stakeholder consultations.

On an ongoing basis, draft curriculum documentation is reviewed and discussed, and external insights are brought to bear on the curriculum redevelopment process in a collaborative and constructive process of learning. In partnership with the NCCA team, the Advisory Panel prepared and published a collaborative document, *From Purpose to Practice*, which is intended to support stakeholders to engage with the ‘big ideas’ of curriculum change (Hayward et al., 2022). This was accompanied by a suite of short videos to support stakeholder engagement (<https://tinyurl.com/bdduvhtp>). *Supporting Systemwide Primary Curriculum Change* (NCCA, 2022m), a document prepared to support collective and collaborative decision-making and action as all stakeholders in the primary sector work together to support and guide curriculum change, was also informed by Advisory Panel discussions.

Beacons

In addition to existing structures for networking and consultation, the NCCA collaborated with the Teaching Council in March 2022 to host a BEACONS (Bringing Education Alive for our Communities on a National Scale) day-long event. This event provided the opportunity for approximately 70 participants (including 40 children from three Dublin primary schools alongside parents, teachers, school leaders and representatives of national bodies [e.g., Department of Education, Centre for School Leadership, Teaching Council, National Council for Special Education, National Parents' Council Primary and Professional Development Service for Teachers]) to come together and share their perspectives, views and ideas on the future of a Primary School Curriculum in Ireland. In addition to the proceedings and outcomes of the day being published (NCCA, 2022n), a video was prepared to give a flavour of the event (<https://tinyurl.com/9b54r324>).



Strand 4:

Deliberations⁷

Given the extensive work undertaken in terms of the research, consultation and networking strands, the deliberations undertaken by the NCCA in terms of using the evidence and perspectives gathered are a critical feature of the redevelopment process. This deliberative process is ongoing and recursive, running alongside and interfacing knowledge and perspectives gained from the research, consultation and networking strands as part of a social and professional practice. The deliberative strand and space is critical within the overall process of curriculum redevelopment as it is in this space that decisions are made based on the available research, consultation and networking knowledge and perspectives – which are often diverse, contested and informed by values.

Figure 1 below provides an overview of the NCCA's structure which provides a framework for these deliberations, both through the internal NCCA Executive Team and its wider representative structures. The role and scope of each structure is set by legislation (e.g., the NCCA Council) or through terms of reference or parameters established by the NCCA Council (e.g., for Development Groups). For the purpose of this review, the deliberative process is explored, in turn, through the following structures:

- The internal work of the NCCA Executive Team.
- The representational structures of the NCCA:
 - Development Groups.
 - The Board for Early Childhood and Primary.
 - The NCCA Council.

However, it must be stressed that the deliberative process is not linear in nature and involves multiple dynamic and recursive processes of ongoing interaction within and across the various structures. The scale and scope of this iterative process are particularly important to hold in mind given the extensive timeframe over which the primary school curriculum has been redeveloped.

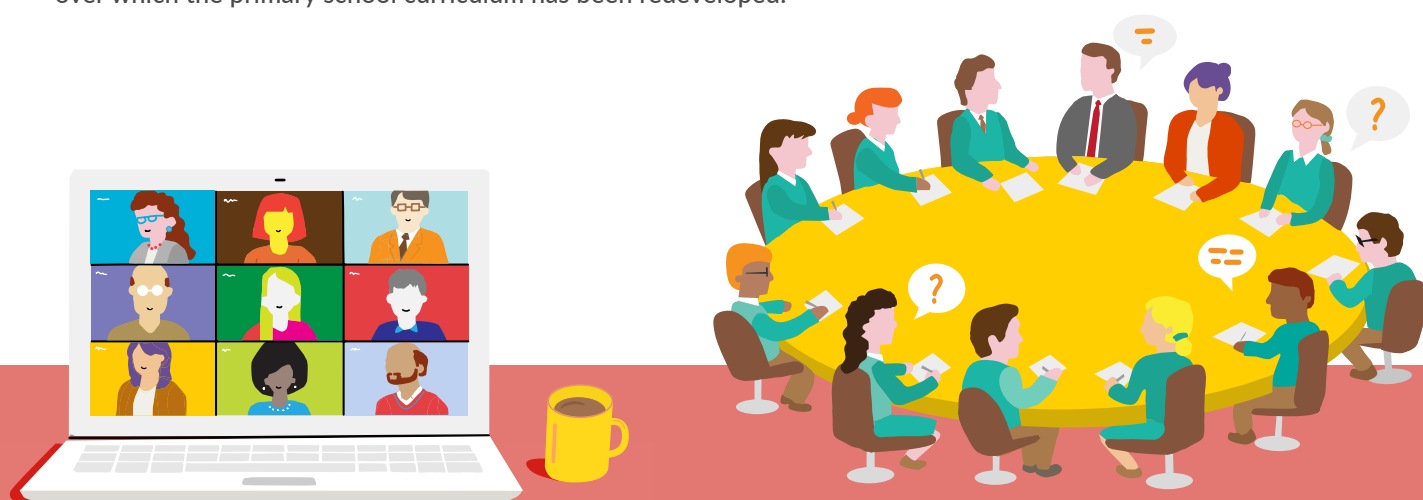


Figure 3: The Deliberative Process

⁷ Given the internal nature of the deliberative process, this section has been informed by a semi-structured interview with a senior member of the NCCA Executive Team to reveal insights into the process for deliberations within NCCA and through its representative structures.

NCCA Executive Team

The NCCA has a full-time Executive Team led by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Arlene Forster. On the primary side, the CEO is supported by the Deputy CEO (Dr Patrick Sullivan) as well as five directors with responsibilities for various aspects of early childhood and primary curriculum and assessment work. Each director leads a team of Education Officers who work on project teams to advance particular areas of work (e.g., two Education Officers work on each curriculum area while other Education Officers work on more general themes and projects). Almost all NCCA team members working on the redevelopment of the primary school curriculum are former teachers working permanently or a seconded basis with the organisation. In 2025, approximately 20 staff worked within NCCA in the development of advice regarding early childhood and primary curriculum and assessment.

The NCCA Executive Team is central to the deliberative process, managing the process of bringing knowledge and insight from the research, consultation and networking strands to bear on curriculum redevelopment. NCCA project teams, led by an NCCA director and in conversation with wider Executive Team members, are central to developing curriculum and assessment reports and documents. In effect, these project teams usually author initial drafts and manage feedback processes as subsequent drafts are prepared. This usually involves multiple rounds of discussions, drafts, reviews and observations from both NCCA Executive Team members, as well as by engagement with wider structures such as Development Groups, the Board for Early Childhood and Primary, and the NCCA Council as work progresses. The writing and deliberative processes are informed by the other strands of the work (research, consultations and networking). For example, research evidence can be particularly influential at the outset of these drafting processes but later in the process, wording and emphases may be tempered by reference to evidence from the consultative or networking processes (e.g., through engagements with the Schools Forum). As well as working in teams, the Education Officers attend and present at various other deliberative spaces such as Development Groups, the Board for Early Childhood and Primary, and NCCA Council given their expertise and familiarity with the research, consultation and networking strands. This process of drafting, refining and incorporating feedback from stakeholders across multiple NCCA structures is usually repeated many times across various cycles of development.

The CEO, Deputy CEO and directors also have a role in the deliberative process in terms of making efforts to ensure that the curriculum documentation is of a high quality, and as coherent and consistent as possible. This process is ongoing throughout the development process and particular attention is paid towards issues of coherence and consistency towards the end of the development phase. Part of this review includes a focus on structure across curriculum documentation, a review of terminology, as well as a focus on themes such as inclusion and interculturalism across the curriculum documentation.

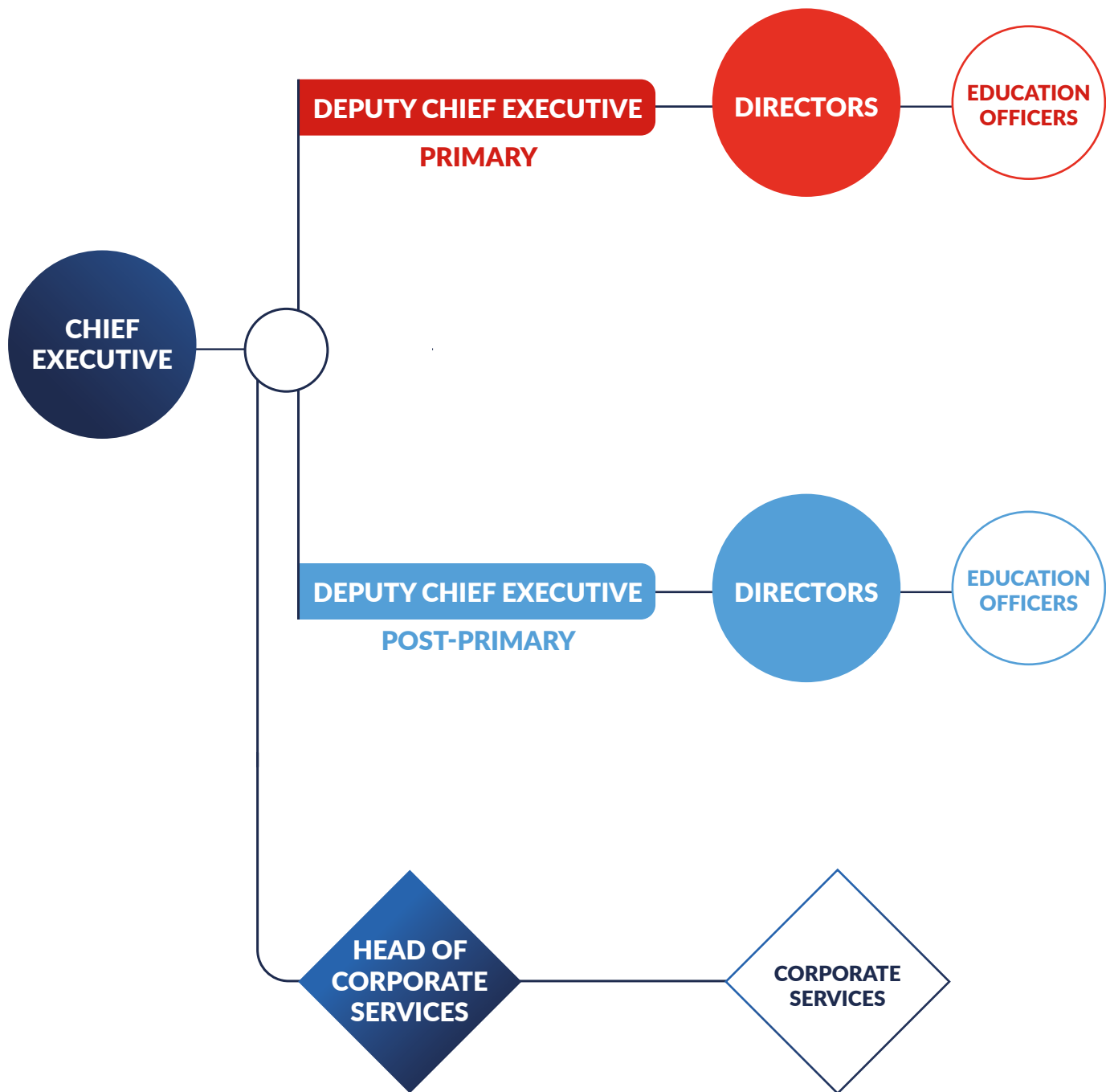


Figure 4: NCCA Organisation Chart

Development Groups

The *Primary Curriculum Framework* (Department of Education, 2023) was published in March 2023. Given the scale of the task of preparing draft specifications, the NCCA established a Development Group comprised of 12–15 members with expertise to advance the development work in each of the five curriculum areas. The role and remit of the Development Groups were developed and approved by NCCA Council, and the work of each Development Group is guided by a chairperson. Each Development Group includes nominees from teacher unions, management bodies, support services and the Department of Education. A number of members are also co-opted to each Group. These members are identified through an open, public call for individuals to express an interest in joining a particular group. The co-opted members bring further expertise, knowledge, and skills to the work complementing that of the representatives from the nominating bodies.

Their work includes engaging with research, debate and discussion, and collaborating with, and listening to, contributions from school leaders, teachers, children and parents. In carrying out their work, Development Group members:

- Comment on and contribute to the development of draft curriculum documents.
- Ensure that the views/policy of the nominating body are brought to the discussion.
- Support consultation processes at key stages in the development process.
- Update their nominating organisations on the ongoing work of the Development Groups.

The NCCA Education Officers and Directors are central to bringing the discussions of the Development Groups to the NCCA Executive Team and lead the process of refining towards subsequent drafts that are shared with wider NCCA structures. While the Development Groups are central to the deliberative process, they do not have a decision-making function.



Figure 5: Development Groups

The following Development Groups have been working since late 2022 and further information on their meetings and development process is accessible at the link below:

- Primary Arts Development Group – Chaired by Dr Regina Murphy
- Primary Language Development Group – Chaired by Dr Patrick Burke
- Primary Social and Environmental Education (SEE) Development Group – Chaired by Dr Karin Bacon
- Primary Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Education Development Group – Chaired by Professor Aisling Leavy
- Primary Wellbeing Development Group – Chaired by Dr Margaret Nohilly.

>> <https://tinyurl.com/4zd8a9bz>

In addition to each Development Group meeting separately, joint meetings of the Development Groups were undertaken to support coherence and shared understandings. Five joint meetings of the Development Groups were held between 2022 and 2025 to support such shared understandings, to explore cross-curriculum issues and to work towards coherence and consistency across the five specifications. The deliberations of the five Development Groups were central to informing the publication of the draft specifications for each of the five curriculum areas in March 2024 (NCCA, 2024e; 2024f; 2024g; 2024h; 2024k). The Development Groups have also been involved in the revisions of each specification following formal consultations, with the final specification for each of the five curriculum areas due to be published in September 2025.

NCCA Board for Early Childhood and Primary

The NCCA Board for Early Childhood and Primary is a permanent NCCA structure that meets on an ongoing basis to inform curriculum and assessment redevelopments. This Board is representative of the education partners across early childhood and primary education, including nominees from teacher unions, management bodies, government departments/agencies and parents. It currently consists of 22 members (<https://tinyurl.com/3rcuydsr>). On an ongoing basis as various research and consultation reports are developed, these are shared with Board members for information and engagement. As a representative structure, Board members are asked to reflect on the implications of the discussion for their representative group as well as for curriculum and assessment more broadly. Members also act as a conduit between the NCCA and their organisation by sharing information in both directions. Moreover, external researchers who have produced research for the NCCA as well as the Executive Team present at Board meetings and engage in discussions which assist the Board in its deliberations. This iterative process aims at building the expertise of the Board members and enables them to deliberate based on the totality of research, consultative and networking knowledge and evidence. As various elements and drafts of the *Primary Curriculum Framework* (and later its specifications) were prepared by the NCCA Executive Team and then revised based on consultations and networking events, these were explored and discussed by the Board for Early Childhood and Primary over many meetings. As the Board is representative rather than corporate, there is scope for different views and voices informing deliberations as decisions are not made at this level of the NCCA structure.

NCCA Council

At the apex of the NCCA structure is the NCCA Council which is appointed by the Minister for Education for a four-year period and is representative of the education partners. The 26-member Council comprises nominees of the partners in education, industry and trade union interests, parents' organisations and one nominee each of the Minister for Education and the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. Since 2022, it also includes the President of the Irish Second Level Students' Union (ISSU) as a full-time member of the NCCA Council (see: <https://tinyurl.com/4kejpdv6> for its current membership). Unlike other NCCA structures, the NCCA Council is a corporate body (rather than its members representing their respective bodies) and it ultimately makes the decisions that become the advice on curriculum and assessment matters provided to the Minister for Education. The work of the Executive Team, the Development Groups and the Early Childhood and Primary Board feeds into the NCCA Council's deliberations in its decision-making role. For example, issues of contention or unresolved issues at the level of Development Groups or the Early Childhood and Primary Board are brought forward to Council to inform their debates and deliberations prior to decision-making. While robust debates and disagreements are a core feature of NCCA Council deliberations, its corporate role ultimately works towards a shared and agreed decision. All outputs of the NCCA related to the redevelopment of the primary school curriculum are reviewed and agreed by Council prior to publication.

The outputs of the NCCA, as approved by Council, represent the curriculum and assessment advice to the Minister for Education. The Minister or Department of Education officials (e.g., officials in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Unit into which the NCCA reports) may also seek formal and/or briefings or opportunities for discussion before deciding whether to accept the advice of the NCCA.

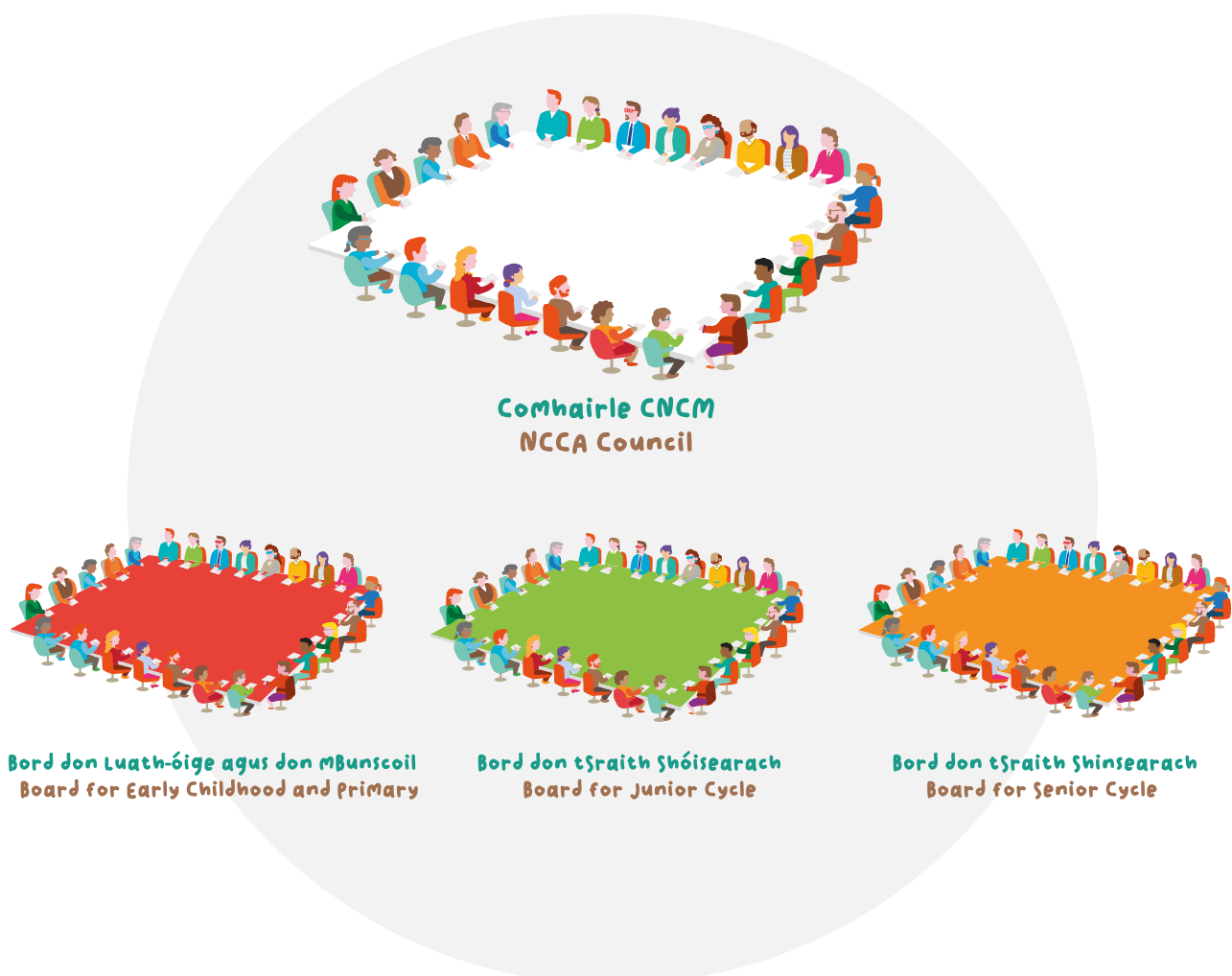


Figure 6: NCCA Council

Conclusion

This short report summarises progress up to March 2025 in the process of redeveloping the primary school curriculum. However, it should be remembered that curriculum development, or indeed curriculum redevelopment, is not a product or destination – it is an ongoing, recursive and dynamic process of development and interaction which only comes alive when a curriculum is used in myriad ways in schools and classrooms across the country. In this sense, the journey is as important as the destination as it is only through engagement, individual and collective sense making, and interfacing new expectations with existing professional identities and practices that change occurs.

The NCCA has made significant efforts to invite participation and to communicate updates to stakeholders, partners and the wider public about the redevelopment process and progress through publications, press briefings, social media, e-communications and website updates. This work has been critically important as the processes engaged in to date across the four strands of redevelopment have educative potential in terms of curriculum redevelopment and enactment. Indeed Cohen and Barnes (1993) argued over 30 years about the potential pedagogical power of the policy making process and policy documents. The individual and collective learning that has occurred through the process to date (i.e., through research and policy developments, through consultations and networking, and through subsequent deliberations) has been substantial. It has involved harnessing and distilling the voices and experience of partners across the entire landscape of education in Ireland, as well as perspectives from international research and experts. And it needs to be comprehensive because when there is a revision to an education policy, particularly curriculum policy, it triggers a multiplicity of emotions and responses at the collective and individual levels.

But it is in the collective rather than in the individual strands of the process that the richness emerges. Research or consultation or networking alone would not provide a comprehensive foundation for the curriculum redevelopment process. It is in the interfacing of the various forms of knowledge – research, policy and practice – that rich discussions and pathways forward emerge. While exploring and discussing curriculum content is important, it is in teasing out and co-constructing shared educational visions, values, aims and priorities that encompass the substantive redevelopment work. Central to all of this is the deliberative process, reviewing the extensive evidence and its inherent tensions to support system-wide learning. The tensions, uncertainties, senses of loss or gain can be assuaged through careful written and oral communications, but it is ultimately in the refraction through all the various levels and networks of the education policy landscape that the messaging arrives at the school level, where it is ultimately interpreted and mediated by teachers and school leaders.

The long duration of, and the substantial reach of the primary curriculum redevelopment process, bodes well that it will prove educative for all those learning together within the education system. This 'learning together' process is critical, especially as the scale and extent of the proposed change are significant. System and indeed individual thinking have progressed a long way in the past decade as educational ideas and priorities were explored, discussed and refined, and as new theories, concepts and pedagogies were interfaced with existing belief systems and practices. But the journey is far from complete. The sense making must continue at all levels of the system and especially at school level; space and time must be provided for new shared and co-constructed understandings to emerge, to attend to the affective and emotional dimensions of change, for risk-taking and experimentation, and for the celebration of success. Moreover, attention needs to be paid to issues of coherence within and across the education system as wider education policy continues to evolve. In the pathway forward, the *Supporting Systemwide Primary Curriculum Change* document (NCCA, 2022m) is as critical as the *Primary Curriculum Framework* itself for it is only by nurturing and supporting change that the vision and principles of the redeveloped curriculum can become a reality in the classrooms of Ireland into the future.

Reflections of the Advisory Panel

Professor Emerita Louise Hayward

Educational reform, perhaps more than any other area of education, is paved with good intentions. The policy documentation found in countries around the world is peppered with the same phrases – ‘sharing a common vision’ or ‘curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in alignment’ or ‘informed by research, policy and practice’ or ‘developed with the profession.’ These are not just words – they are essential ideas in any reform that is to be successful, i.e., reform that leads to better learning experiences and outcomes for young people, for learners and, ultimately, for society.



After working with NCCA colleagues, and with members of the international team in the Advisory Panel, Dom, Jim and Tom, it is interesting to step back and to reflect on why I feel more optimistic about the likelihood of the Redeveloped Primary Curriculum bringing better experiences for learners and leading to more rewarding professional lives for teachers in Ireland than almost any other programme of educational reform in which I have been involved.

At the heart of my optimism lies a belief that the process of redeveloping the primary curriculum has been authentic, truly authentic. The processes behind the development of a shared vision and principles, the sense checking with learners, with professionals and wider communities have brought a renewed sense of purpose to why the primary curriculum matters so much and the ways in which its redevelopment will build on the existing strengths of Ireland’s education system to ensure that primary education will continue to serve both learners and Irish society well. The educational integrity of the endeavour has been clearly established.

As an outsider to Irish education, it is fascinating to see how seriously the process of informing ideas and actions is taken. Whilst the phrase ‘informed by research, policy and practice’ is common in international reform, its realisation in the practice of reform is far less common. At times, research is interpreted narrowly and designed to close rather than open conversation. The definition of research may be narrowed to include only policy investigation or survey results from specific groups, e.g., teachers or parents, or carefully constructed surveys, limited in scope and designed to elicit particular responses. My experience of the redevelopment of the primary curriculum in Ireland has been far from that. There has been active engagement with a broad range of research sources, a sense of a powerful desire to learn amongst all those working in the primary redevelopment team, and to use that learning to inform the process as it develops. Teachers sometimes accuse policy communities of not taking consultation sufficiently seriously. Consultation, throughout the redevelopment of the primary curriculum has been undertaken with great care and comments received are interrogated to ensure that the development teams understand fully the points being made and how best the programme might learn from the feedback.

So far so good. The authenticity of the engaged approach to the redevelopment of the primary curriculum has been a model of building agency across communities, children, teachers, parents, researchers and policy makers. The challenge remains to sustain the authentic engagement as increasing numbers of schools, teachers and parents become more fully involved in the redeveloped curriculum. The processes of having time to reflect on ideas and to consider what they will mean for day-to-day practice in classrooms is important for every participant. Investing that time now will allow the successes of the redeveloped primary curriculum to be replicated in schools and classrooms across Ireland; and for the redeveloped primary curriculum to provide the bedrock for a better future for every citizen in Ireland.

Professor Jim Spillane

As an outsider, there was much about the NCCA's approach to reviewing and redeveloping the primary curriculum that got my attention and provided valuable lessons for future work. Chief among them was the intentional centring of professional learning and the development of useful and usable knowledge for curriculum policy and practice. Specifically, I was struck by three features of this focus on ongoing professional learning and knowledge development.



First, the investment in and valuing of different types of knowledge including research knowledge (e.g., commissioned reports) and practice knowledge through consultations that engaged the ideas of children, parents, teachers, and other stakeholders. The NCCA commissioned an extensive series of research reports on everything from promoting oral language development to curriculum integration. With respect practice knowledge, numerous consultations coupled with the Schools Forum, with members from over 60 schools, helped ensure that knowledge from practice shaped the curriculum redevelopment process. This careful attention to the ideas and perspectives of teachers, children, parents, and other stakeholders helps ensure that the knowledge base that informs curriculum redevelopment balances research knowledge with knowledge from practice. Of note here was the NCCA's and the Teaching Council's collaboration on a BEACONS (Bringing Education Alive for our Communities on a National Scale) event that engaged different stakeholders including children, parents, teachers, school leaders and representatives from national bodies to come together and share their perspectives, views and ideas on the future of a Primary School Curriculum in Ireland. In addition to the proceedings and outcomes of the day being published (NCCA, 2022n), a video was prepared to give a flavour of the event and to discuss and tease out these points from different perspectives. Together these efforts contributed to producing a robust useful and usable knowledge base for informing the work of curriculum redevelopment and enactment.

Second, the NCCA also worked to ensure that the diverse knowledge base was accessible to and engaged with by multiple stakeholders. Rather than relying solely on the release of formal reports, the NCCA worked to create various representations of the key findings. The NCCA used various formats from podcasts to seminars, including the Curriculum Seminars and Leading Out Seminar series that engaged a range of education stakeholders with the knowledge base. The Curriculum Seminars, for example, offered participants an opportunity to engage with the key lessons from the NCCA's commissioned research reports.

Third, I was especially struck by the intentional design of these spaces and places (e.g., Leading Out Seminars) where diverse stakeholders not only heard about the knowledge base but importantly got to deliberate together about it. These spaces offered rich opportunities for various education stakeholders to come together and discuss their understandings of the key findings, consider their entailments for current practice, and negotiate their different understandings of core lessons from the knowledge base. Such opportunities are necessary to support the ongoing collective sense-making of stakeholders, including allowing for the discussion of different opinions and understandings, that is at the heart of the curriculum redevelopment and enactment process.

Investing in developing multiple types of knowledge to support curriculum redevelopment – from research knowledge to practice knowledge – and intentionally designing opportunities for diverse education stakeholders to engage with, and importantly deliberate together about, are hallmarks of the NCCA's approach to curriculum redevelopment and enactment.

Dr Thomas Walsh

As a researcher with a deep interest in the history of curriculum development and enactment in Ireland, it has been a fascinating journey to be part of a live and contemporary process to redevelop the primary school curriculum as a member of the Advisory Panel. For the past 20 years, I have spent endless hours in archives and libraries attempting to understand and piece together how previous primary school curricula were conceived and developed, whose voices were listened to or silenced in the process, and how curriculum documents were ultimately used in practice within schools. Such insights were often garnered from a random draft of a curriculum document with hand-written annotations, ministerial memos or speeches which charted the direction of travel of the curriculum, or the reflections and memories of educators involved in the system.



Authoring this “Charting the Redevelopment Process” document has been both intriguing and challenging – reminding me of the complex dynamics at play in any education policy development. Having been centrally involved within the redevelopment journey since 2018, with access to the approx. 150 published documents that informed the redevelopment process, and the capacity to engage with those whose professional role it was to lead the curriculum redevelopment, it surprised me that getting a handle on the complex dynamics of the process and exactly how the written documents that now represent the text of Ireland’s primary school curriculum came into existence remained stubbornly difficult to capture. It inspired in me an image of thought partners connecting on a large scale across the education landscape, interfacing and interrogating knowledge in all its forms in a quest to curate a pathway of learning for the next generation of children in Ireland.

Delineating the redevelopment process under the structure of research, consultation, networking and deliberations has somewhat supported the disentanglement of integrated and interrelated processes over the past decade or more. Tracing the evolution of discourses, concepts and ideas (e.g., moving to a curriculum framework, the focus on child and teacher agency) across the four strands over the redevelopment period was also informative to explore the interface and integration of knowledge from research and professional practice. Each of these strands have provided key ingredients for what has ultimately become the primary curriculum framework and curriculum area specifications. Of all the strands, the deliberative processes were of particular interest to me as this remained the most invisible and elusive to document. While the other strands had publications and artefacts to represent their significance and outcomes, ultimately curriculum redevelopment requires decisions to be made that are not just evidence-informed but are also based on values and beliefs. Ultimately I conclude that the redeveloped curriculum documentation and process are much more than the sum of the four strands. I am very grateful to the senior NCCA Executive Team member for providing insights into the complex and iterative deliberative processes that inform curriculum decisions during a lengthy interview, as well as to the wider NCCA team for the many generative conversations regarding curriculum redevelopment in recent years. In particular, I greatly appreciate the contributions of Dr Tracy Curran and Dr Siobhán Keenan Fitzgerald in the conceptualising and shaping of this report.

As we move to the next stage of the journey, I am heartened that the process to date has been rigorous, well-informed and inclusive of many voices and sources that inform curriculum redevelopment discourses and texts. The process has resulted in a strong vision and holistic range of experiences and outcomes to inform the professional practice of educators and the primary education of the next generations of children in Ireland. But such strong foundations cannot lead to complacency. Lessons from the history of education are very clear – the development of the policy documents is critical but an inattention to supporting their enactment can lead to their neglect or symbolic enactment. Central to supporting enactment is providing time and space for teachers in particular to individually and collectively make sense of the curriculum aspirations and to interface this with their existing beliefs and practices. I hope that the enactment process will be underpinned by many strands of support and that this next exciting part of the journey will be captured in a second edition of “Charting the Redevelopment Process.”

Professor Dominic Wyse

Creating a new curriculum, even if a redeveloped curriculum, is a demanding challenge. At the level of countries, and other large regions, the challenge arises from two key phenomena that are connected but also in tension:

1. The values of society that set expectations for education, and;
2. The need to ensure that the curriculum is effective in terms of children's learning outcomes (Wyse et al., 2025 in press).



The values that members of society hope to inculcate in the citizens of the future are multiple and include significant areas of contestation. And educational effectiveness in relation to children's learning, as a result of the curriculum and pedagogy, requires the selection of areas of learning to be assessed. The selection of these areas includes value judgements made about which parts of the curriculum are important. Ensuring that these intersections between values and effectiveness are managed productively is one of the key tasks of curriculum policy makers. From my experience working as a member of the Advisory Panel for Ireland's primary curriculum redevelopment, it appears to me that the place of research and research evidence have been a key factor in the successful processes of curriculum development that have sought to balance values and likely effectiveness.

My first encounter with research and Ireland's primary curriculum redevelopment came with the NCCA's commission to lead an analysis of the place of knowledge in the curriculum (Wyse and Manyukhina, 2018). Knowledge is a key aspect of the study of curriculum, and was something that informed one of the first issues of the British Educational Research Association (BERA) *Curriculum Journal* during my time as one of the editors that included a fellow advisory panel member, Louise Hayward (Wyse et al., 2014). The early work for NCCA prompted me to reflect on the different ways that knowledge in primary education and secondary education is represented and conceptualised in a curriculum. Ultimately the decision about the point at which to move from *areas* of learning for younger primary children towards *subjects* of learning for older primary children in Ireland's redeveloped primary curriculum seems to me to be a good solution to an age-old challenge. The benefits of cross-curriculum learning, rooted in early years and early primary pedagogy, are the foundation for the later work which is organised in more discrete curriculum subjects.

The analysis of knowledge in the curriculum also prompted me, and my colleague Yana Manyukhina who was also involved in the work, to think about the ways in which the representation of knowledge in a curriculum impacts on children's and teachers' agency (Wyse and Manyukhina, 2024; Manyukhina and Wyse, 2025). For teachers, their agency is particularly affected by the extent to which they can make decisions about teaching. For children, agency is a fragile capacity that requires support through their curriculum and through the values inherent in a curriculum. The explicit attention to both teachers' agency and children's agency that is part of the redeveloped primary curriculum in Ireland is one of its many hallmarks. The establishment of the longitudinal **Children's School Lives Study**, which focuses on children's views about their education, is one large scale example of this commitment. Work done to illicit the preferences of some of the very youngest children in the education system is another example (e.g., Kiely et al., 2022; 2024).

The success of Ireland in bridging values and likely effectiveness in the development of the primary curriculum is being achieved through the sustained timescales needed for development; the use of research, both newly commissioned and newly synthesised across all major research methods; extensive and wide-ranging consultation approaches; and the commitment and robust thoughtfulness of the people in NCCA who are leading the developments. In my view, many other countries could learn from Ireland's approach.

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