



Primary Developments: Consultation on Curriculum Structure and Time

Final report

Contents

Introduction	7
Rationale for curriculum review and consultation	9
Consultation proposals	13
Formats of consultation	14
Consultation findings	19
Bilateral meetings	20
Structure of a redeveloped primary curriculum	20
Time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum	24
Other thoughts and observations	27
Consultative Conference	28
Structure of a redeveloped primary curriculum	28
Time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum	31
Consultative meetings with children	35
Online questionnaires	37
Profile of respondents	37
Structure of the 1999 Primary School Curriculum	40
Structure of a redeveloped primary curriculum	41
Time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum	51
Teacher focus groups	56
Structure of a redeveloped primary curriculum	56
Time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum	57
Other thoughts and observations	58
Written submissions	60
Structure of a redeveloped primary curriculum	60
Time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum	69
Other points from the written submissions	73

Summary of main themes from the consultation	75
Structure of a redeveloped primary curriculum	75
Time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum	76
Other ideas from the consultation	77
The next phase of work	80
An overview of a redeveloped curriculum	80
The process towards an overview of a redeveloped curriculum	83
Research	83
Work with schools and settings	83
Consultation	84
Deliberations with education partners	84
References	86
Appendix 1: Proposed incremental models for a new primary curriculum	87
Appendix 2: Considerations for a new curriculum model	88
Appendix 3: Proposed model of time allocation for primary schools	89
Appendix 4: Considerations for a new model of time allocation for primary schools	90
Appendix 5: Supporting consultation engagement	91
Appendix 6: Online questionnaire	94
Appendix 7: Written submissions for publication	104

Tables

Table 1. Guidelines published since 1999	12
Table 2. Organisations which participated in bilateral meetings	17
Table 3. Data-gathering method, recording of data, and number of contributors	21
Table 4. Statements about the primary school curriculum	43
Table 5. Satisfaction with the subject-based primary curriculum	43
Table 6. Level of agreement about the proposed three-stage model	44
Table 7. Level of agreement for restructuring the curriculum using the three-stage model	45
Table 8. Level of agreement about the proposed two-stage model	50
Table 9. Level of agreement for restructuring the curriculum using the two-stage model	51
Table 10. Level of satisfaction with the current suggested weekly timeframe in the primary curriculum	54
Table 11. Level of agreement with proposals for new time allocation model	55
Table 12. Different uses of flexible time in school	56

Figures

Figure 1. Suggested alternative models for a new primary curriculum	31
Figure 2. Profile of respondents	39
Figure 3. Profile of school patronage	40
Figure 4. Profile of school type	41
Figure 5. Profile of respondents to the online questionnaire	41
Figure 6. Teaching experience of respondents	42
Figure 7. Timing of the introduction of subjects in the curriculum	54
Figure 8. Demand for guidance or support on how best to use flexible time	56
Figure 9. Process for developing curriculum and assessment advice	85

Introduction

The past number of years have borne witness to significant changes and adjustments in Irish society, the economy and its education system. ‘Change’ was and always will be a constant feature in all our lives including those of our children, both in and out of school. In looking at early childhood and primary education, the pace and scope of this change has been substantial. This is due, in part, to increased demands and high expectations from parents, wider society and policy-makers about what the education can and should do in terms of supporting children’s and young people’s learning and development in the 21st century.

At curriculum level, this demand for more has included calls for increased time to be allocated to existing primary curriculum areas and requests for the inclusion of new curriculum areas. Late 2009 saw the publication of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and from 2014, the phased introduction of a new junior cycle experience in lower secondary education. Both curriculum developments reflect key changes in education policy and ultimately, new experiences for young children and for students, necessitating greater curriculum alignment and continuity across all phases in the Irish education system from early childhood through to senior cycle. Against this backdrop, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) issued an open invitation in 2011 to all interested individuals and organisations to have their say about priorities for a primary curriculum. Over a 12-month period, a total of 960 responses were received. The analysis of responses highlighted six key priorities with these mirroring, in broad terms, the priorities within *Aistear* and the then draft Junior Cycle Framework, as well as spotlighting ways in which the current curriculum could be improved.

For these reasons and others which are fully detailed in the next section of this report, the NCCA published proposals related to ‘structure’ and ‘time allocations’ in the primary curriculum in December 2016 and used these as the basis for an extensive consultation from January to June 2017. This consultation has been an important first opportunity, in almost twenty years to ‘check in’ with the current primary curriculum and question, debate and reflect on the extent to which it is still ‘fit for purpose’ as we approach the third decade of the 21st century. Two sets of proposals informed the debate—(1) how the primary school curriculum should be ‘structured’ and (2) how ‘time’ might be used across the curriculum into the future. The consultation also provided a lens to explore wider aspects of curriculum—the implementation process, the system’s role in enabling and supporting change in teaching and learning, the school’s role in enabling and supporting change, and the centrality of high-quality continuing professional development. A range of consultation formats were used including a

major consultative conference in Dublin Castle. The findings from this consultation will inform and support the next phase of work in the redevelopment of the Irish primary curriculum.

The report on the consultation is organised using the following sections:

- Rationale for curriculum review and consultation
- Consultation proposals
- Formats of consultation
- Summary of main themes from the consultation
- Next steps.

An executive summary of the report will be developed and published online alongside the main report.

Rationale for curriculum review and consultation

The Primary School Curriculum (DES) was published in 1999 after a decade-long process of development and deliberation and has since been the focus of curriculum research, review and evaluation. This research activity has not only provided insights into strengths of, and challenges with the curriculum but has also spotlighted the extent to which classrooms have changed in those intervening years. They are now more dynamic and busier places in which teachers support and respond to a greater diversity of learners, helping each to grow and develop. The last ten to fifteen years have also brought unprecedented technological advances changing the way we communicate with each other, the way we access, process and manage information, and the way we ultimately think about and view the world around us. This period has also seen significant change in social structures and institutions, increased prosperity followed by a significant period of recession and an emerging economic growth. These changed and changing circumstances impact both positively and negatively on children's experiences of childhood and families' experiences of life. But the last two decades have not only seen significant change in *who* inhabits classrooms and the *types* of experiences they bring with them; this period has also seen increasing demands being made of the curriculum by a changed and changing society and its expectations of the education system.

The 1999 curriculum was informed by research of its time—those were different times. It has provided a strong foundation for teaching and learning in primary schools. However, despite its extensive size—two books per subject and an introductory book—it was considered incomplete (Sugrue, 2004). Furthermore, while child-centredness was central to the vision for the curriculum, teachers noted *the emphasis on a theoretical rather than practical framework*, and highlighted the need for further practical support in using different teaching resources, organisational settings, strategies for differentiation, and ways to promote higher-order thinking skills (NCCA, 2008a, p.198). Some of these needs reflected the increasing complexity of teachers' work in supporting all children to learn and develop in classrooms with greater diversity of learners. In response, the NCCA published guidelines to provide further practical support for teachers and schools on specific aspects of curriculum and assessment. Table 1 provides an overview of the suite of guidelines published since 1999.

Table 1: Guidelines published since 1999

Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (guideline status for primary schools)	2009
Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum: Guidelines for Schools	2007
Exceptionally Able Students: Draft Guidelines for Teachers	2007
Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities	2007
Intercultural Education in the Primary School: Guidelines for Schools	2005
English Curriculum: Additional Support Material	2005
English as an Additional Language: Guidelines for Teachers	2005
ICT in the Primary School Curriculum: Guidelines for Teachers	2004
Modern Languages in Primary Schools: Teacher guidelines	2001
Pilot project for modern languages in the primary school: Draft curriculum guidelines	1999

During this period, the Council also developed new online tools including the Curriculum Planning Tool (www.nccaplanning.ie), the Report Card Creator (www.reportcard.ncca.ie), the Aistear Toolkit (www.ncca.ie/aisteartoolkit) and resources for parents on a range of topics including *Early Literacy*, *Early Numeracy*, *Standardised Tests* and *School Reports* (www.ncca.ie/parents). Embedding videos, podcasts and online presentations in these materials helped to illustrate teaching and learning across the curriculum in a way that wasn't possible when the curriculum was being developed and introduced. While many of these supports were requested by teachers to help them unpack and implement the curriculum, the number and span of guideline documents has increased the overall volume of curriculum documentation with which teachers work, raising concerns about the feasibility of 'managing it all' as noted in the discussion document for the Irish National Teachers' Organisation's 2015 Education Conference: *materials continued to be prepared by the Department of Education and by the NCCA to support schools to meet their changing needs, and while useful, contributed to a sense of overload among teachers* (p.7). The volume of guidelines developed to help teachers work with the primary curriculum perhaps also highlights the depth and complexity of the 1999 curriculum in the context of teaching and learning in today's classrooms which are significantly different from those of seventeen years ago when the curriculum was published: *it [the curriculum] is a bit idealistic. It wants to fit every aspect of every subject for every student and that's just not possible* (INTO, 2015, p.20).

Through two reviews, teachers reported that curriculum overload—too much to do and too little time—was the greatest impediment to fully implementing curriculum subjects or to addressing all of the objectives within all subjects (NCCA 2005; 2008a). Teachers also reported that they did not have enough time to meet the growing range of children's learning needs, particularly in large classes. Circular 0056/2011 which outlined initial steps in implementing the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011), including the allocation of increased time to literacy and numeracy, is likely to have further

accentuated the challenge of implementing the primary curriculum in the way it was intended when developed almost 20 years ago.

The last two decades have also seen an acceleration in the volume of research on children's learning and development in their early childhood and primary school years. Much of this offers fresh insights into *how* children learn and develop during this stage of childhood. *Growing Up in Ireland*, Ireland's first longitudinal study of children (www.growingup.ie), following 18,000 children, illuminates how children are developing in their social, economic and cultural environments and how these rapidly changing environments, especially in recent years, have impacted on children's lives. Together with other research, this study enables us to see and better understand children's experiences of education in Ireland today. Across research, one constant is the centrality of the relationship between children and their teachers and the importance of 'quality' relationships for teaching and learning. These relationships are central to high-quality teaching in the primary years which, in turn, is crucial to children's success as highlighted by Bryk and Schneider (2002) and Hattie (2012).

As well as new research on teaching and learning, and new insights into children's experiences of their primary school years, NCCA has been requested to add more and new 'content' to the primary curriculum. Schools and the curriculum, together, are often viewed as a critical site for responding to national priorities or needs, and addressing societal problems. This is evident in calls for increased time to be allocated to existing curriculum areas such as Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Physical Education (PE), and in demands for the inclusion of new curriculum areas such as Coding, Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, Modern Languages, and Wellbeing. Oftentimes, calls for a greater focus on a particular aspect of the curriculum can result in initiatives such as health initiatives and environmental initiatives which can, in practice, become layered on top of the primary curriculum potentially adding further to an experience of curriculum overload. These different kinds of requests 'for more' highlight the competing demands on teachers and schools as they translate the written curriculum into the lived curriculum for all children. The requests also make the NCCA's work in reviewing and redeveloping the primary curriculum more complex and demanding.

The publication of *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020* (Department of Education and Skills [DES], 2011) re-adjusted the priorities for education by providing more time for the teaching of language and mathematics. This change was made without further re-adjustment of time allocation across other curriculum areas. The NCCA is now tasked with advising on time allocation across the

curriculum. On the face of it, advising on time might sound like a straightforward, technical exercise. But is it? At one level, it could involve simply reviewing current time allocations and re-adjusting them to reflect developments since 1999. However, time allocations are not neat, uncontested bundles of minutes allocated to individual curriculum areas or subjects. They represent values and priorities in primary education—what we deem important for our young citizens in the formative years of their educational experiences and what we value and prioritise for children’s learning and development. These priorities, in turn, influence how a curriculum is organised, how time for teaching and learning is distributed across curriculum areas and subjects, and how that time is used.

The *National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy* also set out a curriculum reform agenda. This required the NCCA to begin the redevelopment of the primary curriculum in the area of language (English and Irish) followed by mathematics. Shaped by the timelines in the strategy, this work proceeded ahead of a review of the primary curriculum as a whole, and the new *Primary Language Curriculum* for junior infants to second class was published at www.curriculumonline.ie in December 2015. Recognising that schools are now working with the new language curriculum, the NCCA now sets out proposals for the review and redevelopment of the primary curriculum as outlined in the *National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy*.

Changing classrooms, ever-increasing and changing demands of a primary school experience, a crowded curriculum, policy changes and new findings from research on teaching and learning create both a need and an opportunity to revisit the primary curriculum and to ask the question: *how can it be improved to support children’s learning into the next decade?*

Consultation proposals

The first set of proposals presented two options, both using the concept of an **incremental stage model**, for how a redeveloped primary curriculum might be structured encompassing the two years of the *Early Childhood Care and Education Programme* (See Appendix 1). The options indicated when the points of curriculum differentiation happen. The proposals suggested moving away from subjects in early primary education replacing them with themes such as those in *Aistear* or with broad curriculum areas, leading into subjects in later primary education. The changes marked in very broad terms, changes in children's learning and development. The options were not exhaustive and were intended to stimulate discussion about the most appropriate structure for the primary curriculum. A range of different questions were considered during the consultation in relation to both options (See Appendix 2).

The second set of proposals presented a **differentiated approach** to think about and use 'time' in the school day (See Appendix 3). The proposals reflected some of the trends and developments internationally and building on what has been learnt about schools' experience with the suggested weekly time framework in the 1999 curriculum. A new approach to time allocation is intended to better meet children's learning needs, and the needs of teachers and schools in terms of planning, teaching and assessing. It intends to provide teachers with greater flexibility in their use of teaching time to meet the needs of children and the school community. The proposed time allocation model can work with either revised structures for the primary curriculum. The proposed model uses two categories of time rather than the three categories presented in the Primary School Curriculum¹. The two proposed categories were *minimum state curriculum time* and *flexible time*. A range of questions were considered during the consultation in relation to a differentiated time allocation (See Appendix 4).

¹ The framework for time in the Primary School Curriculum (DES, 1999) includes three key elements:

- time allocated to the teaching of the patron's programme
- a suggested minimum time allocation for each of the other six curriculum areas, along with a period of discretionary curriculum time¹
- time allowed for breaks and assembly.

Formats of consultation

The consultation used a range of formats to support constructive and thorough engagement with educators, children, parents and members of the public about the proposals on curriculum structure and time. The variety of consultation formats supported rich discourse, not only on the proposals but on other aspects of primary schooling such as curriculum implementation and educational change, more broadly. The formats were:

- Bilateral meetings with stakeholders
- Consultative conference
- Consultative meetings with children
- Online questionnaire
- Teacher focus groups
- Written submissions.

Each of these is described briefly.

Bilateral meetings

Bilateral meetings with a wide range of interest groups took place throughout the consultation period from January to June. Table 1 identifies the 33 organisations which, either on invitation or through an expression of interest request, participated in the meetings, sharing their views about aspects of the proposals in which they had particular interest. In advance of the meetings, each organisation was forwarded information detailing the consultation proposals. The meetings supported interesting discussion, reflection and commentary on both sets of proposals contained in the consultation document.

Table 2: Organisations which participated in bilateral meetings

- An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG)
- An Foras Patrúnachta
- Association for Drama in Education in Ireland (ADEI)
- Association of Teachers' / Education Centres in Ireland (ATECI)
- Barnardos
- Better Start, National Early Years Quality Development Service
- Catholic Primary School Management Association (CPSMA)
- Church of Ireland Board of Education (CIBE)
- Dublin City University Institute of Education
- Early Childhood Ireland (ECI)
- Educate Together
- Equate Ireland
- Gaeloideachas
- Hibernia College
- Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO)
- Irish Primary Physical Education Association (IPPEA)
- Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN)
- Lecturers in Science Education, Dublin City University Institute of Education
- Marino Institute of Education
- Mary Immaculate College
- Maynooth University: Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education
- National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD)
- National Childhood Network
- National Council for Special Education (NCSE)

- National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)
- National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT)
- National Parents Council Primary
- Physical Education, Physical Activity and Youth Sport (PEPAYS) Ireland
- Physical Education Unit, Dublin City University Institute of Education
- Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST)
- Science Education Lecturers, Dublin City University Institute of Education
- Small Firms Association (SFA)
- The Teaching Council

Consultative Conference

A consultative conference took place on March 28th in Dublin Castle and was attended by 190 delegates including teachers, principals, early childhood practitioners and managers, parents, researchers, policy-makers, and members of the wider public. John Hammond, Chief Executive of the NCCA, opened the conference and Arlene Forster, Deputy CEO, provided a broad overview of the consultation, to date. Fergus Finlay, CEO, Barnardos Ireland gave a keynote which was followed by children, teachers and principals sharing some of their experiences of the primary curriculum. These contributions provided food for thought as delegates then participated in two discussion group sessions as they explored the proposals on structure and time, in detail. A panel discussion in the afternoon provided an opportunity to continue the conversation on certain themes arising from earlier sessions at the conference. The Minister for Education and Skills, Richard Bruton T.D., addressed delegates in the afternoon before Brigid McManus, Chairperson of the NCCA, closed the event. In closing, she encouraged delegates to continue their engagement with the proposals and their involvement in the consultation. Further details about the conference, including recordings of sessions, can be accessed at <http://www.ncca.ie/en/Conference/Time-and-Structure/Video.html>. The event generated coverage in the media including articles in the Irish Times, Irish Examiner, RTE news website and the Pat Kenny programme on Newstalk radio.²

² <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/primary-school-shake-up-to-focus-on-play-led-learning-1.3028193>
<https://www.rte.ie/news/2017/0328/863272-school-religion/>

Consultative meetings with children

Another significant aspect of the consultation involved conversations with primary school children. This work didn't focus explicitly on the consultation proposals but instead, invited children to share their thoughts on curriculum content and pedagogy—why they thought school was important, what they liked doing at school, how they liked to learn and what they would like to do more of. To support children in sharing their views, NCCA worked with schools on an ongoing basis to develop trust and to build a rapport with the children. Previous work in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics which involved consulting with children, informed the process. The work included children in four schools across the contexts of English-/Irish-medium, DEIS/non-DEIS, urban/rural. The children came from the junior, middle and senior classes. In total, 34 children took part in the conversations. To ensure that children were informing the process from the outset, a Children's Research Advisory Group (CRAG) was established with 17 children in one school. The aim was that these children, although not part of the consultation itself, would help shape the questions and tools used during consultation.

Based on the feedback from the CRAG, the NCCA consulted with children in Scoil Íde, Limerick, Gaelscoil Riabhach, Loughrea and Scoil Chroí Íosa, Galway. The work did not seek to achieve a nationally representative sample of children; instead, its aim was to listen authentically to the voices of children in a few selected settings. Children were visited on two to three occasions, depending on the context and age of the children, to build up trust and confidence. On the final visit, audio-visual recordings were made of the children responding to the questions outlined above and discussed in previous visits. Parental consent was received for all participants and oral assent was given by the children.

Online questionnaires

In collaboration with the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), an online questionnaire was developed (See Appendix 6). The questionnaire was available in both Irish and English throughout the consultation period. It was designed primarily for educators, to gather their professional opinions in response to curriculum change. The questionnaire focused on the following three areas:

- Structure and time in the 1999 curriculum
- Proposed changes to the structure of the primary curriculum
- Proposed changes to time allocation in the primary curriculum.

There were also profile questions about respondents. A total of 2,084 questionnaire responses were received. The way in which the questionnaire was developed enabled respondents to skip over any questions they didn't wish to answer. This resulted in some questions having missing answers. For example, a question asking at what point in the primary school subjects should become the structure of the curriculum, was answered by 1,205 (57%) respondents and skipped by 879 (43%) respondents. Those who responded to the questionnaire tended to be early-career to mid-career teachers while there was a good representation of respondents across the years of primary education.

Teacher focus groups

Teacher focus group meetings was another important feature of the consultation process in supporting teachers to voice their views and responses to the proposals. The Association of Teachers' Education Centres in Ireland (ATECI) helped to organise and inform teachers about the focus group meetings. Seven focus groups took place between February 15th and March 15th involving 48 teachers and principals—Cork, Drumcondra, Ionad Mhúinteoirí Chonamara, Limerick, Navan, Sligo and Waterford. Seven other groups were cancelled due to low numbers expressing an interest in attending. This may have been due to the busyness of schools at this time of year or perhaps due to the level of consultation, more generally, within the education system in recent times. In the case of these seven groups, teachers and principals who indicated their intention to attend, were encouraged to use the online questionnaire to share their views on the proposals. The INTO and CPSMA also organised focus group meetings and shared feedback from teachers and principals through their bilaterals with the NCCA and subsequently, through their written submissions.

Written submissions

A facility for representative bodies, interest groups and individuals to provide written submissions on the proposals, was available on the consultation webpage. A template was provided to support respondents in structuring a written response to the proposals. Some respondents chose to use an alternative structure. A total of 107 written submissions were received by post and through the address structureandtime@ncca.ie.

Consultation findings

A significant amount of data was gathered across the consultation.

Table 3 summarises the level of involvement in each consultation format and outlines the type of data gathered.

Table 3: Data-gathering method, recording of data, and number of contributors

Data-gathering method	Recording of data	Numbers of contributors
Bilateral meetings with interest groups	Field notes	33 bilateral meetings held
Consultative Conference	Field notes Notes from discussion groups	190 people attended
Consultative meetings with children	Field notes Self-reported video recordings	34 children participated
Online questionnaire	Self-reported online submissions	2,084 questionnaire responses
Teacher focus groups	Field notes	7 focus groups involving 48 teachers
Written submissions	Online and paper-based submissions	107 written submissions received

This section describes the main findings which emerged from each of the six consultation formats—bilateral meetings, consultative conference, consultative meetings with children, online questionnaires, teacher focus groups, and written submissions.

Bilateral meetings

Structure of a redeveloped primary curriculum

Each organisation shared its informed views and considerations regarding the strengths and limitations of new curriculum models. In addition, they used the bilateral meetings as an opportunity to consider, question and reflect on the type of future curriculum experiences and outcomes that could best support *all* children in *all* school contexts. This enabled different voices across bilateral meetings to speak of a range of curriculum values and purposes such as children needing to be active, creative and appropriately challenged. In one meeting, delegates spoke of, *needing to speak to wellbeing, citizenship, agency and play*. Some organisations spoke of the importance of developing and nurturing children's problem-solving and critical thinking skills while others commented on children's health and wellbeing needing to be a central focus for their overall learning experience. There was also a desire for children and schools to become more visible in the wider, local community. One organisation noted that to develop a truly broad and meaningful curriculum, cohesion across the curriculum themes / areas / subjects is important, with a conceptual framework highlighting a continuum of learner experience.

There was rich discourse on how best a redeveloped curriculum could and should support quality teaching and learning. To achieve this, respondents were of the view that a new curriculum structure would need to support a wide range of innovative pedagogical approaches. Some organisations also suggested that teachers would benefit from more opportunities to engage in team teaching and professional collaboration, which could foster greater opportunities to adapt their teaching to children's learning needs.

Some organisations commented that they were not overly concerned whether a new curriculum structure used a two- or three-stage model, so long as there is a review and redevelopment of the existing curriculum to better support continuity and enhance children's learning into the future. These organisations chose to record no preference in terms of the suggested alternative structures for the curriculum. Overall though and across the bilateral meetings, there was a strong preference for the three-stage model over the two-stage model.

Preference for a three-stage model

In considering the more preferential three-stage model, some organisations felt there is a natural progression from themes to curriculum areas and on to subjects. There was discussion on the need

for learning outcomes to be framed differently in each stage and that for cohesion and continuity, the outcomes would need to relate to those in the other stages. The three-stage model was viewed as providing more freedom and flexibility for teachers in their planning, teaching and assessing. One group remarked that when considering what is best for the child, the three-stage model is better; but when considering what is most workable in schools, the two-stage model is better. In support of the three-stage model, there was also some negative commentary on the length of stages in the two-stage model. One organisation commented that there are a lot of changes to be seen in a child's development from 3rd class to the end of 6th class. Other concerns about a two-stage model included a risk that children could be under-challenged in the early years of primary with remarks such as, *stage one is about playful experiences and stage two is about the more serious learning.*

Those in favour of the less popular two-stage model drew attention to fewer transition points enabling continuity of experience. *The 2-stage would be more convenient for teachers' planning and it fits in with the layout of the Primary Language Curriculum. (Bheadh 2-chéim níos áisiúla do phleanáil mhúinteoirí agus tagann sé leis an leagan amach atá ar Churaclam Teanga na Bunscoile).* It was also commented that the two-stage model may be easier to implement in a multi-class setting: *Rural smaller schools may have an issue with a three-stage model from a practical point of view.* There was also a suggestion for a two-stage model with themes in stage one and curriculum areas, rather than subjects, in stage two. The collegial voice of others called for complete flexibility for schools with the curriculum structure they employ. This recognises that school contexts vary greatly and so decisions such as how a school organises, plans and enacts the curriculum, might be best made at local level.

A single curriculum stage encompassing the two preschool years and initial primary years

Regardless of a two- or three-stage model, the proposal for stage one to comprise the two preschool years and the initial years in primary school using the themes, or an adaptation of the themes, of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (2009) as a curriculum structure received much support from respondents. *It is important that there would be continuity between preschool and primary school and that primary school subjects are not undertaken in preschool. (Tábhactach go mbeadh leanúnachas ann ón réamhscoil go dtí an bhunscoil agus nach mbeadh ábhar bunscoile á dhéanamh sa réamhscoil).* There was recognition of the mismatch or misalignment between the pedagogical approaches of *Aistear* and the current subject-based infant curriculum. The success of *Aistear* in supporting teachers to review and adapt their practice in infant classrooms was emphasised in bilateral meetings and by extension, the use of *Aistear's* principles and themes in a redeveloped primary curriculum, was considered positive. It was strongly acknowledged by respondents that

primary school teachers, to date, had not received the necessary support in relation to working with the principles and approaches in *Aistear* and that schools had not been resourced to use child-led play. Others suggested that *Aistear* may need to be evaluated, adapted or perhaps redeveloped, as well as being adequately resourced, if it was to become the curriculum organiser from early years up to the end of second class. There was also a request for an evaluation to compare the implementation of *Aistear* in preschools and primary schools. Some organisations drew attention to the higher pupil/teacher ratios in infant classrooms in comparison to preschool settings. Oral language development, child-led play, effective transitions and the importance of scaffolding were all mentioned as being important curriculum considerations in the early years of primary education.

The current qualifications requirements for practitioners in early childhood settings are at a lower level on the National Framework for Qualifications compared to primary school teachers. Some organisations would like to see this difference in qualifications addressed, in an upward direction, to avoid a perceived negative impact on the status and professional identity of primary teachers working in the same curriculum stage as early childhood practitioners.

Inclusion of subjects in a redeveloped primary curriculum

The responses from the bilateral meetings indicated support for the presence of subjects in the primary school curriculum. However, there was little consensus on *when* subjects should become the organiser of the curriculum. Some organisations questioned the benefits and rationale for organising children's learning through discrete subjects. They expressed a preference, instead, for the introduction of themes at the infant and junior end of primary school leading naturally into curriculum areas at the middle and senior end. For these organisations, this structure would better align with, and reflect how children learn. Other groups commented on the desirability of children becoming familiar with a subject-based structure prior to entering post-primary education, *subjects are probably no harm in the curriculum*. As one organisation put it, *there is a fear among teachers of letting go of subjects*. There was a feeling among some respondents that if children are going to experience a subject-based curriculum in first year of post-primary school, there needs to be some exposure to subjects in the senior end of primary school. Children need to be prepared for the transition to post-primary school and this means *subjects at the upper end of the primary school*. There was some sentiment that the introduction of subjects in 5th and 6th may be too late and the preference for some would be to introduce subjects in 4th or possibly earlier in 3rd class. Other respondents cautioned against the notion that the principal function of primary education is 'preparing' children for post-primary school: *subjects at 5th and 6th will provide for primary schools turning into prep schools for*

post-primary. It would be a junior secondary school. One organisation expressed the point of view that it did not want primary schools to *become a hothouse for post-primary education.*

Some groups questioned how the new Mathematics and Language curricula would be integrated into the proposed curriculum changes. They suggested that, in keeping with the first four years of primary, playful approaches could be seamlessly integrated into the new Language curriculum for 3rd – 6th classes. Some specific curriculum areas/subjects arose in the discussions with many contributors asserting that Arts Education, Physical Education (PE), Science, and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) are considered very important in the current primary curriculum and cautioned against these curriculum areas being *squeezed out*. There was some concern about this happening in the senior classes with some organisations suggesting this was the current practice in some schools. There were specific calls during bilateral meetings for PE to be integrated throughout the school day. There was a concern that if PE was not included as a discrete subject, it may become lost or diluted within broad curriculum themes. In a bilateral meeting specifically considering Science, respondents held the opinion that the current curriculum principles of social constructivism and inquiry-based methodologies should be maintained so that children have opportunities to develop their scientific knowledge and skills.

Support for schools in implementing a new primary curriculum structure

The themes of continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers and leadership support for principals featured strongly in almost all bilateral discussions. Respondents were clear that the introduction of a redeveloped primary curriculum would require ongoing, planned CPD to ensure lasting, effective change in teachers' practice, knowledge and confidence. There was interest in how a new curriculum structure could be managed, with one respondent noting that *CPD needs to focus on understanding an emergent and inquiry-based curriculum*. Concern was also expressed about the level of sustained support, resourcing and guidance that schools and teachers would receive to successfully implement changes set out in the proposals. There was also reference to leadership for change requiring school management competences in leading innovation and meeting the challenges which lie ahead.

A shared understanding of themes, topics, integration, curriculum areas and subjects

The use and understanding of terminology in the consultation was discussed in different bilateral meetings. There was a request for greater clarity in the use of terms such as 'themes', 'topics',

'curriculum areas' and 'curriculum subjects'. The suggestions from meetings were that these terms needed to be unpacked, defined and exemplified so people could more readily conceptualise each of them as curriculum organisers. Some organisations spoke of people needing a greater understanding of the term 'curriculum', the concept of an 'integrated curriculum' and 'integrated teaching'. An integrated curriculum needs explication so no ambiguity exists. It was also considered important that teachers would be supported in planning for and teaching an integrated curriculum. This, according to some respondents, would require an integrated approach to teaching to be embedded in initial teacher education courses and teachers' continuous professional learning. Similarly, terminology such as 'emergent curriculum' and 'enquiry based curriculum' needed the same interrogation. Likewise, it was apparent across bilateral meetings that there were multiple understandings of *Aistear* in a primary school context with references being made to *doing Aistear*, the *Aistear hour* and the *Aistear room*. Clarification of key terms used both in the consultation proposals and in the consultation discussions would benefit and inform future work on the primary curriculum.

Time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Overall there was a positive response to the proposals for a new time allocation as *it's needed and overdue to give autonomy back to schools and provide for professional discretion*. In considering the proposals, some organisations suggested that further clarification about what is intended by 'minimum state curriculum time', would be helpful. In general, feedback suggested that the proposals provide increased flexibility for schools to respond to their individual school contexts. The existing model of time allocation in schools means that children may have a fragmented experience of the curriculum. Some organisations drew the distinction between models of time allocation as described in policy and the actual use of time in the classroom, remarking that what is of greatest importance is how time is used by teachers to ensure quality learning experiences for children. The view was expressed that a new time allocation model could be *a huge challenge, a mind shift, where school leadership needs to be confident to reconceptualise how we think about time*. While flexibility is needed, nonetheless, respondents were of the view that *there needs to be guidance on time allocations*.

Increased opportunities for teachers to exercise professional agency

Within minimum state curriculum time, organisations highlighted opportunities for teachers to exercise their professional judgement, agency and creativity with many groups acknowledging that

this fosters teacher professional autonomy to make decisions based on local needs and knowledge. A reduction in the current requirements related to teachers' long- and short-term planning, would be welcomed. Alongside this, many respondents in meetings felt that teachers would still welcome weekly or fortnightly time allocations for Mathematics, English and Irish as set out in the consultation proposals. Respondents saw this as being particularly important in the infant and junior classes. There were also clear requests from organisations/interest groups working in the area of PE for this subject to receive a minimum weekly increased time allocation throughout the primary school benefiting children physically and academically.

Respondents in meetings welcomed monthly time allocations for other curriculum themes, areas or subjects. The benefit of monthly time allocations for thematic teaching and learning approaches was identified with many respondents remarking on the opportunity for longer, more sustained learning experiences and a move away from the 'hurried classrooms' that characterise some schools. Additionally, some respondents noted that longer sustained learning experiences could include *the opportunity for children to spend more time outdoors learning about plants and Science*. Similarly, several organisations remarked that the combined use of monthly time allocations and flexible time may enable schools to develop local curricula that reflect the community of which they are a central part, while also meeting the needs of all children.

Concern about children's regular exposure to the full curriculum

Some groups expressed a concern related to the potential infrequent teaching of themes/curriculum areas/subjects outside Language and Mathematics. This concern emanated from the extent to which monthly time allocations could result in some teachers choosing to teach certain themes/areas/subjects once a month only thereby reducing the frequency with which children would have particular curriculum experiences, and also making integrated units of learning across the curriculum more difficult to plan *The Christmas play could become drama for the term – a very narrow experience for children*.

A small number of organisations suggested that some schools may choose to *farm out subjects* to individuals outside the school staff. There were warnings about external 'experts' taking over teaching time. There were suggestions that this was already the case in some schools and caution was advised against this practice so that children experienced broad learning experiences from a qualified primary school teacher working within the school.

Proposals for curriculum time allocations inconsistent with early childhood structures

Some organisations held the view that the proposals for new time allocations *do not reflect early childhood structures*. To illustrate this point, attention was drawn to the weekly allocation of time for Mathematics, English and Irish, subjects which are not delineated in *Aistear*. The view was that these subjects should traverse a child's learning experiences and should not have a specific time allocation in an early childhood classroom: *Children's learning is not divided into time for Mathematics, Language and so on. If any distinction is made it should be a distinction between group work or individual time.*

General positivity towards flexible time in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Overall, flexible time was viewed as a positive development although the use of the word 'flexible' was questioned during some meetings. The term 'extra-curricular allocation' was a suggested alternative. Some organisations mentioned opportunities for children to shape their educational experience by choosing curriculum areas or projects of interest during flexible time. A school leader commented that flexible time could enable increased mobility of teachers across the school, for instance, teachers with expertise in certain areas may be *freed up* to work with children in different classes. Some organisations questioned the actual label *flexible time* and questioned its place *within an experiential context and inquiry-based learning*. The question was raised as to whether the proportion of flexible time could alter, depending on the incremental stage children are at in school.

Specific components of flexible time

Two components within the proposed flexible time received particular attention in the bilateral meetings—patron's programme, and break and recreational time. Different views were articulated about the place of the patron's programme in a redeveloped curriculum. Some organisations welcomed the positioning of the patron's programme in flexible time, allowing extra time for school assemblies and ceremonies/celebrations of a religious nature. Alongside this, concern was expressed about the potential diminution of the status of the patron's programme arising from its separation from the rest of the curriculum. In contrast, others expressed concern that locating it within flexible time could lead to it receiving additional time and result in decreased time for other components within flexible time. Other points made referred to parents' concerns about the large amount of time currently given to the patron's programme, and a call to move the programme outside the school day.

In the case of breaks and recreational time, organisations referred to the importance of these for both children and teachers. In making the point, some cited the *Rules for National Schools*. There were requests for recreation and break-times to be ring-fenced and protected. Some organisations called for no discretion to be given as this could result in children experiencing decreased recreational opportunities. They suggested that the integrity of break and recreation times could be maintained by removing them from flexible time and giving them a specific time allocation.

Other thoughts and observations

During conversations, the possibility of an education experience in primary schools involving contact with local businesses and opportunities to learn modern foreign languages were suggested.

The possibility of children having **contact with local businesses** in their community was discussed in a bilateral meeting. It was suggested that local business people, with a diverse range of skills and knowledge, could be of significant value to children and teachers in facilitating mentoring and networking opportunities. The children could benefit from new learning experiences that might further contribute to their creativity, problem-solving and entrepreneurial skills.

The importance of **modern foreign Languages** in a redeveloped curriculum has also been raised. References were made to the Modern Foreign Languages in Primary School Initiative in which some primary schools were involved until 2012. Some organisations and individuals expressed an interest in re-introducing modern foreign Languages to foster a richer and more varied learning experience for children.

Other themes and ideas included wellbeing, citizenship, appropriate challenge for children, and maximum use of the local environment.

Consultative Conference

The Consultative Conference on March 28th provided an opportunity for delegates to consider, discuss and respond to the proposals for consultation on structure and time in a redeveloped primary curriculum. To facilitate rich and engaging discussions, delegates were divided into six groups working in separate break-out rooms where they were further divided into smaller working groups. Delegates considered the proposals on 'structure' in one discussion session and the proposals on 'time' in another session. To help guide discussions, working groups were asked to respond to a set of questions relating to the proposals and, through a rapporteur, to create a written record of key points from their deliberations. What follows is an overview of findings from the discussion groups.

Structure of a redeveloped primary curriculum

Delegates responded to the following questions on the proposals related to structure.

- The proposals suggest a two-stage model or a three-stage model for structuring a redeveloped primary curriculum. Which, if either, of these models should be used?
- Should we continue to use subjects? If so, from which class?
- What learning, not included in the 1999 curriculum, should be included in a redeveloped primary curriculum?
- How could space be created to include new learning?

The proposals suggest a two-stage model or a three-stage model for structuring a redeveloped primary curriculum. Which, if either, of these models should be used?

Delegates used the opportunity to question, debate and clarify perceived benefits and challenges of the two suggested incremental models. Some groups commented on the potential for both models to aid children's gradual movement from one stage to another. Others noted that neither model was likely to suit all school contexts and that the introduction of different stages could lead to *pigeon holing* of teachers within specific stages. Those favouring the two-stage model viewed it as easier to implement, while also creating a greater sense of school community. It was suggested that the two-stage model *slots* into multi-class settings more easily. Those favouring the three-stage model viewed it as a continuum of education with more opportunities for children's learning progression. While there was no consensus about which of the two models was the more appropriate for a primary

curriculum, initial analysis suggests a stronger preference for a three-stage model but with conflicting opinions regarding the commencement and finishing points of each stage as shown in Figure 1 below.

Delegates, if they wished, could suggest alternative models for restructuring the primary school curriculum. Figure 1 illustrates eight alternative permutations. They use mainly two- or three-stages with only one suggested model using four-stages. The four-stage model spans from birth up to 13 years. One other suggestion was for a three-year infant stage. Respondents did not elaborate on how the models could function. They simply provided illustrations.

Figure 1: Suggested alternative models for a new primary curriculum

0 – 3 years	3 – 7 years	8 – 10 years	11 – 13 years
Aistear Up to 2 nd class	Curriculum areas 3 rd and 4 th	Subjects 5 th and 6 th	
Themes Preschool – 1 st class	Curriculum areas 2 nd , 3 rd , 4 th	Subjects 5 th and 6 th	
Themes Junior infants – 2 nd class	Curriculum areas 3 rd and 4 th	Subjects 5 th and 6 th	
Aistear Preschool – 2 nd class	Curriculum areas (retaining some signature pedagogies of subjects) 3 rd – 6 th		
Aistear Juniors – 4 th Or Themes and areas Juniors – 2 nd	5 th and 6 th Subjects Curriculum areas 3 rd – 6 th		
Aistear Themes Ages 3 – 8/9	Curriculum areas 10/11 – 12/13		
A three-year infant programme: Junior infants, Middle infants and Senior infants			

Should we continue to use subjects? If so, from which class?

There was little consensus from delegates regarding the future of subjects in a redeveloped primary curriculum. Many delegates strongly favoured their retention at the upper end of primary in 5th and 6th class *as they give security while linking upper primary with first year in post-primary school.* Delegates pondered that if subjects were no longer retained, *then what would the provision look like?*

In addition, some delegates suggested that subjects should be delayed until post-primary school, wondering if subjects were necessary at all. Overall, there was considerable support for retaining subjects in the upper end of the primary curriculum and clearly delineating learning outcomes and skills development within subject specifications. While there was no consensus on when and where subjects should become the organiser of the curriculum, there was agreement on the value of a redeveloped incremental curriculum. Delegates spoke of the importance of greater clarity about the meaning of the term *curriculum areas* with more clarity needed on the difference between *curriculum areas* and *curriculum subjects*.

What learning, not included in the 1999 curriculum, should be included in a redeveloped primary curriculum?

The responses to this question were many and varied. A number of discussion groups mentioned coding, emotional literacy, modern foreign languages, and ERB and Ethics. To a lesser extent, play through the primary school, inquiry-based learning and higher-order thinking skills were mentioned.

How could space be created to include new learning?

In responding to the question of how *space* could be created for the addition of new areas of learning, delegates referred to greater opportunities and greater support for meaningful curriculum integration. Some delegates noted that effective integration could allow for more thematic- and topic-based approaches for children's learning. Delegates also called for a reduction in curriculum content and less prescription. Some groups took the opportunity to discuss the future of Music and Drama in a redeveloped primary curriculum. There was some support for the re-configuration of Drama as a methodology rather than a subject. The same was suggested for music but by a smaller group of delegates. Concern was expressed by other discussion groups about the future of these subjects in the primary curriculum. One group proposed combining History and Geography into a single subject.

Time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Delegates responded to the following questions on the proposals related to time.

- Do you agree with the categorisation of time as minimum state curriculum time and flexible time?
- Considering the 'contents' of the two categories, is the allocation of 60% of the school day to 'minimum state curriculum time' and 40% for 'flexible time' appropriate?
- Should the amount of time allocated to Mathematics and to the school's first and second Language differ depending on the curriculum stage in question?
- Should time allocations be specified for the rest of the curriculum? If so, should this be on a weekly, monthly, termly or annual basis?
- Ideally, how much of the school week should be available for schools to use as they choose?

For what purposes might schools use this time?

A number of points emerged in the discussion groups. These included the need for trust in and autonomy for teachers in how they choose to allocate time within the school day. Delegates felt that flexible time allocations would be especially useful in junior classes to provide for thematic teaching, inquiry-based and child-led learning. Some discussion groups also highlighted what they considered to be a current over-allocation of time to Languages and Mathematics and the necessity of avoiding a hierarchy of subjects.

Further recurring points included:

- a desire for a weekly increased time allocation for Physical Education;
- a preference for monthly allocations over weekly, fortnightly, termly or annual allocations for all other curriculum areas or subjects outside of Languages and Mathematics;
- a questioning of the placement of breaks, recreation and patron's programme in flexible time.

Do you agree with the categorisation of time as minimum state curriculum time and flexible time?

Delegates generally agreed with the division of school time into these two categories. Furthermore, there was agreement that time allocations should be presented as guidelines rather than requirements. There were mixed views on the actual titles of the categories. Some discussion groups felt that the term 'minimum state curriculum time' was inappropriate as it implied the state 'owns'

knowledge. While the concept of providing flexible time to schools was supported, respondents were generally of the view that the elements proposed in flexible time were perhaps not so flexible; particularly break-times and the patron's programme. There was strong support for reinstating discretionary time for schools and some groups suggested moving discretionary time into minimum state curriculum time. Greater flexibility in allocating time in junior classes, in particular, was highlighted in order to better support more thematic, child-led learning.

Some discussion groups suggested three categories of time rather than two—minimum state curriculum time, flexible time, and all other times that are not flexible, i.e., break-times and the patron's programme. Another suggested alternative included discretionary time, minimum state curriculum time and 'other areas'.

Considering the 'contents' of the two categories, is the allocation of 60% of the school day for minimum state curriculum time and 40% for flexible time, appropriate?

The call to redefine 'flexible time' also arose in response to this question. Some discussion groups felt the necessity for break-times to be categorised separately to reflect their importance for children in the school day.

Some discussions groups noted the importance of the curriculum in supporting teachers as professionals to make decisions about how time is used in their classrooms. In this context, they called for a greater amount of time to be categorised as flexible. A further point discussed was that discrete time be allocated to each school to design learning for their individual context.

Should the amount of time allocated to Mathematics and to the school's first Language and second Language differ depending on the curriculum stage in question? If so, how?

In response to this question, some discussion groups expressed concern about Mathematics and Languages being given weekly allocations while other subjects or curriculum areas would have longer-term allocations. These groups questioned the extent to which this could work in the context of a 'broad and balanced' curriculum experience for children. Some discussion groups questioned the time allocated to Irish and whether this specific allocation should perhaps be flexible. Furthermore, these groups questioned if Irish should continue to be considered a *core subject* from a time perspective.

Delegates were open to having different time allocations as children progress through primary school while at the same time, questioned where this time would be taken from.

Should time allocations be specified for the rest of the curriculum? If so, should this be on a weekly, monthly, termly or annual basis?

A perceived hierarchy of subjects was again alluded to in the discussion that this question generated. Monthly allocations were generally preferred to termly or annual allocations while the opportunity to plan weekly was, at the same time, seen as being important. Some delegates again expressed the view that PE should receive a weekly allocation in order for children to gain maximum benefit from that subject.

Ideally, how much of the school week should be available for schools to use as they choose?

There was strong support for increased time to be given to schools to use as they choose. The use of this time could better reflect each school's values, ethos and context. It was also felt that guidance and support in planning for each school's context would need to be provided, particularly in the early stages of implementation.

For what purposes might schools use this time?

There were many suggestions as to how schools might use this time. These included nature walks, project work, concerts and modern foreign Languages. Delegates also highlighted that this time could be used to run various initiatives within schools such as *Friends for Life* or in the pursuit of 'flags'. *Seachtain na Gaeilge (Irish Language Week)* and *Friendship Week* were also highlighted.

General feedback

Throughout the group discussions on both sets of proposals, delegates articulated the view that schools and teachers would require significant support, resources, investment, and CPD to implement and sustain changes to the primary school curriculum structure and time allocation across it. This would also require the modification and amendment of initial teacher education courses in response to curriculum changes. This view was reiterated during the panel discussion. Other areas highlighted for further consideration included teacher autonomy and professional knowledge in working with a redeveloped curriculum and the current high pupil/teacher ratio in primary classrooms.

There was general positivity towards *Aistear* as a curriculum framework for preschools and the early years in primary school. Delegates felt that *Aistear*, as a curriculum framework for stage one, could be

redeveloped and used beyond the two infant classes. This discussion reflected delegates' general thinking that the need for curriculum change was probably greater at the lower end of primary school than at the upper end. Alongside this, some delegates highlighted current realities that could prove challenging in working towards a coherent curriculum stage traversing the preschool years and early primary years—varied levels of communication between the two settings, variation in the types and levels of qualifications and different curriculum practices.

Consultative meetings with children

As noted earlier, the key questions guiding this initial consultation with children from junior infants to sixth class were: *Why do you come to school? What do you like to learn? How do you like to learn?*

Purpose of school

When asked why they attended school, the children cited three main reasons—the need to learn, the need to make friends, and the importance of education for future employment.

In the case of children in the infant classes, the responses tended to relate to the importance of school in providing them with the opportunity to learn or in the words of one child, *to get smart*. The prevailing attitude was encapsulated by the following: *We need to learn stuff...if we don't know what parents know we can go to school and the teacher will teach us.*

Responses became more nuanced among the older children with the social and economic purposes of education becoming more apparent. A child in second class highlighted the importance of school in creating social bonds stating, *if you're a grown up and if you don't go to school and if you don't meet any friends you won't have any*. The economic importance of school was articulated clearly by a sixth-class child who stated that they went to school so that *we would be able to get a job and earn money when we are older*. (*Go féidir linn post a fháil nuair atá muid níos síne agus is féidir linn airgead a fháil nuair atá muid níos síne*).

Content and pedagogy

Unsurprisingly, when asked what they liked to learn and how they liked to learn, children's responses varied across the age ranges. Those in the infant classes did not, generally, distinguish between these two questions. Colouring, drawing, writing and copying (e.g., from a whiteboard) were mentioned. Specific subjects or curriculum areas were less likely to be brought up although one child noted that he enjoyed Irish and Mathematics while another child said she liked *Gaeilge stories*. Working in groups was noted in a positive way with one child preferring it *because then you're not lonely and you have some friends to talk to*. It was clear that the children had a dedicated time set aside each day for 'learning through play' as all children in this particular class spoke of it in a positive manner. One child liked this time *'cos there's loads of fun stuff to do and there (are) like magnetic polydrons and...there is role play*.

Older children were more inclined to talk about specific subjects and curriculum areas. Mathematics was mentioned on a few occasions by children as an area that they enjoyed. Unsurprisingly, Art and PE emerged as subjects that many of the children enjoyed and wished to do more of. For one child, PE provided the opportunity to take a break from more structured areas of learning, and therefore, she wished to do it more often throughout the day; *I would like to do more PE between lessons as a break from things. (Ba mhaith liom níos mó corpoideachas i lár na ceachtanna so is féidir linn sos a thógáil ó na rudaí.)* Visual Arts was spoken about as a calm space in which children could do their own thing and two children mentioned the absence of right or wrong answers as being a significant factor in their enjoyment of the subject.

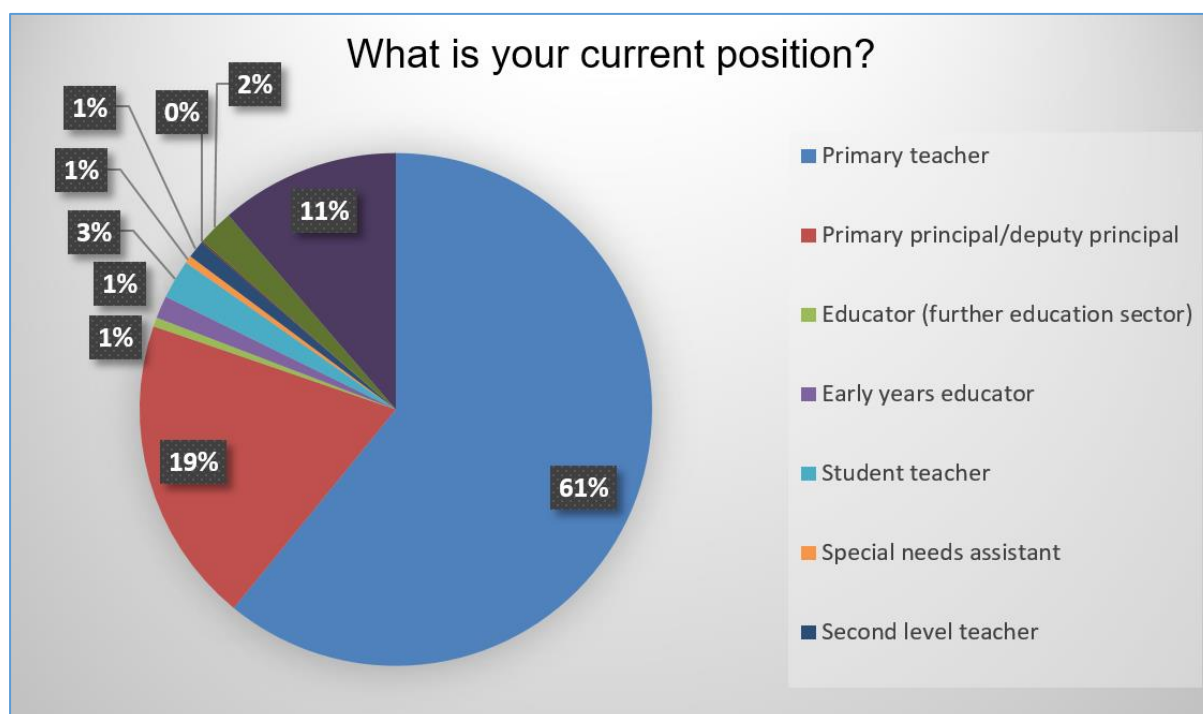
When asked how they liked to learn, the children in second class mentioned writing, using books and iPads. Some children in sixth class echoed these thoughts whilst others highlighted their enjoyment of station learning or the use of classroom games, *I enjoy learning when we are doing stations, so you can do different things at every station. (Is maith liom a bheith ag foghlaim nuair a tá muid ag like déanamh stáisiúiní agus rudaí, so is féidir leat rudaí difriúil ag gach stáisiún).*

Online questionnaires

Profile of respondents

Of the 2,084 online questionnaires, 1,059 provided profile data³. As shown in Figure 2, 645 were primary school teachers, 205 were either a primary school principal or deputy principal, 15 were early years educators, 26 were student teachers, 24 were educators in the higher education sector, 12 were post-primary teachers and one was a post-primary principal/deputy principal. The remaining 120 respondents indicated the current position as 'other' which included researchers, parents, grandparents, members of the public and retired teachers.

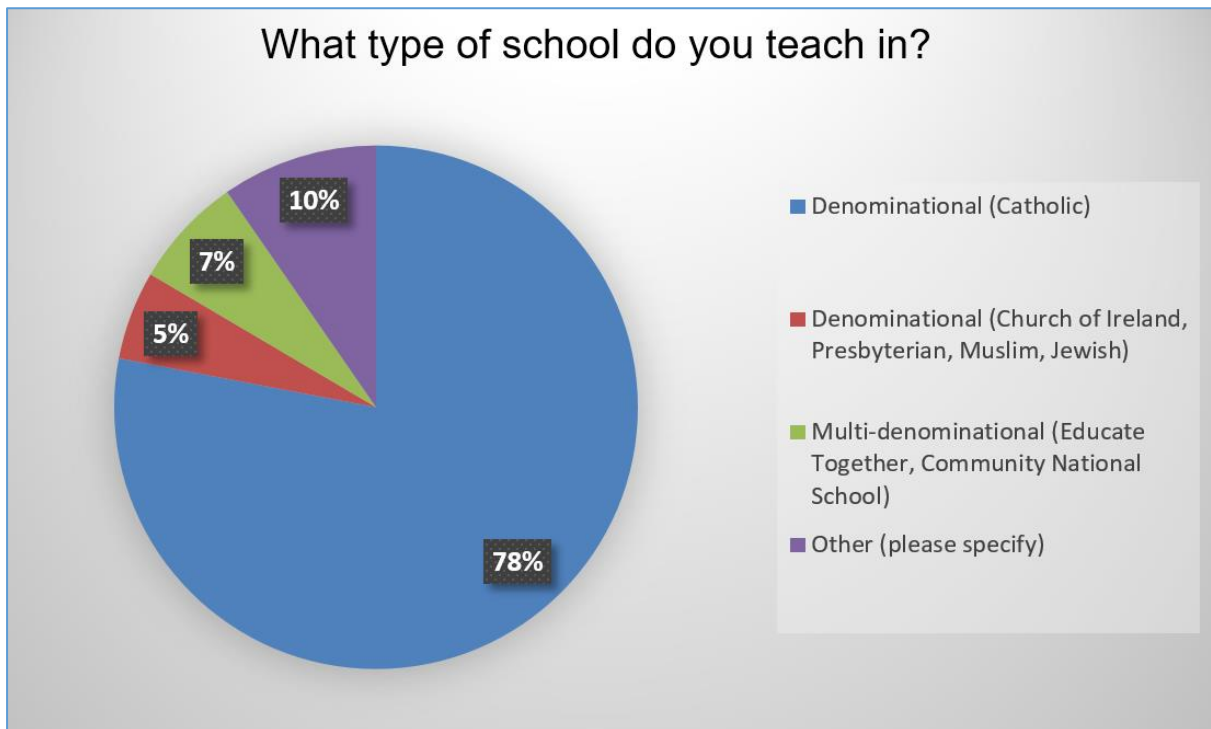
Figure 2: Profile of respondents



Of the 1,059 respondents, 983 (92.26%) worked in an English-medium setting, 76 (7.74%) worked in an Irish-medium setting with 27 (3.02%) of those working in scoileanna sa Ghaeltacht.

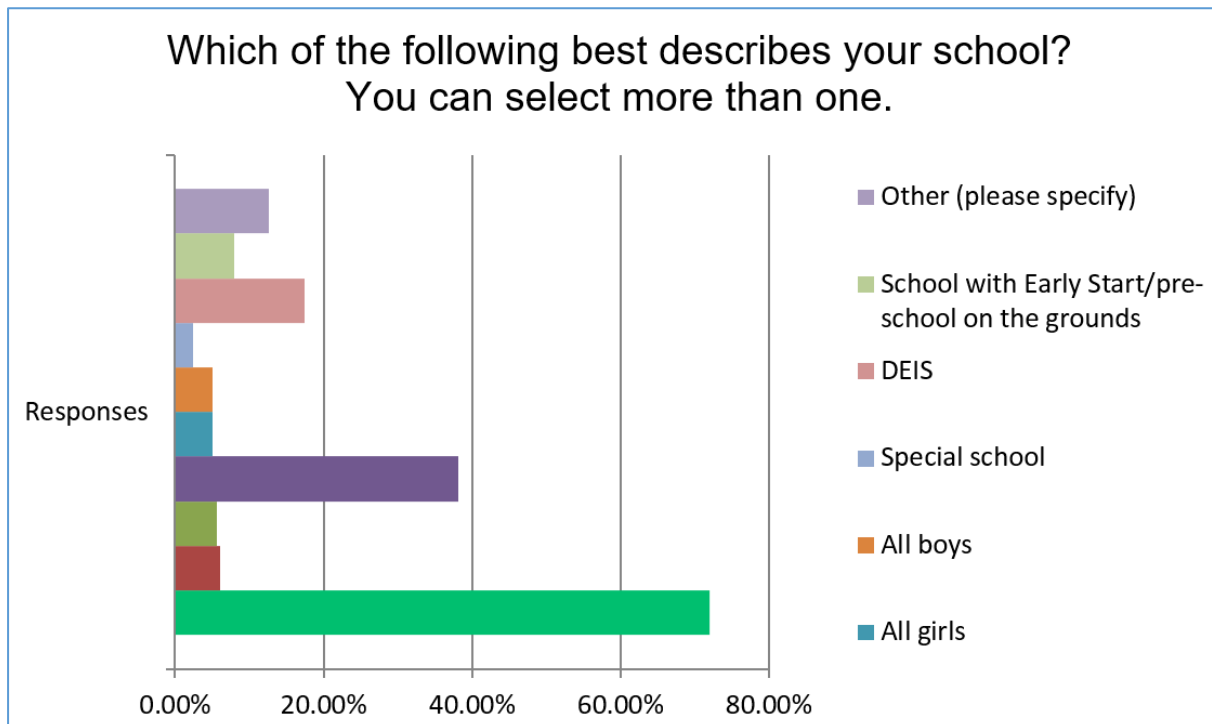
³ As noted earlier in the report, questions in the online questionnaire were not mandatory thereby enabling respondents to choose which questions they wished to complete.

Figure 3: Profile of school patronage



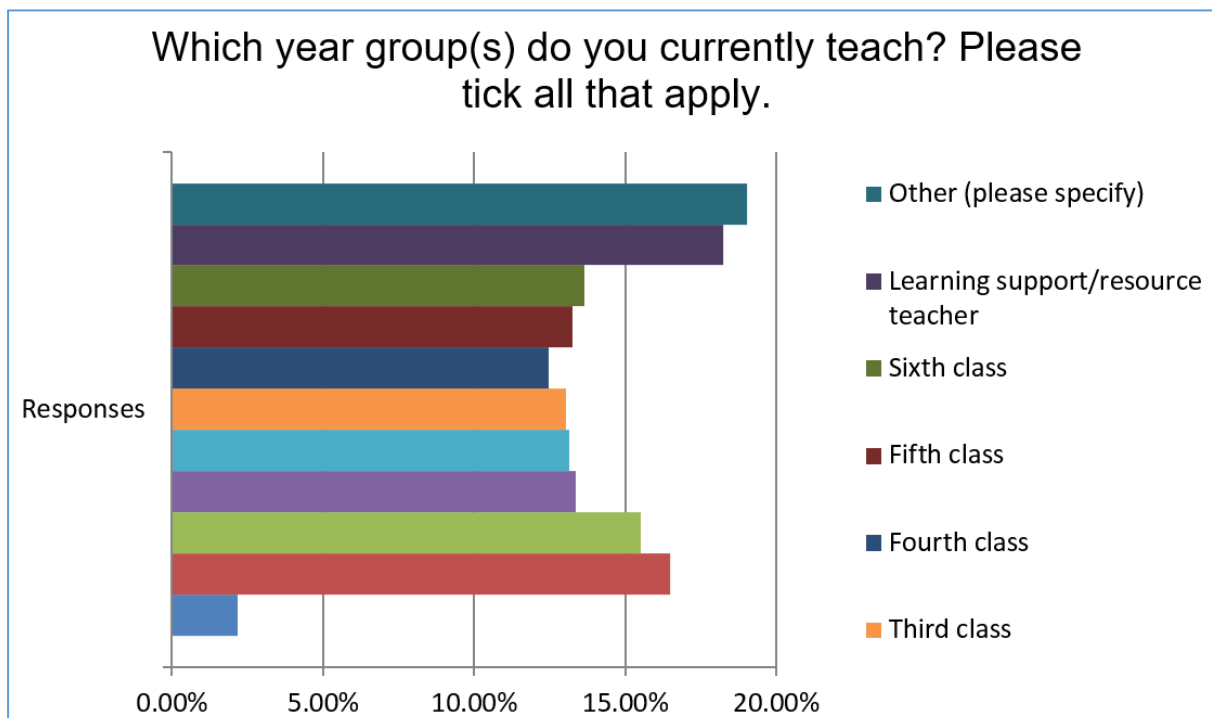
As outlined in Figure 3, of those working in schools, 826 (78%) taught in a Catholic school; 58 (5.48%) in a Church of Ireland, Presbyterian, Muslim or Jewish school; 73 (6.89%) in a multi-denominational school and 102 (9.63%) in what was specified as 'other'. The majority of those specifying 'other' stated that this question was non-applicable to them or that they were a parent or a retired teacher.

Figure 4: Profile of school type



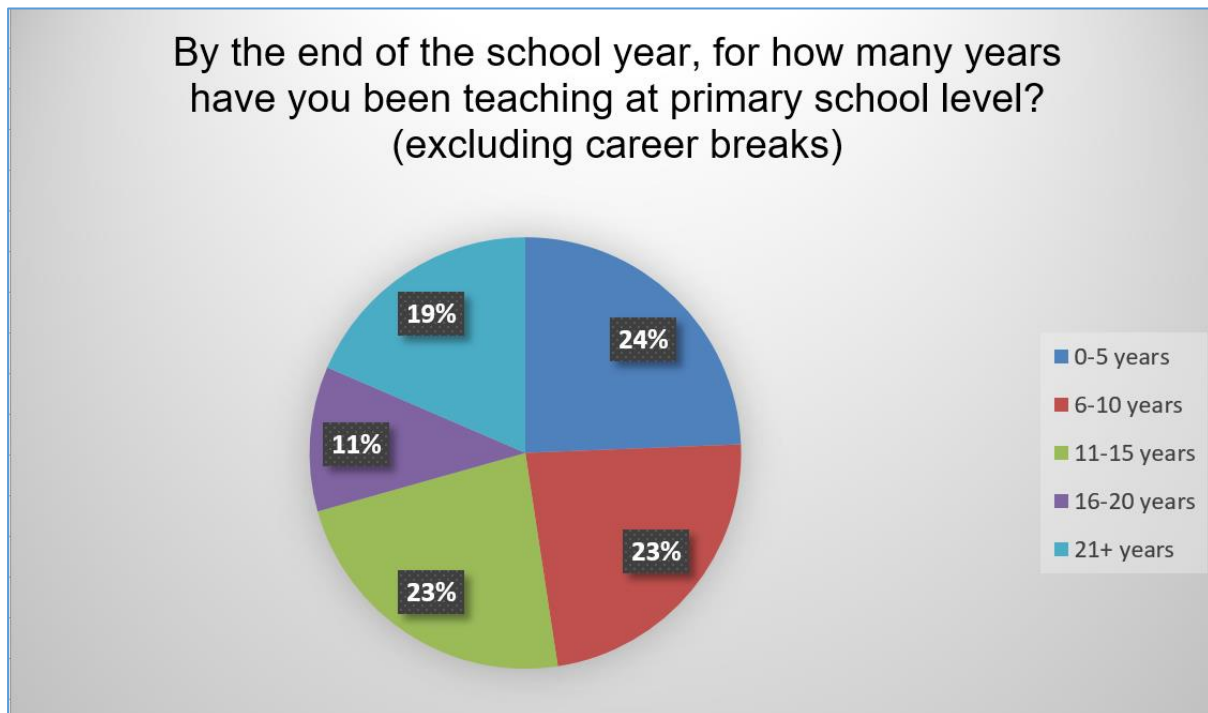
As illustrated in Figure 4, the majority of respondents (763, 72.05%) taught in schools that were vertical while DEIS schools represented 185 (17.47%) of the responses. Of the 133 (12.56%) selecting 'other', their responses included ASD units, preschools, private fee-paying schools, third level institutions and multi-grade settings.

Figure 5: Profile of respondents to the online questionnaire



As illustrated in Figure 5, all class levels, including Early Start (22, 2.16%), were represented by respondents who worked in primary schools. The 194 (19.04%) who responded as 'other' tended to be administrative principals, post-primary teachers, student teachers and teachers working in special education units.

Figure 6: Teaching experience of respondents



The majority of respondents, **748 (70.6%)**, were early to mid-career teachers, with under 15 years' experience. The lowest response rate was from the 16-20 years range with 115 (10.8%) respondents.

Structure of the 1999 Primary School Curriculum

As illustrated in Table 4, most people (1,509, 72.41%), agreed or strongly agreed that there is significant overlap across curriculum areas, that there are too many subjects in the primary school curriculum (1,508, 72.36%) and that there are challenges to linkage and integration in the curriculum (1,314, 63.05%). The level of agreement with this statement was slightly higher among teachers of junior infants (59.53%) and teachers of senior infants (58.23%). Respondents were less definitive on the level of continuity between *Aistear* in the preschool setting and in the primary school with 409 (19.63%) indicating that they did not know. It was agreed/strongly agreed by teachers at different class levels that there are too many subjects in the current curriculum: teachers of junior infants (80.36%), teachers of senior infants (81.65%), teachers of 2nd (70.89%), teachers of 4th (76.38%) and teachers of 6th (80.58%).

Table 4: Statements about the primary school curriculum

Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about the current primary school curriculum by ticking one box on each row.					
Answer Options	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
There is a significant overlap in what children learn across curriculum areas in the current primary school curriculum.	416 (19.96%)	1093 (52.45%)	401 (19.34%)	61 (2.93%)	113 (5.42%)
There are challenges in linkage and integration with the current curriculum.	309 (14.83%)	1005 (48.22%)	577 (27.69%)	97 (4.65%)	96 (4.61%)
There is continuity in children's learning experiences through <i>Aistear</i> in the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (free pre-school years) and the current primary curriculum.	174 (8.35%)	797 (38.24%)	476 (22.84%)	228 (10.94%)	409 (19.63%)
There are too many subjects in the current curriculum.	875 (41.99%)	633 (30.37%)	428 (20.54%)	106 (5.09%)	42 (2.02%)

Respondents indicated a clear dissatisfaction with the current structure of the primary school curriculum with its 11 subjects, with 1,233 (59.17%) indicating that they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (see Table 5).

Table 5: Satisfaction with the subject-based primary curriculum

Overall, how would you rate the structure of 11 subjects in the current primary school curriculum?				
Answer options	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
	100 (4.8%)	751 (36.04%)	1,038 (49.81%)	195 (9.36%)

Structure of a redeveloped primary curriculum

Three-stage model

When considering the three-stage model, respondents were positive about the connection between preschool and primary school in Stage 1 with 1,226 (77.94%) agreeing/strongly agreeing. A total of 75.97% of teacher respondents agreed/strongly agreed that having the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme and the two infant classes as stage 1 would help children to adjust to learning in a primary school setting. 72.62% of teachers of junior infants and 68.36% of teachers of senior

infants also agreed/strongly agreed that having the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme and the two infant classes as stage 1 may enhance curriculum continuity. Teachers of junior infants (80.36%) and teachers of senior infants (82.28%) were of the view that a thematic approach, based on the themes of *Aistear*, is especially appropriate for teaching children in infant classes. Respondents were less certain about first class being the best time to introduce curriculum areas with 688 (43.74%) agreeing/strongly agreeing. While the benefit of the three-stage model in facilitating age-appropriate learning was agreed upon by many, the challenges of this model for multi-grade classrooms was also acknowledged, with 1,239 (78.76%) agreeing/strongly agreeing with this statement as outlined in Table 6.

Table 6: Level of agreement about the proposed three-stage model

Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about the proposed 3-stage primary school curriculum by ticking one box on each row.					
Answer Options	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Having the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (two free pre-school years) and the two infant classes as stage 1 helps children to adjust to learning in a primary school setting.	481 (30.58%)	745 (47.36%)	159 (10.11%)	97 (6.17%)	91 (5.79%)
Having the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (free pre-school years) and the two infant classes as stage 1 may enhance curriculum continuity.	378 (24.03%)	779 (49.52%)	192 (12.21%)	94 (5.98%)	130 (8.26%)
A thematic approach, based on the themes of <i>Aistear</i> , is especially appropriate for teaching children in infant classes.	589 (37.44%)	677 (43.04%)	122 (7.76%)	54 (3.43%)	131 (8.33%)
The best time to introduce curriculum areas such as SESE, the Arts, etc. is in 1st class of primary school.	174 (11.06%)	514 (32.68%)	467 (29.69%)	318 (20.22%)	100 (6.36%)
The subject-based approach in 5th and 6th classes will help pupils to adjust to post-primary school.	428 (27.21%)	874 (55.56%)	129 (8.20%)	52 (3.31%)	90 (5.72%)
Having three stages in the curriculum facilitates the use of age-appropriate pedagogical practices (e.g. play-based approaches, active learning, project-based learning etc.).	342 (21.74%)	821 (52.19%)	191 (12.14%)	98 (6.23%)	121 (7.69%)
A three-stage model would enable teachers to modify their teaching approaches more easily to the needs of different pupils.	236 (15.00%)	630 (40.05%)	314 (19.96%)	146 (9.28%)	247 (15.70%)

A three-stage model will pose particular challenges in a multi-grade classroom.	776 (49.33%)	463 (29.43%)	160 (10.17%)	38 (2.42%)	136 (8.65%)
A three-stage model creates additional challenges for teachers supporting children in their adjustment to the different learning approaches associated with each stage.	446 (28.35%)	598 (38.02%)	310 (19.71%)	43 (2.73%)	176 (11.19%)

Overall, when considering whether the three-stage model as an appropriate way of structuring the curriculum, 915 (58.17%) of the 1,573 respondents agreed/strongly agreed with this statement, while 404 (25.69%) disagreed/strongly disagreed (see Table 7).

Table 7: Level of agreement for restructuring the curriculum using the three-stage model

To what extent do you agree this would be an appropriate way of structuring the curriculum?					
Answer options	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
	175 (11.13%)	740 (47.04%)	229 (14.56%)	175 (11.13%)	254 (16.15%)

Respondents were asked two qualitative questions regarding the three-stage model.

What do you consider to be the strengths of the proposed three-stage primary school curriculum?

Three main themes emerged in considering the strengths of the proposed three-stage model—the perceived benefits of thematic and integrated approaches, natural progression between the stages, and continuity in children’s learning. Each of these is elaborated on below.

Beneficial use of thematic and integrated learning approaches

Respondents were very positive about children experiencing a more thematic, flexible and integrated learning experience within the three-stage model. Age-appropriate play-based learning in Stage 1 was viewed as being particularly beneficial and developmentally appropriate for children at this stage of their social, physical and cognitive development. It was felt that the absence of discrete curriculum subjects in Stages 1 and 2 creates a less crowded curriculum experience for children and their teachers up to the end of fourth class. The proposed curriculum structure in Stage 2 using curriculum areas was viewed as providing a lever for highly integrated and innovative learning. This could, according to some respondents, provide a more tailored experience for children. Respondents also commented

favourably on developing classroom plans that reflected a more integrated curriculum reducing the likelihood of teachers having to work with *severe content overload*. Through this approach to planning, teachers would no longer be required to account for each subject on a fortnightly basis. As one respondent commented, *a more thematic approach allows for integrated and meaningful learning rather than a focus on ticking boxes to fulfil all subject requirements*. A reduction in the 'amount' of content in the primary curriculum was considered very positive and respondents suggested this could be addressed and successfully achieved through a subject integration approach in Stage 3. It is unclear from the questionnaire data whether or not these respondents were advocating the continuation of curriculum areas to sixth class rather than having subjects.

Natural progression and differentiation

The idea of each stage being distinct and differentiated in a child's learning was welcomed. Respondents recognised and favoured the natural progression from themes to curriculum areas to subjects; creating continuity of learning along a continuum, as children transition into, progress through and transition out of primary school. Respondents suggested that teachers would be enabled to plan, develop and implement age-appropriate and varied teaching and learning approaches within clearly differentiated stages. This highlights the importance of opportunities for teachers to develop their professional judgement and knowledge to scope and develop challenging and interesting learning experiences for all children.

Continuity of learning experience

The suggested move away from subjects in the curriculum in Stage 1 was widely welcomed. Respondents felt that the continuity of children's early learning experiences across preschool and primary school supported by a single curriculum framework, would support children transitioning from one setting to the next. Respondents noted the importance of this in acknowledging and affirming children's learning in preschool and supporting more child-led learning in primary school. Respondents viewed Stage 2 as a natural progression from Stage 1 allowing teacher flexibility, creativity and innovation to continue as children's prior learning is extended. A subject-based curriculum in Stage 3 would create an important bridge between the end of primary and the beginning of post-primary education. Respondents suggested that this could result in children leaving 6th class better prepared socially and academically to transition into first year. A path of continuity from preschool to primary school to post-primary would be established with fewer 'jumps' in what and how children learn.

What do you consider to be the challenges of the proposed three-stage primary school curriculum?

Three main themes emerged in considering the challenges of the proposed three-stage model—support and resources for schools, the place of subjects and, impact on teachers. Each of these is elaborated on below.

Support and resources for a new curriculum at a local level

Some respondents questioned the rationale for, and purpose of a new curriculum structure. In doing so, they highlighted practical challenges for schools in using a new structure. They also referenced the need for changes to initial and continuing teacher education while additional expenditure would be required to resource schools in implementing *Aistear*. Inadequate funding and resources for schools were cited as problematic in considering curriculum reform. One practical illustration shared by some respondents related to primary school class size in comparison to preschool ratios, and the challenge the ratios would present to the proposed models. There were also anxieties expressed about implementing a three-stage model in small schools with multi-grade classes. It was suggested that a one-size-fits-all approach may not be suitable and that individual school size and context would need greater consideration. There were strong concerns voiced about additional requirements for excessive planning needed to implement and sustain a new three-stage curriculum.

The place of subjects

Respondents seemed to agree that a subject-based approach in the later years of primary school is beneficial for children transitioning to post-primary school. There was some concern that the introduction of subjects in 5th and 6th class (Stage 3) may be too late in the primary curriculum; resulting in subliminal messaging that this is the point where children's 'real' learning begins. Respondents were clear that any curriculum redevelopment needs to ensure sufficiently challenging and interesting learning for all children to avoid a *dumbing down of the curriculum*. Without subjects, concern was expressed that children could 'miss out' on essential skills and knowledge. Some respondents suggested that there could be a disproportionate volume of subject content knowledge appearing in Stage 3. There was no conclusive agreement on the appropriate point in the curriculum at which to introduce subjects.

Impact on teachers

Respondents fully recognised that teachers will play a central role in implementing a new curriculum structure. Hence a strong emphasis was placed on the need for adequate, sustained professional development opportunities with supports for teachers in implementing a three-stage model. Concern was expressed about the level of professional learning opportunities that would be afforded to teachers in the context of curriculum reform.

Respondents also expressed concern about the prospect of less teacher mobility between stages where teachers may become pigeonholed in a certain stage. Respondents suggested it may become problematic for teachers to move between stages in a school; having to adapt to particular pedagogical techniques and practices within a stage.

There was also a suggestion from respondents that in the case of Stage 1, teachers' future professional identity could be diminished or their status *undermined* in view of a lower level of qualification being required for preschool practitioners. The importance of teacher buy-in, confidence, morale and change in mind-set were also mentioned in the responses.

Two-stage model

When considering the two-stage model, respondents were less disposed towards the extension of Stage 1 up to second class with 467 (38.75%) disagreeing/strongly disagreeing with this proposal (see Table 8), compared to only 256 (11.96%) who disagreed with the proposal of Stage 1 extending to infant classes only. There was strong support for a subject-based curriculum from third to sixth class with 799 (66.31%) indicating their support for this proposal. As with the three-stage model, respondents also felt strongly that a subject-based curriculum could support progression into post-primary school, while a thematic-based curriculum may support children's learning in the early years of primary. The two-stage model seemed to pose fewer challenges for the multi-grade classroom with 752 (62.41%) agreeing that this would be the case, in comparison to 1,239 (78.76%) respondents indicating the same for the three-stage model.

Table 8: Level of agreement about the proposed two-stage model

Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about the proposed 2-stage primary school curriculum by ticking one box on each row.					
Answer Options	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Having the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (two free pre-school years), the two infant classes and first and second classes as stage 1 helps children to adjust to learning in a primary school setting.	203 (16.85%)	455 (37.76%)	332 (27.55%)	135 (11.20%)	80 (6.64%)
Having the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (two free pre-school years) the two infant classes and first and second classes as stage 1 enhances curriculum continuity.	185 (15.35%)	464 (38.51%)	334 (27.72%)	118 (9.79%)	104 (8.63%)
A thematic approach, based on the themes of <i>Aistear</i> , is especially appropriate in teaching children from junior infants to 2nd class.	226 (18.76%)	432 (35.85%)	303 (25.15%)	145 (12.03%)	99 (8.22%)
Pupils in 3rd-6th classes would benefit most from a subject-based curriculum structure.	238 (19.75%)	561 (46.56%)	246 (20.41%)	61 (5.06%)	99 (8.22%)
The subject-based approach in 3rd-6th classes will help pupils to adjust to post-primary school.	256 (21.24%)	629 (52.20%)	186 (15.44%)	46 (3.82%)	88 (7.30%)
Having two stages supports the use of age-appropriate pedagogical practices (e.g. play-based approaches, project-based learning etc.).	151 (12.53%)	515 (42.74%)	311 (25.81%)	107 (8.88%)	121 (10.04%)
A two-stage model would enable teachers to modify their teaching approaches to the needs of different pupils.	126 (10.46%)	464 (38.51%)	340 (28.22%)	120 (9.96%)	155 (12.86%)
A two-stage model will pose particular challenges in a multi-grade classroom.	351 (29.13%)	401 (33.28%)	276 (22.90%)	45 (3.73%)	132 (10.95%)
A two-stage model creates additional challenges for teachers supporting pupils in their adjustment to the different learning approaches associated with each stage.	294 (24.40%)	446 (37.01%)	275 (22.82%)	32 (2.66%)	158 (13.11%)

When considering whether this is an appropriate way to structure the primary curriculum, again views were mixed with 492 (40.83%) agreeing/strongly agreeing that it is, and 580 (48.14%) disagreeing/strongly disagreeing with this proposal. It would seem the three-stage model, as presented in the proposals, is the favoured model of the two presented for consideration (See Table 9).

Table 9: Level of agreement for restructuring the curriculum using the two-stage model

To what extent do you agree this would be an appropriate way of structuring the curriculum?					
Answer options	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
	127	365	360	220	133

	(10.54%)	(30.29%)	(29.88%)	(18.26%)	(11.04%)
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As with the three-stage model, respondents were asked two qualitative questions on the two-stage model.

What do you consider to be the strengths of the proposed two-stage primary school curriculum?

Two main themes emerged in considering the strengths of the proposed two-stage model—clearly defined stages, and age-appropriate and differentiated learning. Each of these is elaborated on below.

Clearly defined stages

Respondents believed the proposed two-stage incremental model would provide clear distinct stages with fewer transition points, making it more suitable for implementation across all school contexts. Respondents felt that the two-stage model poses less challenges in a multi-grade classroom than the three-stage model. Some respondents suggested that children are at an appropriate stage in their learning by 3rd class for the introduction of subjects, favouring the introduction of subjects earlier than in the three-stage model. It was also considered a more accessible curriculum structure for teachers' individual and whole school planning. The continuity in learning from preschool to primary and on to post-primary was viewed with satisfaction by respondents in considering this model.

Age-appropriate and differentiated learning

Respondents felt that the two-stage model promoted age-appropriate, active and child-led learning. They further believed that the two-stage model, like the three-stage model, provided ample opportunities for thematic and holistic learning at the junior end of the primary school. This non-subject-based approach was considered more advantageous for children's successful early learning up to the end of 2nd class. There is a natural link between infant classes and 1st and 2nd class, as it is *much more flexible and child friendly*. It was felt that younger children would benefit from a more thematic approach to learning without discrete subjects in Stage 1. Like the three-stage model, the inclusion of the two preschool years with Stage 1 was also viewed as beneficial.

What do you consider to be the challenges of the proposed two-stage primary school curriculum?

Four main themes emerged in considering the challenges of the proposed two-stage model—support and resources for schools, the length of time span for each stage, the transition from Stage 1 to Stage 2, and the impact on teachers. Each of these is elaborated on below.

Support and resources for a new curriculum at a local level

Like the challenges of the three-stage model, there was a concern about the level of supports, personnel and resourcing that would be made available to individual schools in introducing and implementing a two-stage model. Respondents feared that teachers may not receive adequate and sufficient professional learning required to implement new pedagogical techniques and practices for a new curriculum model. Respondents also expressed concern about school contexts which could have classes within two different stages in the same classroom.

Time span for each stage

Some respondents were critical of the span of years for each stage. They felt that a single stage should not last from preschool to the end of 2nd class or from 3rd class to the end of 6th class. The length of Stage 1 (6 years) could lead to difficulties for children adjusting to a subject-based curriculum in Stage 2 having only experienced a theme-based approach prior to 3rd class. There was a feeling from respondents that the curriculum structure needed to change earlier than 3rd class to support children's learning. This was linked to a concern that within this proposed curriculum structure, children could experience a significant *jump* from 2nd class to 3rd class resulting in a discontinuity in learning for some children. Some respondents felt that this model was less gradual and favoured the smoother transitions presented in the three-stage model. They felt it did not offer the same quality learning experiences as the three-stage model.

A play-based approach to the end of second class; with a significant transition point into third class

As with the three-stage model, there was opinion that *Aistear* was not suitable beyond the infant classes as it was developed for children from birth to 6 years of age. In view of this, some respondents were not in favour of extending the approaches of play-based learning into 1st and 2nd class. It was suggested that children may be ready for more structured learning through subjects in 2nd class, moving beyond the *Aistear* themes into subjects: *Aistear could be very repetitive and boring for some children unless the themes are developed further* and teacher autonomy and agency is permitted. Essentially, if *Aistear* is to be used, respondents would like to see that curriculum framework reconfigured to provide a suitable structure for children's learning up to the end of 2nd class. Notably,

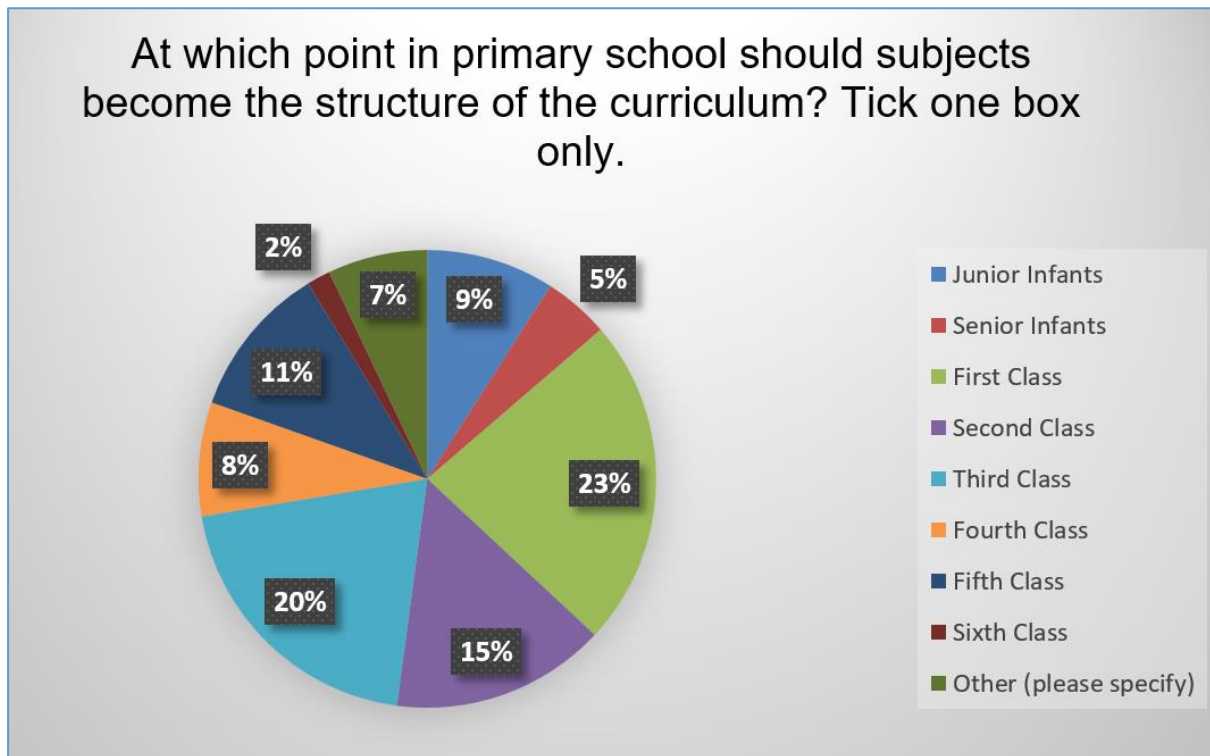
the questionnaire responses referred more to the junior end of the primary school in comparison to the upper end when commenting on the challenges and opportunities of the two-stage model.

Impact on teachers

Like the three-stage model, the future professional status of the primary teacher was considered with some concern, and in particular, in relation to the current status of preschool practitioners. In light of the different levels of qualifications and different pay and conditions, the potential de-professionalisation of a teacher, having his/her work compared with the work of a preschool practitioner, was worrying for some. It was felt by some respondents that without adequate and sufficient professional learning opportunities for teachers, it would also be challenging for them to facilitate play-based learning.

While the three-stage model may generally be favoured above the two-stage model, the responses in relation to *when* subjects should become the organiser of the curriculum, were very mixed. As shown in Figure 7, two classes emerged with over 20% of respondents indicating that either first or third class may be the most appropriate point to introduce subjects.

Figure 7: Timing of the introduction of subjects in the curriculum



Time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Table 10 illustrates that 651 (58.80%) respondents were either dissatisfied/very dissatisfied with the suggested weekly time framework as presented in the 1999 primary curriculum.

Table 10: Level of satisfaction with the current suggested weekly timeframe in the primary curriculum

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
Overall, how do you rate the current suggested weekly time framework in the primary school curriculum?	92 (8.31%)	364 (32.88%)	432 (39.02%)	219 (19.78%)

Overall, respondents were positive about the proposed changes to time allocation. The monthly allocations and larger blocks of time seen as enabling more age-appropriate pedagogies in the classroom by 888 (80.21%). Weekly allocations for Language were viewed as appropriate by 913 (82.47%) respondents. Weekly allocations for Mathematics were viewed as appropriate by 949 (85.72%). The introduction of flexible time seemed to be welcomed by 852 (76.97%). Monthly allocations of time for subjects/themes/curriculum areas other than language and mathematics were viewed as appropriate by 851 (76.87%) respondents. However, respondents were less sure of the proposed 60:40 split between state curriculum time and flexible time with the greatest levels of

disagreement found in this proposal by 497 (44.89%). Strong preference was expressed in favour of guidance on time for themes, curriculum areas and subjects while further analysis of opinion from primary teachers' responses showed clear support for the concept of flexible time enabling them to tailor teaching and learning according to students' needs (See Table 11).

Table 11: Level of agreement with proposals for new time allocation model

Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.					
Answer Options	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
The use of larger blocks of time will support the use of age-appropriate pedagogical practices (e.g. play-based approaches, active learning, project based learning, etc.).	312 (28.18%)	576 (52.03%)	122 (11.02%)	28 (2.53%)	69 (6.23%)
Having a specific weekly time allocation is particularly important for Mathematics.	490 (44.26%)	459 (41.46%)	120 (10.84%)	16 (1.45%)	22 (1.99%)
Having specific weekly time allocations is particularly important for English and Irish.	455 (41.10%)	458 (41.37%)	157 (14.18%)	18 (1.63%)	19 (1.72%)
Guidance on time for themes, curriculum areas and subjects is essential for planning teaching and learning.	320 (28.91%)	575 (51.94%)	149 (13.46%)	27 (2.44%)	36 (3.25%)
The ratio of minimum state curriculum time (60%) and flexible time (40%) would not enable sufficient flexibility to tailor teaching and learning to students' needs.	132 (11.92%)	280 (25.29%)	424 (38.30%)	73 (6.59%)	198 (17.89%)
The introduction of flexible time would enable teachers to tailor teaching and learning according to students' needs.	257 (23.22%)	595 (53.75%)	127 (11.47%)	44 (3.97%)	84 (7.59%)
The use of monthly allocations of time for other subjects/themes/curriculum areas than Language and Mathematics is important.	277 (25.02%)	574 (51.85%)	123 (11.11%)	54 (4.88%)	79 (7.14%)

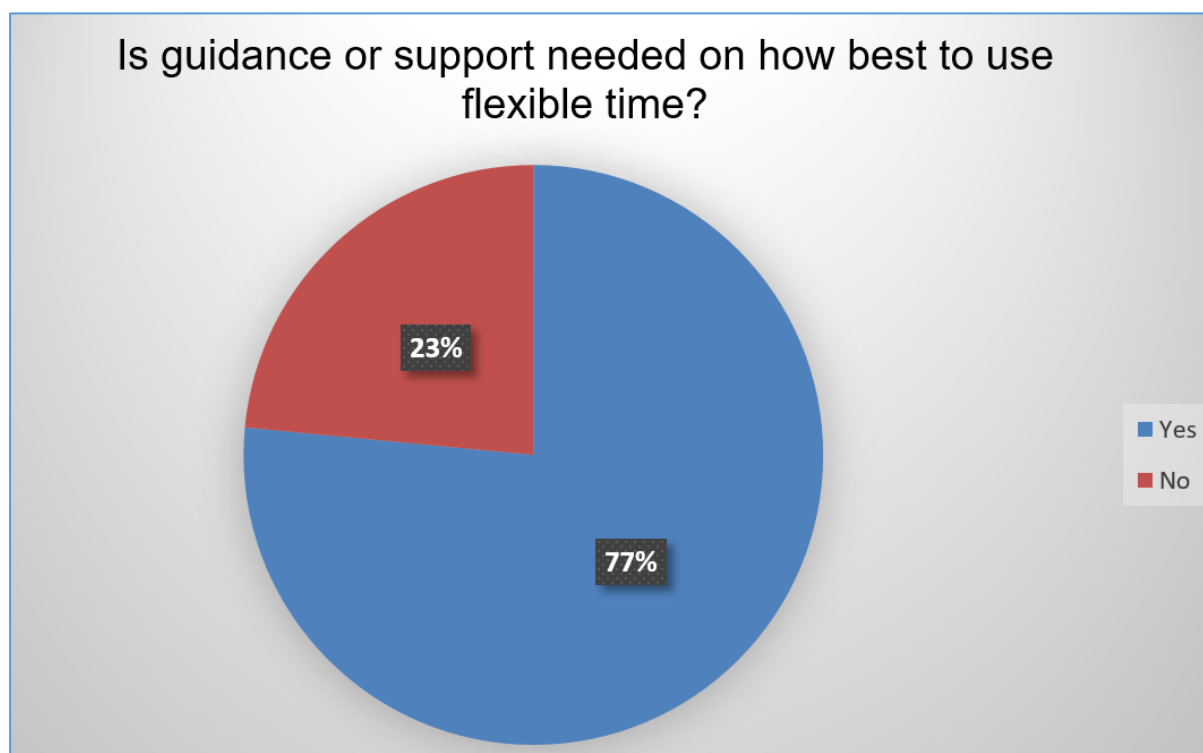
The use of flexible time gave rise to a mixed response as illustrated in Table 12 with many indicating this time may be used for teaching aspects of the curriculum (i.e., restoring discretionary time), having whole school celebrations, completing class/school/community projects or for teaching the patron's programme. Roll call and assemblies did not feature as strongly in the responses to this question.

Table 12: Different uses of flexible time in school

How likely is it that you would use flexible time in your school in the following ways?					
Answer Options	Very likely	Somewhat likely	Not very likely	Not at all likely	Don't know
On assemblies	304 (27.46%)	360 (32.52%)	238 (21.50%)	131 (11.83%)	74 (6.68%)
On teaching aspects of the curriculum	721 (65.13%)	279 (25.20%)	41 (3.70%)	16 (1.45%)	50 (4.52%)
On teaching the patron's programme (Religious or Ethical education)	426 (38.48%)	371 (33.51%)	152 (13.73%)	100 (9.03%)	58 (5.24%)
On whole school celebrations	358 (32.34%)	462 (41.73%)	177 (15.99%)	48 (4.34%)	62 (5.60%)
On class/school/community projects	525 (47.43%)	385 (34.78%)	98 (8.85%)	38 (3.43%)	61 (5.51%)
On roll call	314 (28.36%)	267 (24.12%)	259 (23.40%)	190 (17.16%)	77 (6.96%)

When asked whether guidance or support was needed for the use of flexible time; 847 (76.51%) indicated 'yes' and 260 (23.49%) indicated 'no' as shown in Figure 8 below.

Figure 8: Demand for guidance or support on how best to use flexible time



When asked about opportunities in using flexible time, respondents acknowledged that the introduction of flexible time would not, in itself, resolve the issue of an overloaded primary school

curriculum, but suggested it could create increased teacher autonomy and increased teacher involvement through more school-based curriculum development. A greater scope for a broad and balanced experience, for children, was also highlighted as an opportunity in the use of flexible time. Many respondents felt flexible time could also be used to better reflect the local context of schools in meeting the needs and interests of the children. Some respondents foresaw discretionary time (within flexible time) being allocated to additional literacy, numeracy and Physical Education. Respondents offered many creative and innovative ideas about how flexible time could be utilised in a school. These included whole-school assemblies, Religious Education talks, mindfulness, project-based learning, team teaching, collaborative projects with other local schools/local community and active breaks. In using discretionary time, teachers could also plan blocks of time for events such as Science Week or local area initiatives. This also extended to greater capacity for using educational programmes designed by agencies such as the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) or the Health Service Executive (HSE). Respondents suggested that these opportunities were more limited within the constraints of the current weekly time allocation. In this context, the facility for teachers to use blocks of time for areas of the curriculum was considered very positive. Some respondents indicated how, in flexible time, individual teachers could utilise their interests or strengths within, for example, Arts, Science or Physical Education for the benefit of the children. They suggested that this could happen in a more integrated way.

What challenges do you foresee for schools in using flexible time?

Respondents identified different challenges for schools in using flexible time with some indicating that the School Plan would need amending in response to this change. It could be problematic for teachers in adequately planning monthly learning opportunities across the curriculum. It was also felt that there may be inconsistencies within a school in how flexible time was utilised by individual teachers reducing/increasing instruction time for certain subject(s) if desired, meaning not all children would have access to the same range of learning experiences. There is also a suggestion among a very small minority that flexible time could be allocated to only Mathematics and English. There would be a requirement for timetabling on a whole-school basis as without this, whole school planning could become problematic. Respondents proposed that the principal should monitor the times teachers allocated to individual subjects; with schools also accounting for subject time allocations.

Some respondents believed that the position of the patron's programme in flexible time could, potentially, result in increased time being allocated to it. Others viewed the position of the patron's programme in flexible time as meaning religion becoming less important in terms of the time given to

it. Guidance on the minimum/maximum time allocation for the patron's programme was requested by many respondents.

Finally, when asked about the forms of support that would be needed for the proposed changes, respondents were very positive towards the prompts provided in the questionnaire (online and face-to-face professional development seminars, and online materials). Of these, professional development seminars were mentioned most frequently. There were additional suggestions for a combination of different support models including whole-school CPD (both onsite and offsite) through the provision of a significant allocation of additional professional time. Suggestions included evening and online courses and school-based CPD provided by external support services. Mandatory CPD in the approaches and methodologies of *Aistear* also featured strongly in responses. Respondents indicated that they would prefer CPD for all teachers rather than a model where one teacher availed of outside training and returned to facilitate in-house CPD for colleagues. The support needed to be tailored to a variety of teaching situations and school contexts. An online portal with guidelines, resources and support materials was requested along with adequate funding to support the design and resourcing of *play-based classrooms*.

Teacher focus groups

The focus groups were two-hour sessions with time given to discuss each set of proposals in addition to gathering more general observations and comments on the redevelopment of a primary curriculum. The teachers and principals who attended the seven meetings had different degrees of familiarity with the proposals; for some, they were hearing the detail for the first time at the meeting. Generally, the participants appreciated having the opportunity to contribute to the consultation. Below is an outline of the analysis of the focus group discussions.

Structure of a redeveloped primary curriculum

Mirroring initial findings in other consultation formats, participants indicated a preference towards the three-stage model. They noted the potential for themes, areas and subjects to support smooth transitions in terms of children's learning and development. They were of the view that these stages were likely to be more developmentally and pedagogically appropriate for children. Some participants also commented on how the introduction of 'formal' learning slightly later in the primary cycle could be more beneficial for children, *Children would be older when they start 'formal learning. Maybe that would help. (Bheadh páistí níos sine nuair a thosaíonn páistí foghlaim 'foirmiúl'. B'fhéidir go gcabhróidh sé seo)*. Delving deeper into Stage 1, some participants highlighted the importance of clarity for preschool practitioners and primary school teachers on how progression in children's learning across the preschool years and into the infant classes should be supported. While showing a preference for the three-stage model, teachers and principals shared the view that implementation would give rise to challenges which would require careful consideration. These included the fact that thematic work in Stage 1 would require careful planning and preparation, and would be more complex to evaluate by inspectors. One focus group suggested a different permutation of the model—junior and senior infants, 1st to 3rd class, 4th to 6th class.

Aistear generated considerable attention in some of the discussions. Participants in four focus groups expressed frustration that *Aistear* had not been supported through a national programme of CPD for primary school teachers. Some suggested that this had contributed to multiple interpretations of what it means to use *Aistear* in a primary school context: *Aistear looks very different from school to school*. Participants were strongly of the view that if *Aistear* was to inform the structure of the curriculum in Stage 1, CPD for all teachers would be essential. Some participants also queried if *Aistear* would need to be reviewed and extended in order to support children's learning to the end of second class in the case of the two-stage model. One focus group suggested that having *Aistear* as a curriculum structure for four years *is idealistic* and could *meet with a lot of resistance* from teachers.

In summary, while participants tended to favour a three-stage model over a two-stage model, they noted the importance of further in-depth work to inform the decision-making process:

The whole question of subjects/content areas/thematic teaching/integration is a very complex business requiring a lot more exploration and study...Howsoever it is structured, we should remember that the curriculum is not a constraint, a straitjacket; teachers and schools need to assert their autonomy and the value of their professional judgements about planning and teaching. (Focus group participant)

By comparison, participants gave the two-stage model little attention in their discussions. Generally, they saw the two-stage model as representing *too rigid a break to go from Aistear to subject specific curriculum content* which they considered *wouldn't serve the needs of children*. They spoke too of the length of the stages noting that a stage of five/six years could be *far too long* in light of children being *at very different developmental stages* between the ages of the stage, for example, 8 and 13 years. Some focus group participants suggested that a two-stage model could pose challenges for small, multi-grade schools, for example, a school with three teachers and where a teacher is working across the two stages.

Time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

In general, participants in the discussion groups welcomed the concept of flexibility in time allocations across the curriculum. Some participants were of the view that the 1999 curriculum already affords schools a certain autonomy in deciding how time is allocated. For others, the proposals were a positive step forward in demonstrating confidence in the teaching profession, and in returning a level of autonomy to teachers which perhaps was lost with the 1999 curriculum and in the intervening years. Reflecting on potential risks, a small minority viewed the concept of greater flexibility in time allocations as likely to herald a 'back to basics' approach especially in the case of schools in areas of socio-economic disadvantage, *an opportunity to hone in on what is important: Irish, Mathematics and English (Deis díriú isteach ar céard atá tábhachtach: Gaeilge, Matamaitic agus Béarla)*, and that this *would deny children the cultural richness that is part of the curriculum*. A small number of others posited the risk of flexible time being eroded by new educational initiatives and policies thereby undermining the concept of flexibility for schools.

In terms of the 60%:40% distribution of time across the two categories, some groups indicated satisfaction with the suggested proportions while one group suggested that *maybe 50% would be better (b'fhéidir go mbeadh 50% níos fearr)*.

Participants broadly agreed that Mathematics and Language should continue to receive weekly allocations while there were mixed opinions regarding monthly allocations for other themes/areas/subjects. Some saw monthly allocations as *a really good idea* while others cautioned against this. In evidencing their concerns, they drew on the criticality of SPHE in children's lives and the potential for a diminution of the status of other curriculum areas such as the Arts. In the case of two of the seven groups, the discussion touched on classroom planning and the current practice of some teachers in creating two types of plans—plans for the inspector and plans for the teacher. Participants identified the potential of monthly or even termly allocations to *lessen all the paperwork and provide for more time to plan for learning rather than plan for a possible inspection*.

Reflecting feedback in the wider consultation, some focus group participants questioned the degree of flexibility offered by 'flexible time'. Two of the elements generated particular discussion in this regard—break-times and the patron's programme. In the case of the former, some participants suggested creating a third category specifically for breaks and recreation. In the case of the latter, some participants questioned the right of patrons to have the programme during the school day while others suggested it should have a specified time. One group noted, *difficult to teach Religious Education when there are five religions in the class – unless each person is learning the same thing about various religions. (Deacair Teagasc Chríostaí a mhúineadh nuair atá cúig reiligiún sa rang – seachas chuile duine a bheith ag foghlaim an rud céanna, ag foghlaim faoi reiligiúin éagsúla)*.

Other thoughts and observations

Throughout the discussions, external factors were frequently referenced as being central considerations irrespective of which model might be used to restructure the curriculum. Some participants highlighted that the key factor in any curriculum change was the teacher, with the quality of him/her being paramount. They questioned if a new structure such as the three-stage model could result, in time, in teachers becoming more specialist thereby reducing teacher mobility across the primary school: *it's nice to be able to switch easily between teaching infants one year and sixth class the next year*. Other factors which arose included high pupil/teacher ratios, the centrality of CPD, and resources for using particular pedagogical approaches such as play. Sometimes, participants reflected back on the 1999 curriculum and analysed the challenges in implementing the curriculum as intended. These reflections included references to the curriculum itself and its subject-heavy focus which some participants suggested had rendered meaningful integration particularly challenging: *The 1999 curriculum was delivered in a segmented, packaged way. Think of the individual subject books. Even though the curriculum advocated integrated approaches, it was presented in a segmented way*.

Another issue cited concerned the degree to which the curriculum *became overshadowed by initiatives*.

Looking forward, participants in two of the discussion groups questioned how the new primary Language curriculum already published and being used in schools would align with a new curriculum structure and shared some frustration about potential retro-fitting. Others called for evidence from schools, research and *learning from the mistakes of other countries* to underpin any changes, so as to ensure that curriculum change wouldn't result in a fall in standards in primary schools. Ireland's recent achievements in national assessments, TIMSS and PIRLS were cited as evidence of the primary system's success. Some participants also highlighted the importance of clear messages for parents as curriculum changes proceed.

Written submissions

A total of 107 written submissions were received as part of the consultation. Consent was sought from authors to enable the NCCA to publish the written submissions. Where permission was given, the submissions will be available on the NCCA website when the final consultation report is published. As with the other consultation formats, the first part of this section considers the breadth of opinions regarding the proposals for the structure of a redeveloped primary curriculum. The second part considers the proposals for time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum.

Structure of a redeveloped primary curriculum

The written submission template encouraged respondents to consider the proposals on moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages, while considering the benefits and challenges of each proposed model. In considering the rationale, purpose and benefit of a new curriculum structure, respondents generally felt that the principles of the existing primary school curriculum continue to remain relevant in a contemporary curriculum context. At the heart of the existing curriculum is the belief that children are active agents in their own learning, with a natural curiosity, and respondents would like to see this safe-guarded in the future. Therefore, any adjustment or move away from the existing curriculum would need to result in the provision of a more developmentally appropriate curriculum and pedagogy for primary school children. While this sentiment is echoed through the written submissions, there was also a clear recognition that curriculum revision is necessary in response to curriculum overload. Further explication on how a restructured curriculum could reduce this curriculum overload would be welcomed.

The priorities for a primary curriculum should be revisited *as the structure should follow a deep interrogation of vision, purpose, values and philosophy, not determine them* (History Education Team, School of STEM Education, DCU Institute of Education). The submission also noted that key theorists underpinning social constructivism and enquiry-based learning in the existing curriculum are still relevant in a contemporary context. Another submission asked *what is the coherent theoretical vision for the curriculum?* (Curriculum Working Group, DCU Institute of Education). It was also noted in some submissions that no explicit reference was made to the spiritual, moral or religious development of the child in the consultation proposals on structure and time in the primary curriculum; while the 1999

curriculum both acknowledged and valued *the need to nourish and nurture the spiritual dimension of the child* (Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin).

A new curriculum structure

The complexities of introducing a new incremental curriculum model were highlighted by the wide range of opinions shared through the submissions. For many, there was the recognition that implementing structural curriculum changes in small schools is challenging and needs particular consideration. Therefore, a new curriculum needs to cater for schools where multi-class teaching is the norm. The proposals recommended using an incremental stage model which uses a differentiated curriculum structure. A very small minority of written submissions had reservations about using the term 'stage' in a new curriculum structure due to its association with developmental theories of learning, setting artificial limits on children's capacities to think critically and failure to recognise teachers' responsibilities to scaffold emergent thinking. Another suggested the term 'phases' to emphasise the incremental nature of change in children's capacity rather than major qualitative changes. There was a further call for social and cultural perspectives to be visible in the descriptions of how a new curriculum is structured.

We think it is important to ensure that recent theoretical perspectives, for example social and cultural perspectives, are also visible in the descriptions of how the curriculum is structured. (Early Childhood Education, Institute of Education, Dublin City University)

The overall apparent view was that a differentiated curriculum structure could deliver more flexibility starting at the junior end of the school and moving into the middle and senior classes.

The emphasis on a thematic and integrated curriculum was welcomed particularly in responding to curriculum overload; regardless of either a two- or three-stage model. This was perceived as beneficial for children's learning experience. There were reiterated calls for a broad, integrated curriculum which would be more sophisticated than curriculum linkage.

There was, however, some concern that more 'marginalised' subjects may be diluted or displaced through a curriculum area approach in Stage 2 of the three-stage model. This emphasis on the integration of curriculum material as a learning experience rather than simply as material to be remembered, was considered important. Respondents called for a clearer articulation of the concept of integration as can be seen from the following quote.

Both models are dependent on a sophisticated understanding of integration on the teacher's part. We would distinguish between curriculum linkage and meaningful curriculum integration here. A sophisticated understanding of integration is also dependent on deep subject knowledge of all subjects on the teacher's part. (Association for Drama in Education in Ireland)

The curriculum would also need to be explicit about how and where integration might happen across themes, curriculum areas and subjects. The submissions highlighted a need to clearly illustrate how deep, meaningful integration would happen.

The future place, purpose and value of discrete subjects received a lot of attention, with clear calls for subjects to remain part of a new curriculum structure. It was suggested that the specification for a future curriculum should determine at what point subjects are introduced and that this should happen in an incremental and gradual way.

I applaud the need to move to "subject specific learning, formal learning" in the latter stages of primary school. As a primary teacher, it would be great to if we knew exactly what the pupils should both know and have experience/learnt at the end of the academic year. This would be very beneficial. (Teacher)

A minority of submissions referred to the point where a subject structure should become the curriculum organiser. Those that did comment particularly favoured the retention of subjects from 1st class onwards. It was suggested that Language and Mathematics should be 'core' aspects of the curriculum from junior infants. Some concern was expressed concerning the future positioning of Science, Geography, History, Drama, Physical Education (PE), and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) in the curriculum. Regarding Science, one written submission explained that children need to explicitly develop their scientific content knowledge and inquiry skills, while another explained that Science should enable every child to begin to explore, investigate and understand the world. In the case of Geography, there was a concern that the proposals could lead to bland topic-based work with a focus on content to the detriment of developing geographical skills. Another submission had concern about the possible diminution of History in a redeveloped curriculum. The written submissions regarding Drama cautioned against children's learning in other areas of the curriculum being supported at the expense of Drama and requested that a new curriculum would remain broad and supportive of the arts. A number of written submissions from individuals and organisations focused on the importance and future of PE. They requested that PE should remain a discrete subject for all classes and become a 'core area' of the curriculum. Furthermore, the submissions called for physical literacy, with clearly defined learning outcomes, to be a central part of children's learning in schools. The following response is typical of the written submissions relating to PE.

We believe that the importance of Physical Education (PE) for the development of the child must become a key priority in policy and in practice underpinned by a redeveloped primary curriculum. (Lecturers in Physical Education, School of Arts Education and Movement, Institute of Education, Dublin City University)

SPHE was also mentioned as being a key area of the curriculum within the wider concept of wellbeing. There was a suggestion that wellbeing should become a curriculum area which could incorporate SPHE and PE, and be accorded similar importance to, and have a potentially greater time allocation than, Language and Mathematics. This, according to the submissions, would allow SPHE to continue to be seen as a subject, in its own right, within an integrated curriculum while, at the same time, emphasising the opportunities to integrate with other subjects.

A time allocation that increased the status of Wellbeing (including SPHE and PE and potentially other modules that would be appropriate for primary schools) would be a significant policy change. It would mean that the State would officially consider that the social and emotional development of children to be of equal importance to their academic ability and achievement at Primary Level. (Health Service Executive)

Some written submissions held the viewpoint that the existing curriculum structure should be maintained as there is no appetite for curriculum change and the current curriculum is working well, still having a lot to offer. There were suggestions that modifications and adjustments or refinements to the existing curriculum structure would suffice. The sentiment among some was that the existing curriculum is 'doing its job' and still fit for purpose.

With regard to the two-stage or three-stage model it is felt that neither model is necessary. Introducing a new system of structuring the curriculum and time allocation could complicate a system that is working well presently. (Chairperson, School Board of Management)

Written submissions posited positive views of the 1999 curriculum although curriculum overload and paperwork were cited as key barriers to effective implementation.

In general, teachers hold positive views in relation to the 1999 Primary School Curriculum although curriculum overload and increased paperwork are cited as the key barrier to effective implementation. (Irish National Teachers' Organisation, INTO)

Three-stage model

A majority of written submissions expressed a preference for the three-stage model over the two-stage model. A prominent thread coming through was that this model particularly supports progression and continuity in children's learning and development as it is more developmentally appropriate by reflecting stages of childhood. Some submissions suggested that this model would be able to successfully meet the needs and interests of a broad range of learners.

Overall, the three-stage model may be suitable as it provides a more developmentally appropriate structure and would appear to be better able to cater for the broad needs of children in the primary school. (Physical Education, Physical Activity, Youth Sport [PEPAYS] – Ireland)

In expressing preference for this model, some submissions referred to children benefiting from a topic-based approach to teaching and learning.

Our preferred model is the three-stage model as this gives recognition to pupils who need a topic based approach to teaching and learning...A topic based approach lays out all the subject areas and learning processes. It also allows for a collaborative approach among teachers and topic areas would be chosen as part of the yearly plan to encourage pupils to learn. (National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education)

A small number of written submissions flagged concern for teachers becoming compartmentalised within a particular stage due to differences in pedagogy across stages. In response to the proposal that Stage 2 would use curriculum areas, written submissions called for greater research and explication into the differences between curriculum areas and subjects.

It must be noted that there needs to be further information provided on the three-stage model, in particular the distinction between curriculum areas and subjects. (SPHE Network)

Echoing points made earlier about potential impact of a new curriculum structure on individual subjects, there was apprehension that the provision of quality in PE may be compromised within a structure that is underpinned by curriculum areas. There was also concern that a differentiated curriculum structure could result in a knowledge gap between junior and senior classes.

Two-stage model

The two-stage model, while clearly not as preferable as the three-stage model, was viewed in written submissions as maintaining greater cohesion from junior into senior classes. It also emerged that this model would particularly suit two-teacher schools and junior/senior schools.

I would prefer 2-stage model as a 3-stage model would be hard to implement in a 4 class multi class situation from 3rd to 6th. (School Principal)

I believe that a two-stage model would be preferable to a three-stage model. I am teaching in a senior school (3rd – 6th class) which is run very distinctly and differently from the junior school. (Teacher)

This model is viewed as presenting greater cohesion from the junior classes to the senior classes. The positive benefit of children experiencing a curriculum based on *Aistear* up to the end of second class was also mentioned.

*As a teacher of first and second classes, I strongly support the extension of an *Aistear*-style, thematic approach from junior infants through second class in place of our 12 subject curriculum. (Teacher)*

It is also considered developmentally appropriate for children.

Our preference is for a two-stage model with a transition at 6/7 years of age. The advantage of this model is that it is based on an understanding of child development and is echoed in other high performing education systems. (Lifeways Ireland CLG)

On the flip side, there was sentiment about a tension between the use of themes in Stage 1 and subjects in Stage 2.

*However, progressing directly from *Aistear*-based themes to subjects is a big jump and needs to be introduced incrementally in a manner that is beneficial to both teaching and learning. (PEPAYS Ireland)*

Aistear and play-based learning

A majority of written submissions supported the integration of *Aistear*'s principles, themes and approaches into the curriculum for infant classes. This was considered timely and appropriate to provide greater alignment and continuity between preschool and infant education in primary schools. The potential for *Aistear* to assist with the transition from preschool to primary school was also suggested.

We welcome the possibility of further embedding the Aistear framework in primary schools because we believe it benefits children in terms of the transition to school and the learning experience. (Early Childhood Ireland)

The written submissions further affirmed the value and preference for a broad thematic approach with child-led and teacher-led activities in the infant classes. The value of play as a pedagogy was further endorsed and calls were made for it to be foregrounded.

The principles of playful learning, which are features of education in other countries such as Finland should be embedded in the curriculum review and the role of play and a playful approach to learning embedded in a revised curriculum. (Mary Immaculate College)

Recent years have seen the benefits of play taking centre stage through the promotion of the Aistear Programme. The research that forms the basis for the development of this programme is clear on the central role of play. (Catholic Primary School Management Association [CPSMA])

However, a note of caution was also raised about the practicalities of implementing a curriculum underpinned by *Aistear* in infant classes (and possibly into the junior classes) in primary school. This centred around primary teachers needing to fully understand the *Aistear* curriculum framework in its broadest sense and a call to identify, through research, the strengths and weaknesses of the *Aistear* curriculum framework when used in a primary school context.

Aistear has not been sufficiently resourced and / or embedded in schools at this time such that we can determine if it is the best model to form such a large part of the curriculum here. (School Principal)

A call for a comprehensive professional development programme for teachers and resourcing of materials and physical space were explicitly requested across submissions. A reduced pupil/teacher ratio and time for teachers to plan were also considered as pre-requisites to any child-led and play-based, thematic approach to the curriculum.

While Aistear is praiseworthy and a great curriculum for young children up to six, I have concerns about extending it upward to older children.

Challenges

- *Inadequate resources*
- *Large class sizes and room size ...*
- *Aistear requires a lot of space*
- *.....Some special needs children cannot cope in a play environment and find it stressful*
- *Quality of teaching and learning is harder to assess and learning objectives could be hazy and vague*

- *A considerable amount of CPD for teachers would be required if the Aistear model were to be extended. When would this be done? During school time?*
- *Teachers currently teach using a thematic approach and link various curricular subjects. Significant time would be required to devise, plan, implement, assess, set up class, clean up, storage time if Aistear was extended. (School Principal)*

Stage 1 encompassing the two preschool years

There was a broad welcome for the preschool learning experience being part of a single stage with the early primary school classes.

Teachers were generally supportive of the need for more linkage between pre-schools and primary schools to ensure continuity of learning and experience. (INTO)

There were, however, concerns and reservations raised by some regarding the differences between preschools and primary schools in terms of structure, staffing levels and qualifications, quality of provision for children's learning, funding and resources. Attention also focused on the low level of communication and partnership which currently exists between many preschools and primary schools. Written submissions from some early childhood organisations queried the potential impact that these proposals could have on early childhood care and education. There was a suggestion of extending the years of engagement a child has with the early childhood (preschool) sector by postponing the transition to primary school until the child is older.

In the Nordic countries, much quoted as setting the gold standard in education, children are 6 and 7 years old starting school. (Early Childhood Ireland)

On the flip side, another written submission suggested the possibility of a three-year infant cycle in primary school.

The INTO proposes that consideration should be given to the provision of the second year of the ECCE scheme in the primary school with fully qualified teachers to ensure that continuity be better facilitated. (INTO)

Early childhood organisations questioned why children from birth to three years were not considered in the proposals in view of *Aistear* supporting children's learning and development from birth to six years of age. There was a concern that a split-system could be created in relation to the care and education of children in their earliest years.

PLÉ is concerned that under the NCCA proposals, children under three years of age are not considered part of the education system. (Pedagogy, Learning, and Education [PLÉ])

A further concern would be the potential for this proposal to create a split-system in relation to the care and education of the child in the earliest years...Including children from 3 years of age in the primary curriculum would create an artificial divide and would infer a higher status on the early learning experiences of the 3 year old negating the immense learning experiences of the child under 3 years of age. (Association of Childhood Professionals [ACP])

Time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

The written submission template encouraged respondents to consider the proposals on minimum state curriculum time, flexible time, time allocations for themes, curriculum areas and subjects as well as seeking views on whether time should be allocated on a weekly, monthly or annual basis.

Moving from the existing time allocation

The dominant, although not unanimous, viewpoint was that the existing weekly time allocation model which schools implement is 'too rigid'. The proposals for time allocation in this consultation were viewed more favourably; being flexible and responsive to cater for children's interests, needs and capabilities.

The weekly counting of hours restricts school autonomy and prevents schools from making an informed response to contextual issues. (Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood, School of Education, Maynooth University)

A preference was shown for teachers and schools to have greater flexibility and agency than currently exists in school timetabling and planning. However, respondents were also very clear about a need for accountability mechanisms to guarantee that children would receive their full entitlement to the primary curriculum during all stages of their learning in all primary classrooms. A counter perspective, albeit from a much smaller number of submissions, was that there is no need to alter the existing model of time allocation in primary schools. The perspective also emerged that moving to 60% allocation for Minimum State Curriculum Time and 40% Flexible Time mirrors current practice in many schools. It was proposed that teachers could plan according to teaching methodology rather than subject specific-time, for example, active learning, discussion, project work, writing. This approach could lessen the issue of curriculum overload while foregrounding good teaching methodologies.

Minimum state curriculum time

It was noted that minimum state curriculum time would allow for a standardisation in relation to core themes, curriculum areas and subjects in the curriculum. It was further highlighted that it may suit and indeed foreground cross-curricular planning across subject groupings, and support deeper learning through project work and greater opportunities for differentiated learning. It could also provide opportunities for co-teaching and enabling teachers to utilise their expertise and talents in different learning settings throughout the school.

In considering the breakdown of time allocations, respondents expressed strong support for dedicated weekly time allocations for Language and Mathematics.

Ó thaobh leithdháileadh ama aontaíonn COGG gur chlóir am sainiúil seachtaine a leagan amach don mhatamaitic agus do theanga (Béarla agus Gaeilge), rud a léireodh tábhacht na scileanna sin. (COGG)

There was also support for PE and Wellbeing to receive a weekly time allocation. Respondents felt that children experiencing PE on a weekly basis was developmentally appropriate and allowed for regular physical activity. Submissions showed concern that monthly allocations could result in children only receiving blocks of PE.

A weekly time allocation for PE makes it apparent to pupils and parents alike that regular physical activity is important. (Irish Primary Physical Education Association [IPPEA])

Physical Education is proven to benefit children both physically and academically and enables children to build important motor skills that will benefit them throughout their adult life. (PEPAYS Ireland)

There was strong positivity and calls for monthly time allocations in all other themes, curriculum areas and subjects of the curriculum. Submissions highlighted potential benefits such as facilitating better integration across subjects; deepening learning through project work and having more opportunities to challenge more able children. A shorter time span than a month was felt, by many, to be too restrictive. However, one submission suggested that, *a weekly time allocation is preferred to preserve the opportunities for students to engage in curricular areas on a frequent basis* (Mary Immaculate College). There was a further suggestion in another submission for each subject discipline within each curriculum area to have minimum monthly specified times to prevent the possibility of subject erosion. Without clear guidance on time, there were definite concerns among contributors that some subjects could miss out due to individual teachers' preferences, knowledge and skill. Other curriculum areas/subjects could receive an additional time allocation by certain teachers. There was also a fear that a 60% allocation may not allow sufficient time to cover a broad and balanced curriculum. There was no interest shown in using termly or annual time allocations.

Flexible time

In considering the proposals on flexible time, respondents reflected and commented on the ever-increasing and competing demands being placed on schools' and teachers' time. Through this lens, flexible time was viewed as something that could help alleviate and remedy existing tensions experienced by schools and was welcomed by the majority of respondents. There was, however, a questioning of the use of the term 'flexible time'. This response arose from a consideration of the individual elements of flexible time, some of which were considered to be inflexible in nature: *Cé chomh solúbtha is atá an t-am solúbtha seo?* (COGG). Therefore, it was asserted by many that the term had potential to create confusion and ambiguity by not accurately reflecting the use of this time. So, while there was positivity towards the concept of flexible time, the name and components of this time requires further deliberation.

Flexible time was viewed as respecting teachers' professional judgement and expertise while enabling them to respond in a more creative and innovative manner to children's needs, interests and capabilities. It was felt that teachers, as professionals, required flexibility and discretion at school and classroom level. The word 'autonomy' appeared frequently in submissions when describing how flexible time could beneficially support teachers in fostering experiential learning. It was considered that such a time would allow more choice and alleviate the pressure of being bound and restricted by weekly time-tables. This requires schools to have more optionality and freedom when allocating time for specific themes, curriculum areas and subjects. The value of non-prescriptive guidelines to support schools in implementing flexible time clearly emerged.

Specific elements in flexible time

One element in flexible time received particular attention in the written submissions—the patron's programme. The proposal for the patron's programme to become part of flexible time received much commentary. Concerns were expressed that this proposal could undermine and down-grade the patron's programme in primary schools. The following quote is representative of submissions received:

With regard to moving religion to flexible time, it would have an adverse effect on schools' ethos and also it would damage children's religious and spiritual development. Putting religion into flexible time diminishes the subject entirely.
(Diocesan Advisor, Elphin Diocese)

Respondents also felt that the inclusion of the patron's programme in flexible time would impact on parents' rights to religious and moral formation of their children and the responsibility of a board of management to comply with its legal obligation to be accountable to the patron.

Parents have the right to ensure that their children's education is in conformity with their religious and philosophical convictions. (Association of Trustees of Catholic Schools)

This linked closely with underlying apprehension about future safeguarding the integrity of the characteristic spirit of faith-based schools.

If Religious Education becomes part of the non-core and therefore discretionary curriculum, will it eventually become, as the Forum recommended, a discrete subject? If so, it would be seriously damaging to the characteristic spirit of faith based schools. (Catholic Primary School Management Association [CPSMA])

Some respondents suggested the inclusion of a third category of time which may include the patron's programme and recreation time.

Two subthemes were also evident in relation to the patron's programme in written responses. The first relates to what was perceived as a renaming of Religious Education as 'the patron's programme'⁴. The use of this term was regarded by some as an attempt to diminish the centrality of Religious Education in faith-based schools. The second subtheme relates to the long-term goals of the curriculum and the potential inclusion of a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics, at the expense of Religious Education.

It is difficult not to have suspicions that the State wishes to remove the Patron's programme as part of a core curricular subject area so that it can manoeuvre itself into a situation whereby it can introduce ERBE as an integrated part of the state curriculum. (Diocesan Advisor on Education, Diocese of Cloyne)

In contrast, another perspective from a written submission asserted that Religious Education, understood as faith formation, should not have a space in a redeveloped primary curriculum.

⁴ The use of the term 'patron's programme' arises from the Education Act section 32 (d) which ensures that the Minister 'in each school day shall be such as to allow for such reasonable instruction time, as the board with the consent of the patron determines, for subjects relating to or arising from the characteristic spirit of the school'. While such subjects have traditionally been of a religious nature, in more recent times patrons have developed ethical, philosophical, multi-belief and values education programmes. The term 'patron's programme' is inclusive of all programmes developed by patrons, be they religious, philosophical, ethical or secular in nature.

Catholic / religious 'education' (indoctrination?!) should be left out of school curriculum altogether and replaced by philosophy / informing in a neutral manner about ALL world religions.... (Parent)

There was also regret expressed that the consultation document failed to include a reference to the potential inclusion of a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics. This view is exemplified below:

I am in favour of the new ERB programme that is being developed at the moment. I believe it is important for children to learn about religions and ethics and this will encourage and support respect and celebration of diversity. However, I do not feel that faith formation (Religious Education of the patron body) has a place in publicly funded, state schools. (Teacher)

EQUATE is disappointed that there is not a specific mention of an Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics as part of the core curriculum time. There is an opportunity as part of this curriculum redevelopment to create and make a subject which celebrates the growing diversity in Ireland while also sowing the seeds of cultural respect within our classrooms. (EQUATE Ireland)

Other points from the written submissions

While reflecting, and responding to both sets of proposals, other considerations were mooted in the written submissions. Firstly, there was a prominent thread regarding wider implications involved in the development, implementation and sustainability of a new curriculum structure and model for time allocation. It was queried if additional resources in terms of materials, finance, infrastructure, time and personnel would be allocated to schools; ensuring they had everything required to meet the challenges of introducing a new curriculum within a local context.

This was connected to a very strong consideration about the adjustments that would be needed to Initial Teacher Education courses and the professional learning needs of teachers already in the system. Respondents readily identified teacher confidence, commitment and capacity as hugely important. This led to questions about whether teachers could reasonably expect to receive high quality professional learning to help them deal with curriculum changes of this scale. Through the written submissions, respondents called for consideration to be given to how a quality model for teacher professional development could best support teachers in building their professional expertise to work successfully with a redeveloped curriculum. There were clear calls for detailed structures, resources and processes to be put in place to achieve this. The quote below exemplifies the thoughts of many in the written submissions.

A comprehensive programme of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for all current teachers as well as changes to the teacher training programmes currently on offer for trainee teachers would also need to be considered and developed. These programmes and changes should be developed in conjunction with the overall reform of the curriculum so that there are no gaps between teachers training and the roll out of the revised curriculum to all schools that could lead to confusion or delayed implementation. (EQUATE Ireland)

The readiness and capacity of the school system for significant curriculum change emerged across a number of submissions. Respondents took the opportunity to mention how primary schools are currently experiencing significant curriculum change with the introduction of the new Primary Language Curriculum (2015); while the development of a new mathematics curriculum is underway. The development of new curricula in Language and Mathematics was viewed as premature in the context of the full primary curriculum review and redevelopment. Concern was expressed about schools' capacities to continue to cope with ongoing curriculum changes, in parallel to systemic changes such as the introduction of the new Special Education Needs Model of Allocation and the roll-out of *Droichead: The integrated professional induction framework*. References were also made to schools still working within the confines of textbooks and standardised tests.

There were suggestions that, ideally, a pilot study might be put in place involving a number of different schools across the country. This would enable policy-makers to see and evaluate what a new curriculum might look like in different school contexts and in the case of different areas of the curriculum. An important part of the pilot would be a detailed evaluation of the schools' involvement. Contributors were of the view that this should happen before change across the system.

Summary of main themes from the consultation

Structure of a redeveloped primary curriculum

In looking across the consultation formats, five main themes emerged in response to the proposals on curriculum structure. These are summarised below.

1. There was **positivity and support for a single curriculum stage encompassing the two preschool years and infant classes**. This was evident regardless of preference for a two- or three-stage curriculum structure. It is considered important in supporting the continuity of children's learning experiences from one educational setting to the next. Respondents posited the opportunity for greater connectedness between preschool and primary education. In terms of practical concerns, references were made to differences between preschools and primary schools in relation to the pupil/teacher ratio and the minimum levels of qualifications required by practitioners and teachers. Differences in conditions and salaries for practitioners in both sectors were also noted.
2. There was broad **agreement for using a more integrated curriculum structure for infant classes**. A richer and more holistic curriculum model was considered more developmentally appropriate for children at this stage in their learning and development; better supporting children's oral language development, enabling child-led play while promoting positive and effective transitions from preschool to primary school. A more integrated and thematic curriculum structure was also thought to benefit planning for teachers of junior and senior infants. There was recognition of the current challenge of using a play pedagogy in a subject-based curriculum in the infant classes, and challenges associated with resources and access to CPD.
3. There was sentiment that **subjects should continue to hold an important position in the primary school curriculum**. A strong majority agreed that a subject-based approach in the later years of primary school could help children transition into post-primary school by facilitating alignment in curricula. There was less consensus, however, as to when subjects should appear in the curriculum. There was some concern that their introduction in 5th class may be too late with some suggesting this should happen as early as 1st class. There was clear messaging that Arts Education, Physical Education (PE), Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE),

and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) should not be diluted or squeezed out of a redeveloped primary school curriculum.

4. There was **greater support for the three-stage model**; viewed as a natural and progressive continuum of education. For many, the three-stage model was considered more developmentally and pedagogically appropriate. Respondents also felt there was a natural progression from themes to curriculum areas to subjects. Respondents referenced the benefits of thematic and integrated approaches, natural progression between the stages, and continuity in children's learning. In considering the two-stage model, there were some concerns about the length of time for each stage and the belief that it could be difficult for children to transition from a thematic curriculum approach in Stage 1 to a subject-based curriculum in Stage 2.
5. The **practical challenges** of implementing a two- or three-stage incremental model **in small primary schools with multi-grade classrooms** were recognised. Respondents were vocal in echoing this point of view. Some favoured the two-stage model for teaching and learning in a small school while others favoured the three-stage model. Others again felt that neither model is practical nor manageable due to pedagogical and organisational issues in a multi-grade setting.

Time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

In looking across the consultation formats, four main themes emerged in response to the proposals on time. These are summarised below.

1. There was **support for changing how time is allocated across the curriculum**. While highlighting that guidance and support on how best to implement these changes at school level would be essential, there was a recognition that the current allocations need reconfiguration. The existing model of time allocation in schools means that children may have a fragmented experience of the curriculum. There was an acknowledgement, however, that the introduction of a new time allocation model, without further curriculum development, would not resolve the issue of an overcrowded primary school curriculum.
2. There was strong support evident for **schools having greater flexibility in deciding how time is allocated** in the curriculum. Respondents expressed the view that these decisions, made at a local level, could better reflect the context of each individual school. Teachers felt they were well placed to allocate time in classes and schools. Increased flexibility could provide for more

creative teaching, thematic planning and project-based learning that better reflect the needs, interests and capabilities of children. Great flexibility for schools in deciding how time is allocated was viewed as demonstrating greater confidence in the teaching profession.

3. There was general agreement for the proposal of two categories of time allocation. The suggested **60:40 ratio of time** for minimum state curriculum time and flexible time was met with a positive response. Within Minimum State Curriculum Time, the weekly time allocations for Language and Mathematics were viewed as appropriate while the monthly allocations for the remainder of the curriculum were seen as enabling more age-appropriate pedagogies in the classroom. The term 'Flexible Time' itself was questioned across the consultation formats. Some respondents felt it may not be as flexible as the 40% would suggest, so perhaps a different term may be needed. The inclusion of breaks and recreation time, and to a more significant extent, the patron's programme within 'Flexible Time' was questioned. It is considered that Flexible Time recognises the professional autonomy of schools and teachers and could help to alleviate existing time pressures on schools.
4. As the 1999 curriculum assigns time to each subject, albeit a suggested time, there were **concerns that in a redeveloped primary curriculum, some subjects may 'lose out'** in a review of how time is allocated. How best to plan for flexible time to ensure consistency and maintain a balance that will meet children's needs, while protecting subjects from either neglect or excessive attention, was highlighted. Some form of guidance to support the use of a new time curriculum time allocation was considered necessary by respondents.

Other ideas from the consultation

The consultation also provided a platform for expressing views, opinions and responses to wider educational issues. Some of the other ideas and insights that came through the data analysis are mentioned below.

1. The proposals for consultation, while welcomed by many, were viewed by some as a deviation from the existing clear and structured primary curriculum. A deeper interrogation of the reasons **why** the existing curriculum requires review would be welcomed. Signposting a clear articulation of the **aims, principles and key theories of learning** underpinning a redeveloped curriculum would be beneficial.

2. Respondents noted that any revision to the curriculum structure and time allocations would mean a cultural change for the school community, requiring a **change in teachers' mindset** and pedagogical approaches. Everyone involved in the primary school system (children, parents, teachers, management, support services) will need time to familiarise themselves with these changes. Respondents commented that **change** would need to be introduced in a focused and developmental way and that the curriculum developer (NCCA) would need to 'remain close' to the new curriculum's introduction and implementation in schools.
3. The development and provision of **CPD policy and practice** to support this change was considered essential. Analysis showed a need to incorporate a variety of approaches and supports for CPD from different providers. Calls were made for this to be accessible to all teachers across the continuum of their careers. The following were the most frequently mentioned areas of learning for teachers:
 - understanding and appreciating the **aims and principles** of a **new curriculum**
 - learning how to incorporate **new and innovative pedagogical approaches** (including play-based and child-led learning) into their teaching
 - planning, developing and implementing an **integrated curriculum** through themes / curriculum areas / subjects
 - embedding the use of **weekly and monthly time allocations** and **flexible time** into planning processes.
4. The great potential within the proposals for considering a full **restructuring of a child's primary school experience** possibly linking key skills at junior cycle to *Aistear*, was noted by respondents. Some also commented on the opportunity to consider aspects like the physical school building, layout of classrooms, and the length of the school day for children. The curriculum is *only one piece of the puzzle!* This linked with calls for **system change** as well as curriculum change. However, the **financing and resourcing** of change was a concern for many. Respondents felt that the costs of resources, personnel, infrastructure and modifications to school buildings would influence the outcome of a new curriculum model. They questioned if sufficient resources would be forthcoming to implement the curriculum proposals in full.
5. The **inclusion of children** was considered as a strength of the consultation, with groups and individuals commenting on the importance of children's active participation, and recognising their contribution to shaping a future primary curriculum. Respondents expressed the view that useful information could be gleaned by actively listening to children and hearing about their experiences of school.

6. The **central role of parents** in children's primary education and the challenge for schools in helping parents to understand the benefit of different teaching and learning approaches, was highlighted.

The next phase of work

As noted, the consultation provided the first opportunity, in almost twenty years, for those interested in primary education to consider the structure of that curriculum and how time is allocated within it. While the consultation proposals focused largely on structural and organisational aspects of the curriculum, they stimulated discussion on a wider range of themes which while not directly associated with the Council's work in redeveloping the primary curriculum, nonetheless, are of critical importance in considering, planning for, and supporting implementation of that curriculum. This concluding section presents an outline of the next phase of the Council's work in reviewing and redeveloping the primary curriculum.

Children spend eight years in primary school in Ireland, more years than in any other education phase/sector. The primary curriculum aims to support children during their childhood as a time in its own right and into a future which is relatively unknown and likely to be incomparable, in many respects, to today's world. To put this in more concrete terms, children born in 2018 and who begin primary school in September 2022/2023, will begin their working lives in the fifth decade of this century and retire in the late 2080s. The question about the type of primary curriculum we choose to develop for children now and for the years ahead is an all-important one; it says much about our image of primary teachers and children in Ireland today and our understandings and assumptions about our children's future world. The key findings from the recent consultation on curriculum structure and time together with previous work by the NCCA such as the identification of priorities for a primary curriculum (2012), and an extensive body of research, will help to shape the next phase of work on the primary curriculum. This phase will centre chiefly on the development of an overview of a redeveloped curriculum which will be the focus of a major public consultation in 2019.

An overview of a redeveloped curriculum

Drawing on the experience of developing *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (2009) and, more recently, the *Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015), the draft overview will respond to a number of key questions about a curriculum some of which emerged during the consultation on structure and time. These include, although are not confined to, the following.

- **Purpose**—while the consultation discussions indicated a continuing relevance for the three broad aims of the primary curriculum⁵, there was a call to clarify the contribution a redeveloped curriculum should make to a child’s educational journey, taking account of policy developments in early childhood and at junior cycle.
- **Values and principles**—the increasingly diverse nature of the student population in our primary schools was reflected in many discussions during the consultation. This rich diversity necessitates a clear articulation of values in a redeveloped curriculum and of the principles that underpin it ensuring that the curriculum is for *all* children, catering for the full richness of diversity and the full scope of additional needs.
- **Overarching priorities**—since the primary curriculum was published in 1999, there have been key curriculum developments in early childhood, junior and senior cycle. While these have been sectoral, they have shared a number of broad, overarching skills/competences—developing children’s wellbeing, communication, critical and creative thinking, their capacity to work with others, and their literacy and numeracy skills – as well as priorities related to the development of dispositions, knowledge and understanding, values and attitudes. The redevelopment of the primary curriculum brings an opportunity to identify what it is that the curriculum, as a whole, aims to do for children.
- **Pedagogical approaches**—the consultation proposals highlighted the acceleration of research, in recent years, on children’s learning and development and the significance of this for understanding more fully *how* all children can be supported in their learning. A redeveloped primary curriculum provides an opportunity to identify and describe effective pedagogical approaches that work across the curriculum, some of which may be especially significant at particular points in a child’s primary school years.
- **Curriculum structure**—the consultation findings signalled widespread support for an integrated curriculum for children in the early years of primary and the importance of retaining subjects, at least in the later years. Respondents, overall, indicated somewhat greater support for a three-stage model over a two-stage model while others questioned the potential departure from the current four-stage model. In exploring further the concept of an

⁵ The three general aims of the *Primary School Curriculum* (DES, 1999) are to

- enable the child to live a full life as a child and to realise his or her potential as a unique individual
- enable the child to develop as a social being through living and cooperating with others and so contribute to the good of society
- prepare the child for further education and lifelong learning. (p.7 - http://curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/c4a88a62-7818-4bb2-bb18-4c4ad37bc255/PSEC_Introduction-to-Primary-Curriculum_Eng.pdf)

incremental staged model, additional work is now needed in teasing out and defining more clearly the differences between a curriculum theme and a curriculum area and the relationship between these and subjects. A question also arises regarding alignment with, and from, *Aistear*—what does this mean in the context of a primary curriculum? In parallel, work is also required in exploring the concept of curriculum integration and how this can be fore-fronted in a redeveloped curriculum.

- **Curriculum content**—a redevelopment of any curriculum brings an opportunity to examine and clarify what children should be able to do through, and on foot of, their experiences with that curriculum, and to look at how curriculum content should be specified. The overview of a redeveloped primary curriculum will identify the constituent themes/areas/subjects in the curriculum taking account of the demands for broadening the scope of children’s learning in areas such as wellbeing, education about religions and beliefs and ethics, coding, and modern languages.
- **Time allocation**—informed by the consultation findings, the overview will include a new suggested time allocation framework. The consultation findings showed strong support for a number of changes to how time might be allocated within the curriculum while at the same time highlighting concerns, namely around the concept of ‘flexible time’ as configured in the proposals. The elements contained within ‘flexible time’ and most notably, break-times, recreational time and the patron’s programme, received particular attention and critique. Work in the next phase will require further consideration as to how schools can be afforded greater flexibility in how they use time for teaching and learning in the themes/areas/subjects of the curriculum, and importantly, how this flexibility can be better reflected and incorporated in a new suggested time allocation framework.
- **Planning, teaching and assessing**—each of the 11 subjects in the 1999 curriculum included some guidance for schools on how to assess children’s learning within that subject. Building on this and reflecting more recent research in the area, the NCCA published *Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum: Guidelines for Schools* in 2007 and online reporting and transfer materials for schools and parents in 2014. Even with this additional support, assessment, and particularly formative assessment, has received limited attention in supporting schools to broaden their assessment practices. Research shows that the greatest benefits for children’s learning happen when teachers provide effective feedback to them which helps them to understand how they can improve. The overview of a redeveloped primary curriculum can

build on existing good assessment practices in schools and clarify how assessment can be embedded in a redeveloped primary curriculum.

NCCA consultations with schools in 2009 and 2010 highlighted the extent to which teachers and principals found the primary curriculum to be overloaded and challenging to navigate and use in their teaching. More recent curriculum developments, namely *Aistear* and the Junior Cycle Framework, have resulted in leaner specifications with clear overarching priorities for children's learning and development. The redevelopment of the primary curriculum provides an important opportunity to reduce the 'layers' that exist within the 1999 curriculum while being clear on what we ultimately deem to be important and essential for children living and learning in the 21st century.

The process towards an overview of a redeveloped curriculum

In mapping the process through which the overview of a redeveloped curriculum will be developed, it is helpful to consider the four interconnected areas of NCCA's work in formulating advice on curriculum and assessment—research, consultation, working with schools and settings, and deliberations with education partners through NCCA committees. Each of these is outlined below in the context of progressing work on an overview of a redeveloped primary curriculum.

Research

Extensive research, national and international, underpins the NCCA's curriculum and assessment work. In developing the overview as outlined above, the NCCA will draw on existing research, assessments and evaluations as well as contemporary literature. In the case of the latter, the Council will commission short research papers to tease out particular aspects of a primary curriculum, such as purpose, values and priorities, curriculum integration, skills and dispositions, and pedagogies. As they are completed, these papers will be published on the NCCA website and used as the basis for discussion and debate in order to further clarify directions for a redeveloped primary curriculum.

Work with schools and settings

The development of the overview will also, importantly, be shaped by ideas, experiences and evidence from schools and early childhood settings. Working directly with schools and settings creates opportunities for NCCA to learn from their innovative work with the curriculum including, for example, embedding playful and more active teaching and learning in the early years of primary education;

using time in creative ways across the curriculum; integrating a range of digital technologies in children's daily experiences; developing inclusive practices to support *all* children; and expanding the range of children's classroom experiences. In this way, schools represent critical learning sites for NCCA in drawing on their creative thinking about primary education and what it should do for children. This is important for redeveloping the curriculum as well as for thinking about how best to manage and plan for the complexities of curriculum change as notes by many respondents across the consultation when they spoke of change and the need for it to be supported in a focused and developmental way.

Consultation

As already noted, the overview of a redeveloped primary curriculum will be the focus of an extensive consultation in 2019. The development of the overview itself will also be underpinned by ongoing discussions and opportunities to explore and tease out ideas for the redeveloped curriculum. In facilitating this, throughout 2018 the NCCA will organise a series of seminars on particular aspects of the curriculum. Short research papers together with ideas, experiences and evidence from schools as referenced above, will provide an important backdrop for discussions at the seminars. Deliberations from these events will feed directly into the development of the curriculum overview.

Deliberations with education partners

The construction of an overview of a redeveloped primary curriculum will be a significant part of the NCCA's work in 2018. The work will be supported by, and progressed with, the education partners through the Board for Early Childhood and Primary, and Council. The work will take account of existing and planned curriculum and assessment developments namely the new *Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga Bunscoile* currently in the initial phase of implementation in the junior years of primary school, and the new *Primary Mathematics Curriculum* due for publication in 2018 (junior classes) and in 2019 (senior classes). The overview will also reflect the outcomes from the NCCA's ongoing school-based initiative on coding in primary schools which explores different approaches to integrating coding in the curriculum, and ongoing work with schools on inclusive practices in intercultural, religious and ethical education.

Together, these four interconnected strands of work – research, work with schools and settings, consultation, and deliberations – will enable robust debate and informed consideration of questions central to the development of a primary curriculum. Such activity should help to signpost, more clearly, directions for a new curriculum with 2019 bringing an opportunity for extensive consultation

on those directions before moving ahead with the development of the curriculum itself from late 2019.

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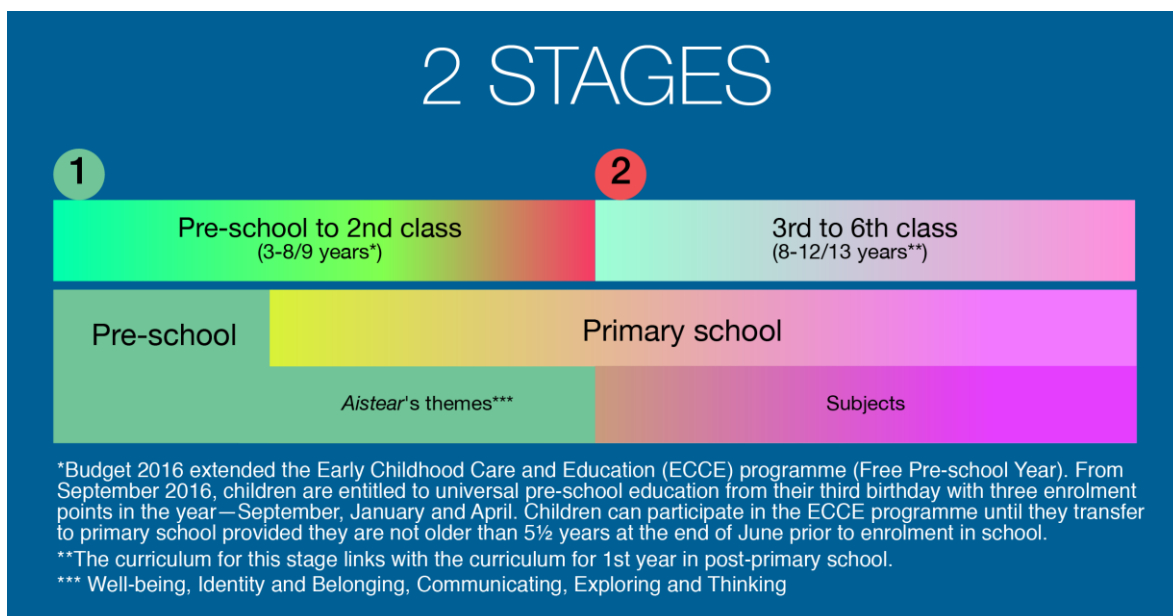
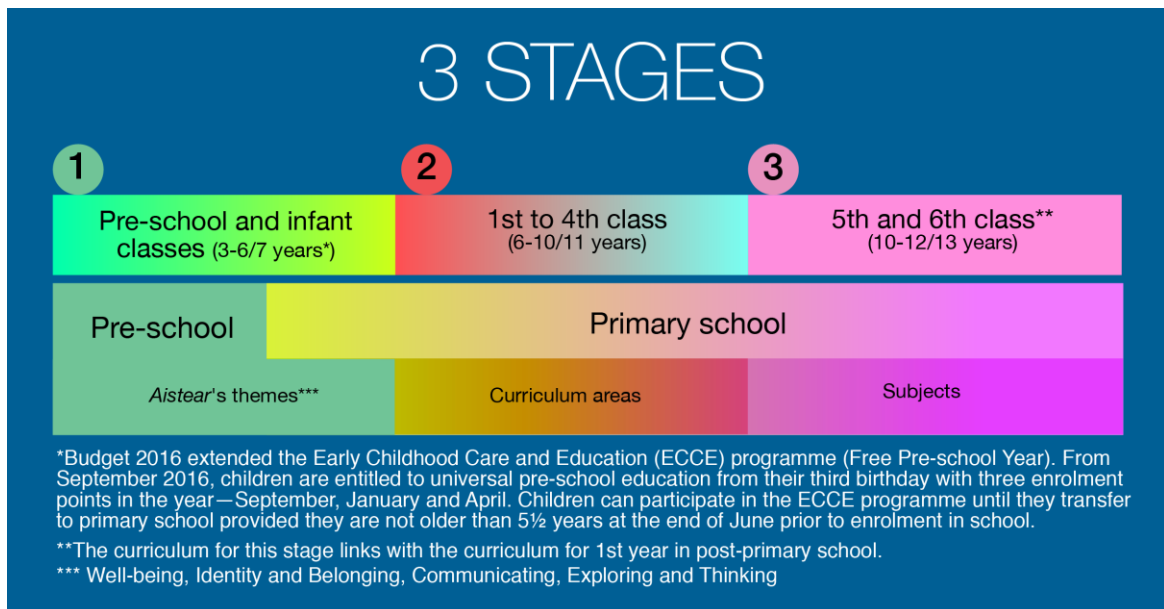
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Appendix 1: Proposed incremental models for a new primary curriculum

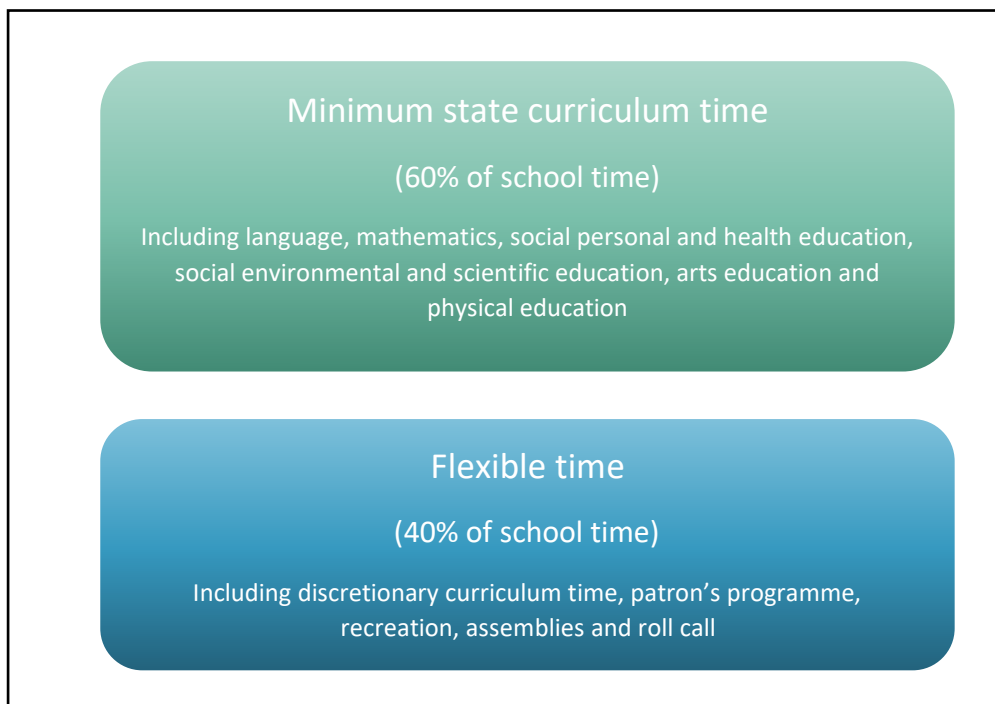


Appendix 2: Considerations for a new curriculum model

For consideration

1. The proposals recommend moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an **incremental stage model** which uses a **differentiated curriculum structure**. To what extent do you agree/disagree with this proposed change? Give reasons for your response.
2. The two options for a new curriculum structure refer to the **two years of universal pre-school education as part of Stage 1** to help support better continuity of experience for children and progression in their learning. To what extent do you agree/disagree that the two pre-school years should be seen as part of Stage 1? Give reasons for your response.
3. **Option 1 – three-stage model**: This model would give rise to three approaches to presenting curriculum—using **themes, curriculum areas** and **subjects**. To what extent do you agree/disagree with this option as a structure for a redeveloped primary curriculum? Give reasons for your response. What might the ‘content’ of each of these include, for example, what themes? What areas? What subjects?
4. **Option 2 – two-stage model**: This model would give rise to two approaches to presenting curriculum—using **themes** and **subjects**. To what extent do you agree/disagree with this option as a structure for a redeveloped primary curriculum? Give reasons for your response. What might the ‘content’ of each of these include, for example, what themes? What subjects?
5. Options 1 and 2 both include subjects as a way of organising the curriculum in the latter years of primary school. **At what point** in primary education do you think a curriculum based on **subjects** should be introduced? Why this point?
6. What **organisational** and **resource supports** would be necessary to introduce a curriculum based on an incremental stage model?
7. What are the **implications** beyond the classroom of using an incremental stage model for structuring a primary curriculum, e.g., initial teacher education, working with parents, etc?
8. What, in your opinion, are the strengths and challenges of the **structure of the 1999 primary curriculum**?

Appendix 3: Proposed model of time allocation for primary schools



Appendix 4: Considerations for a new model of time allocation for primary schools

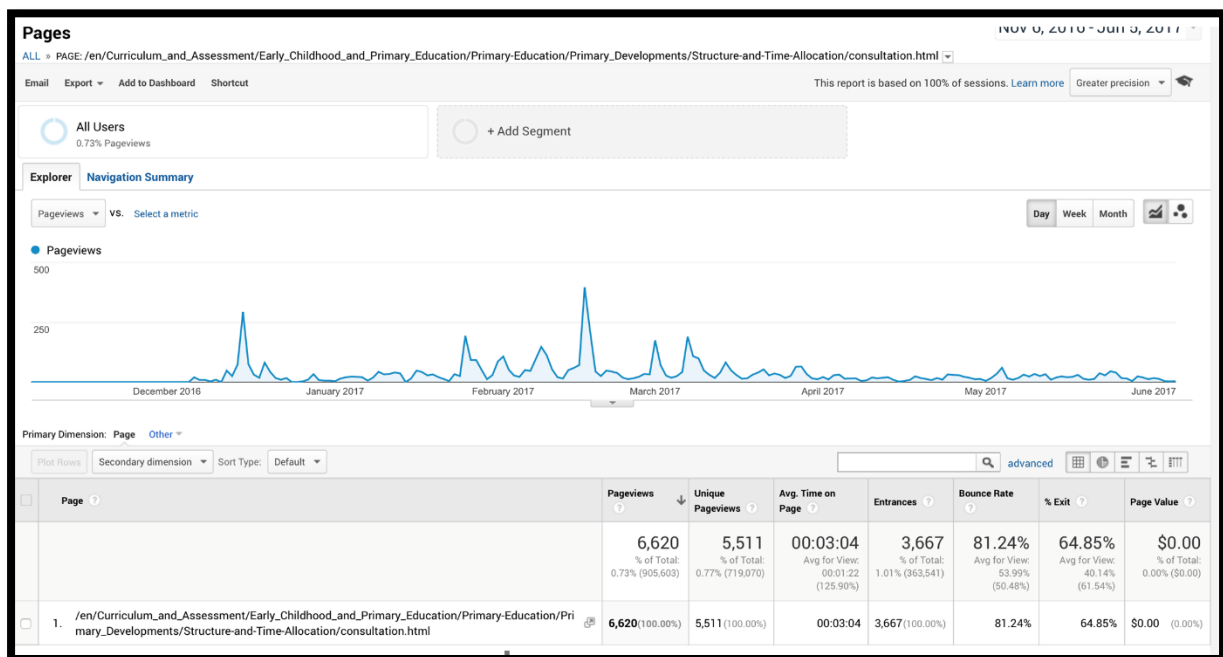
For consideration

1. To what extent do you agree/disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**? Give reasons for your response.
2. To what extent do you agree/disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**? Give reasons for your response.
3. What are your views on the overall division of time into **minimum state curriculum time (60%) and flexible time (40%)**? What are your views on the percentage time allocations proposed for each?
4. Are you in favour of specifying **time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects? Should all have time allocations or should some be prioritised over others?
5. Where time is allocated, what are your views on whether it should be on a **weekly, monthly, termly, annual basis**? Please provide further comment as appropriate.
6. Should the proportion of time allocated differ depending on the **curriculum stage** involved? In what way should the time allocation change?
7. Do you agree that **Language and Mathematics** should be provided with more tightly specified time allocations than other themes/curriculum areas/subjects? What should the weekly minimum allocations be?
8. What **opportunities/challenges** do you foresee for schools in using flexible time? Is **guidance** or support needed on this? If so, what should that guidance focus on?

Appendix 5: Supporting consultation engagement

To ensure that the consultation was as far-reaching and inclusive as possible, a range of materials were developed to support all interested parties in their engagement with the proposals outlined in the *Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum: For consultation*⁶. The primary section of the NCCA website was updated with a specific area on the consultation www.ncca.ie/timeandstructure. This area of the website continues to provide links to the consultation document, the executive summary, review and research material which have informed the proposals, and a podcast by Professor Mark Morgan explaining an incremental stage approach. A link to the Irish Language website was made more visible to encourage more teachers to access it during the consultation. As outlined in Figure 1 below, since the date of publication there have been 5,511 unique visits to the dedicated consultation webpage.

Figure 1: Analytics of unique page views since publication



⁶ Referred to as the Consultation Document in the rest of this update.

To spread awareness of the published proposals, the education correspondents of the national media were informed about the consultation process with articles subsequently being published in the national press. Partner networks have also supported the dissemination of the proposals. An article was published in January's edition of *INTouch* and the March edition contained a brief reminder of the consultation and the formats in which teachers could become involved. A separate article featured in the March edition of *Leadership+* - the magazine of the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN).

The use of social media has become a feature of publicising NCCA consultations. A Twitter campaign was undertaken to generate interest and participation. To date, the Twitter campaign has resulted in over 54,000 impressions which has generated 500+ unique visits to the consultation webpage at www.ncca.ie/timeandstructure. Figures 2 and 3 below provide an overview of the Twitter engagement to date and the types of tweets generated to highlight the consultation.

Figure 2: Twitter campaign impressions from January to February 2017

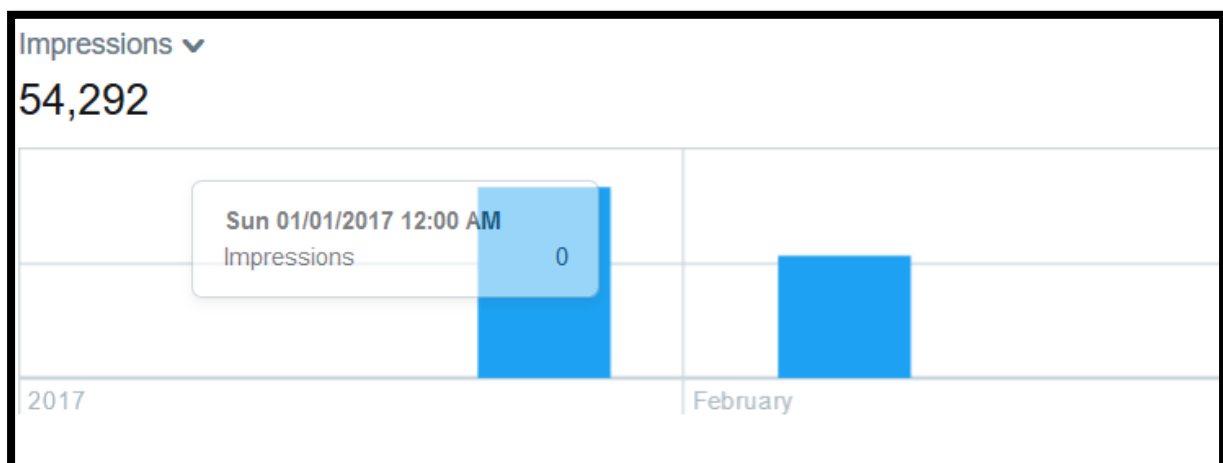


Figure 3: Sample tweets from Twitter Campaign



NCCA has been active on Facebook targeting the audience of parents and teachers through this social network. On average, NCCA Facebook posts receive 5,000 views. NCCA is working to increase its visibility on this network.

Opportunities to link in with education partners on events and initiatives were also explored. The INTO provided NCCA with the opportunity to present two workshops on the proposals at its consultative conference in November 2016. The IPPN supported the consultation by providing the opportunity for NCCA to present two masterclasses at its conference in January 2017. The early learning experiences symposium in Trinity College Dublin in February 2017 also provided a conduit to gather feedback on the consultation document. Early Childhood Ireland (ECI) provided the opportunity to organise a symposium on the consultation document as part of its research and practice seminar in March 2017 in University College Dublin (UCD).

Appendix 6: Online questionnaire

1.

The NCCA has published proposals related to structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum. This is the first time, in almost twenty years, that those working in primary education have had an opportunity to consider the structure of the curriculum, what it should comprise and how time should be allocated within it. Your views are very important as they will help shape the redevelopment of the primary curriculum.

The proposals are set out in detail in the document 'Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum: For consultation' which is found at www.ncca.ie/timeandstructure.

For most of the questions you are asked to tick a box after the question.

2. STRUCTURE OF THE 1999 CURRICULUM

* 1. Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about the current primary school curriculum by ticking one box on each row.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
There is a significant overlap in what children learn across curriculum areas in the current primary school curriculum.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There are challenges in linkage and integration with the current curriculum.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There is continuity in children's learning experiences through Aistear in the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (free pre-school years) and the current primary curriculum.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There are too many subjects in the current curriculum.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 2. Overall, how do you rate the structure of 11 subjects in the current primary school curriculum?

Very satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3. PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE CURRICULUM

The NCCA is currently considering a change to how the primary curriculum is structured. The proposals set out two options, both using a model of incremental stages. The options indicate when and how the points of curriculum differentiation will occur. Option 1 is a 3-stage model whereby Stage 1 encompasses the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (free pre-school years) as well as the two infant years in primary school. Stage 2 refers to the 'middle' four years of primary school (1st to 4th) and Stage 3 the subsequent years (5th and 6th class) of primary schooling. Each stage uses a different curriculum structure as seen in the figure below.

* 3. Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about the proposed 3-stage primary school curriculum by ticking one box on each row.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Having the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (two free pre-school years) and the two infant classes as stage 1 helps children to adjust to learning in a primary school setting.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Having the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (free pre-school years) and the two infant classes as stage 1 may enhance curriculum continuity.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A thematic approach, based on the themes of Aistear, is especially appropriate for teaching children in infant classes.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The best time to introduce curriculum areas such as SESE, the Arts, etc. is in 1st class of primary school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The subject-based approach in 5th and 6th classes will help pupils to adjust to post-primary school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Having three stages in the curriculum facilitates the use of age-appropriate pedagogical practices (e.g. play-based approaches, active learning, project-based learning etc.).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A three-stage model would enable teachers to modify their teaching approaches more easily to the needs of different pupils.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A three-stage model will pose particular challenges in a multi-grade classroom.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A three-stage model creates additional challenges for teachers supporting children in their adjustment to the different learning approaches associated with each stage.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. What do you consider to be the **STRENGTHS** of the proposed 3-stage primary school curriculum?

Please describe:

5. What do you consider to be the **CHALLENGES** of the proposed 3-stage primary school curriculum?

Please describe:

* 6. To what extent do you agree this would be an appropriate way of structuring the curriculum?

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE CURRICULUM

The two stage model comprises of 2-stages. According to this model, Stage 1 comprises of the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (free pre-school years), the two infant classes and first and second classes. Stage 2 will span third to sixth class with subjects as the foundations of the curriculum.

* 7. Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about the proposed 2-stage primary school curriculum by ticking one box on each row.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Having the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (two free pre-school years), the two infant classes and first and second classes as stage 1 helps children to adjust to learning in a primary school setting.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Having the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (two free pre-school years) the two infant classes and first and second classes as stage 1 enhances curriculum continuity.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A thematic approach, based on the themes of Aistear, is especially appropriate in teaching children from junior infants to 2nd class.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pupils in 3rd-6th classes would benefit most from a subject-based curriculum structure.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The subject-based approach in 3rd-6th classes will help pupils to adjust to post-primary school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Having two stages supports the use of age-appropriate pedagogical practices (e.g. play-based approaches, project-based learning etc.).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
A two-stage model would enable teachers to modify their teaching approaches to the needs of different pupils.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A two-stage model will pose particular challenges in a multi-grade classroom.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A two-stage model creates additional challenges for teachers supporting pupils in their adjustment to the different learning approaches associated with each stage.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. What do you consider to be the STRENGTHS of the proposed 2-stage primary school curriculum?
Please describe:

9. What do you consider to be the CHALLENGES of the proposed 2-stage primary school curriculum?
Please describe:

* 10. The two-stage model proposed involves an emphasis on the four Aistear themes (well-being; identity and belonging; communicating; exploring and thinking) in the first stage (up to 2nd class) and subjects in the second stage (3rd to 6th).

To what extent do you agree this would be an appropriate way of structuring the curriculum?

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 11. At which point in primary school should subjects become the structure of the curriculum? Tick one box only.

- Junior Infants
- Senior Infants
- First Class
- Second Class
- Third Class
- Fourth Class
- Fifth Class
- Sixth Class
- Other (please specify)

12. Please provide a reason for your answer to question 11:

5. TIME ALLOCATION IN THE PRIMARY CURRICULUM

The allocation of time across the curriculum can be seen to place a value on what is important for children in the formative years of their educational experience. The current primary school curriculum provides a suggested minimum weekly time framework including three key elements:

- time allocated to religious education;
- a suggested minimum time allocation for each of the other six curriculum areas along with a period of discretionary curriculum time
- time for breaks, recreation and assembly.

A new model proposes a differentiated approach to time allocation which can work with either the 2-stage or 3-stage option of a revised structure for the primary school curriculum. The proposed model includes minimum state curriculum time (60%) and flexible time (40%). It also uses larger blocks of time (e.g., on a monthly basis) for some curriculum areas and shorter blocks of time (e.g., weekly) for English, Irish and mathematics.

* 13. Overall, how do you rate the current suggested weekly time framework in the primary school curriculum?

Very satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 14. Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
The use of larger blocks of time will support the use of age-appropriate pedagogical practices (e.g. play-based approaches, active learning, project based learning, etc.).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Having a specific weekly time allocation is particularly important for mathematics.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Having specific weekly time allocations is particularly important for English and Irish.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Guidance on time for themes, curriculum areas and subjects is essential for planning teaching and learning.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ratio of minimum state curriculum time (60%) and flexible time (40%) would not enable sufficient flexibility to tailor teaching and learning to students' needs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The introduction of flexible time would enable teachers to tailor teaching and learning according to students' needs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The use of monthly allocations of time for other subjects/themes/curriculum areas than Language and Mathematics is important.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

15. What opportunities do you foresee for schools in using flexible time?

16. What challenges do you foresee for schools in using flexible time?

* 17. How likely is it that you would use flexible time in your school in the following ways?

	Very likely	Somewhat likely	Not very likely	Not at all likely	Don't know
On assemblies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
On teaching aspects of the curriculum	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
On teaching the patron's programme (Religious or Ethical education)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
On whole school celebrations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
On class/school/community projects	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
On roll call	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

* 18. Is guidance or support needed on how best to use flexible time?

If so, what should that guidance focus on?

19. What form of support for the proposed changes would you prefer (e.g. professional development seminars, online materials, etc.)?

Appendix 7: Written submissions for publication

No.	Name		Position	Personal / Organisation
1	An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG)			Organisation
2	Ann Dolan		Lecturer in Mary Immaculate College	Personal
3	Association for Drama in Education in Ireland (ADEI)	Elaine Clotworthy, Ciara Fagan, Mary Howard, Dr Úna McCabe, Paula Murphy, Dr Annie Ó Breacháin, Margaret O’Keeffe, Dr Triona Stokes		Organisation
4	Association of Childhood Professionals	Marian Quinlan	Chairperson	Organisation
5	Association of Trustees of Catholic Schools (ATCS)	David Kennedy	Research Assistant	Organisation
6	Brain Russell		Principal	Personal
7	Bridget Heffernan			Personal
8	Catholic Primary School Management Association (CPSMA)			Organisation
9	Catholic Schools Partnership	Ferdia Kelly	Chief Executive Officer	Organisation
10	Ciara Fagan		Primary School Teacher	Personal
11	Claire O’Callaghan		Primary School Teacher	Personal
12	Clare Finnerty		Principal	Personal
13	CPSMA Council, Ossory Diocese			Organisation

14	Curriculum Working Group, Institute of Education, DCU	Jones Irwin	Chairperson	Organisation
15	Daniel O'Connell		Lecturer in Religious Education, Mary Immaculate College	Personal
16	Dermot Lane		Parish Priest	Personal
17	DICE Project	Siobhán Sleeman	Project coordinator	Organisation
18	Diocese of Elphin	Justin Harkin	Education Secretariat Representative	Organisation
19	Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin	Bishop Denis Nulty	Bishop	Organisation
20	Diocese of Killaloe	Gerard Kenny	Board of Management Member, Diocesan Education Secretary	Organisation
21	Diocese of Ossory RE Advisors for Primary Schools	Maria Comerford	Coordinator	Organisation
22	Dorothy Morrissey		Lecturer in Education, Mary Immaculate College	Personal
23	Dr Cliona Murphy, Dr Greg Smith and Ms Nicola Broderick		Lecturers in Science Education, DCU Institute of Education	Organisation
24	Dr Susan Pike and Mr Joe Usher		Lecturers in Geography Education, DCU Institute of Education	Organisation
25	Early Childhood Education Group, Institute of Education, DCU	Liz Dunphy	Senior Lecturer Early Childhood Education	Personal
26	Early Childhood Ireland			Organisation
27	Elizabeth Mee		Principal	Personal
28	European Physical Education Association (EUPEA)	Claude Scheur and Ruedi Schmid	President and General Secretary	Organisation

29	EQUATE			Organisation
30	Fr Michael O'Meara		Parish Priest	Personal
31	Feale Biodiversity	Anneke Vrieling	Mother, Ecologist	Personal
32	Francis Nolan			Personal
33	Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood	Therese Hegarty, Katherine Lally, Patsy Stafford, Triona Stokes, Tony Sweeney, Bernadette Wrynn, Marie McLoughlin		Organisation
34	Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA)	Pat Daly	Director of Games Development and Research	Organisation
35	Gerard Nash		Director of Pastoral Development, Diocese of Killaloe	Personal
36	Grainne Kavanagh			Personal
37	HSE Health and Wellbeing Division	Orla McGowan	Education Officer	Organisation
38	History Education Team, DCU Institute of Education	Professor Fionnuala Waldron, Brian Ruane, Peter Whelan, Caitríona Ní Cassaithe		Organisation
39	Institute of Public Health in Ireland	Helen McAvoy	Director of Policy	Organisation
40	Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO)			Organisation
41	Irish Primary Physical Education Association (IPPEA)	Liam Clohessy	Chairperson	Organisation
42	Joseph McMahan			Personal
43	Kinnitty National School	Robert O'Donoghue	Chairperson	Organisation
44	Knocknagree National School (1)	Junior Goulding	Chairperson	Organisation
45	Knocknagree National School (2)	DJ Golden	Principal	Organisation
46	Lenore Mulvihill			Personal
47	Lifeways Ireland CLG.	Pearse O'Shiel	Chairman	Organisation

48	Máire Ní Mhaitiú		Teacher	Personal
49	Margaret Buckley			Personal
50	Martin O'Brien			Personal
51	Mary Regan			Personal
52	Maurice Hurley		National Coordinator Global Citizenship School	Personal
53	Mary Immaculate College			Organisation
54	National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education	Breda Corr	General Secretary	Organisation
55	National Association of Primary Diocesan Advisers	David Gavin	Chairperson	Organisation
56	Paula Kelly		Primary School Teacher	Personal
57	Physical Education, Physical Activity, Youth Sport (PEPAYS Ireland)	Dr Elaine Murtagh, Ms Suzy Macken, Dr Sarahjane Belton, Dr Richard Bowles, Dr Tara Coppinger, Mr Paul Friel, Mr Paul Keogh, Dr Deirdre Ní Chróinín, Dr Wesley O'Brien, Dr Melissa Parker, Professor Catherine Woods		Organisation
58	Physical Education Unit, Institute of Education, Dublin City University	Dr Frances Murphy, Dr Maura Coulter, Dr Bronagh McGrane, Ms Susan Marron	Lecturers in Physical Education, School of Arts Education and Movement	Organisation
59	PLÉ Ireland	Mary Moloney	Chairperson	Organisation
60	Rev Dr Seán Corkery		Diocesan Advisor on Education	Personal
61	Richard Casey		Primary Teacher	Personal

62	Royal Society of Chemistry	Dr Sheila Donegan and Nicole Morgan		Organisation
63	Sligo School Project CLG	Robert Hamm	Secretary	Organisation
64	Safefood	Charmaine McGowan	Scientific Officer	Organisation
65	Science Foundation Ireland (SFI)	Dr Abigail Ruth Freeman and Margie McCarthy	Director and Head of Education and Public Engagement	Organisation
66	Scoil Bhríde	Anne Flanagan	School Principal	Organisation
67	Scoil Mhuire Girls' National School	Mary Mclvor	School Principal	Organisation
68	SPHE Network	Margaret Nohilly	Chairperson	Organisation
69	St Fiacc's National School	John Brennan	School Principal	Organisation
70	St John Bosco Senior Boys' School	Emmanuel Bourke	School Principal	Organisation
71	St Laurence's National School	Catherine Coveney	School Principal	Organisation
72	St Mary's Parish Primary School	Philip Ward	School Principal	Organisation
73	St Patrick's National School	Michelle Griffin	Primary Teacher	Organisation
74	St Vincent's Girls' National School	Anne Neylon	Chairperson, Board of Management	Organisation

