

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Key points from the consultation and next steps

The consultation process

1. What were the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) consulting on?

The NCCA were consulting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics for primary schools. The [Consultation Paper](#) outlined the proposed rationale, vision, aims and features of the curriculum. The paper formed the basis for engagement during the consultation process, where participants were encouraged through the use of different consultation formats, to respond to the proposals presented.

The aims of the consultation process were to identify the

- perceived opportunities and benefits of the proposals for Irish primary schoolchildren
- perceived challenges posed by the development of the proposals
- types of learning that currently take place in schools that may be supported by a curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

2. What response formats were used during consultation?

To ensure the consultation was as far-reaching and inclusive as possible, a number of formats were used such as online questionnaires, written submissions, discussion groups, school case-studies and meetings with education partners and interest groups. A conference, held in conjunction with Mary Immaculate College on Inter-belief Dialogue in Contemporary Ireland, also provided an opportunity to raise awareness of the consultation process.

3. How long did the consultation last and who took part?

The consultation began on November 3rd 2015 and finished on March 31st 2016. During this time, NCCA received 2,255 responses to the online questionnaire and 174 written submissions,

a record for a NCCA consultation. NCCA also worked with 7 case-study schools and held 5 focus groups with teachers across the country. 16 bilateral meetings were held with education partners and interest groups. The consultation was successful in gathering the views of parents, children, teachers, interest groups and members of the general public. For an overview of the consultation process please see the short animation clip at www.ncca.ie/consultation/erbe.

The consultation findings

4. Where can I find the Consultation Report?

You can download the Consultation Report at www.ncca.ie/consultation/erbe. Here you will also find the [Consultation Paper](#), [background material](#) that informed the proposals and further information on the consultation process.

5. Is my written submission published?

Yes, NCCA have made available all written submissions where consent was provided online at www.ncca.ie/consultation/erbe.

6. What were the key findings of the consultation?

The consultation highlighted widespread support for the inclusion of learning and teaching that relate to ERB and Ethics in the primary curriculum. Such learning includes fostering skills, dispositions, knowledge and understandings of religions, beliefs and ethics that enable children to engage positively with the world in which we live, be respectful of those from other traditions, and have meaningful relationships with their peers. Many participants felt that these were a positive step towards fostering greater understanding and respect amongst children in an increasingly diverse environment. The proposals were seen by many as also contributing to the ethical development of children, supporting them to develop the capacity to become good decision-makers.

While there was significant support for the types of learning opportunities described by the proposals, the consultation highlighted features that have a significant impact on curriculum implementation in primary schools. These include:

- the provision of the Education Act (1998) in relation to the rights of the patron body,

particularly sections 9(d), 15(2)(b) and 30(2)(b)

- the structure of the primary education system, with 96% of schools under denominational patronage
- schools' experience of curriculum overload and the associated challenges of teaching and learning across the whole primary curriculum.

These contextual features, elaborated upon in the report, are important considerations for the development of a new curriculum in ERB and Ethics for primary schools.

Next steps

7. So what happens next?

In the coming weeks and months, NCCA will begin working with children, teachers and school communities to provide examples of shared practice that relate to the types of teaching and learning described by the proposals for ERB and Ethics. This material will be made available on an ongoing basis at www.ncca.ie so that schools wishing to use them to support and/or further develop their practice in this area, can do so while the work on the wider primary curriculum continues.

In the medium term, considering the findings of the consultation and being mindful of the sense of overload in the primary curriculum NCCA have outlined a direction forward in our [Consultation Report](#) (pp. 49-56). In recent weeks, NCCA have published proposals on how the primary curriculum can be organised to best cater to children's learning needs, while ensuring that teachers have the flexibility they need for their particular contexts. This work will determine the stages of the primary curriculum; the form of curriculum that will apply at each stage – integrated themes, curriculum areas, subjects. It will also determine how much time will be available for these curriculum components.

In doing this NCCA will identify and specify how the types of teaching and learning, that received broad support in the consultation, can be integrated into a redeveloped primary curriculum.

8. What will the short term work involve and how will it support children's learning and development?

This work will involve engagement with a variety of schools from across Ireland. NCCA will enable

these schools to network together, to share practice and reflect on the inclusive approaches which are already a feature of their schools. NCCA will document, present and disseminate the examples of practice from these schools, encouraging others to work with this material with the aim of supporting and enhancing inclusive school environments.

The examples of practice will show how schools respect, celebrate and recognise the normality of diversity in human life; while promoting equality and human rights. The examples will facilitate schools and teachers in creating inclusive school environments, raising awareness of issues that may arise from increasing cultural and ethnic diversity while supporting teachers in providing appropriate learning experiences for children of all religions and beliefs.

9. When will the type of teaching and learning set out in the ERB and Ethics proposals become part of the primary school curriculum?

As referred to above, between autumn 2016 and spring 2018, NCCA will be revisiting the structure of the primary curriculum and the allocation of time across the curriculum. This work will provide NCCA with opportunities to identify and specify how the significant learning relating to ERB and Ethics and which received broad welcome in the consultation, can be integrated into the primary school curriculum.

10. Will these experiences in the curriculum be for all children?

Yes, these experiences will be for all children in primary school.

11. Why can't this learning be included in the primary curriculum sooner?

During this and other such consultations, teachers identified time constraints and curriculum overload as significant barriers to the introduction of new content/subjects/curriculum areas into the primary school curriculum. NCCA have begun working on a redeveloped structure for the curriculum, as outlined earlier, which will help to address curriculum overload.

12. Will this learning replace the patron's programme or take time from its teaching?

No, this learning is not intended to replace the patron's programme. Under the Education Act (1998), patrons are entitled to develop and teach their own programmes that underpin the ethos of their schools. They are also entitled to a reasonable amount of time during the school day to

teach their programme. The proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics do not call this time into question.