

NCCA Draft Senior Cycle SPHE/RSE Specification – for Consultation

Points for completing Written Submissions Template

The draft **Senior Cycle SPHE Specification** has been issued for consultation by the NCCA, the schools curriculum body, with a **deadline of 17th Oct 2023** – this is due to be implemented for Senior Cycle (Leaving Cert) classes from Sept 2024. SPHE stands for Social Personal and Health Education, and **Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE)** lessons are included as part of the SPHE curriculum.

It is strongly recommended for parents and all concerned about the new Sex Education curriculums in our schools to fill out the **Written Submission Template** - available on the NCCA website at link below - <https://ncca.ie/en/senior-cycle/curriculum-developments/senior-cycle-social-personal-and-health-education-sphe/>

The comments below can be used to respond to the relevant questions in the Submissions Template; the completed Template should be emailed by **Tuesday 17th Oct** to the NCCA at - SPHEdevelopments@ncca.ie

Comments for filling out the NCCA Written Submission Template

Below are comments on some key points in the Submission Template which outlines the 3 Strands in the new SC SPHE Specification –

Strand 1. Health and Wellbeing;

Strand 2. Relationship and Sexuality;

Strand 3. Into Adulthood

While it is recommended to fill out answers to all the questions in the Submissions Template, this note will focus mainly on Strand 2: Relationships and Sexuality. Below are the key **Learning outcomes ('LO') in Strand 2 (in italics)** followed by comments to help people to provide responses re the Learning Outcomes questions in the Template. **It is important that people personalize their comments in their own words**, which is why a pre-completed Template has not been provided.

Key Learning outcomes in the SPHE Curriculum (in Italics) followed by comments below:

'Strand 2 Relationships and Sexuality –

LO 2.1 demonstrate the awareness and skills needed for nurturing healthy in-person and online relationships, including respecting boundaries, communicating feelings and needs and preventing and managing conflict

Comment - does this imply that there can be healthy '**online relationships**'? Shouldn't schools be steering students away from online relationships?

LO 2.3 discuss **sexual activity** as an aspect of adult relationships characterised by care, respect, consent, intimacy and **mutual pleasure**

Comment - is discussing sexual activity appropriate for students in Secondary School? This is de-sensitising young people to discussing sexual activity and in effect normalizing it – thereby sexualising students. The focus given here in adult relationships is on intimate sexual activity and pleasure. Consent arises for sexual encounters so this is educating young people about consent for sexual intercourse etc; as the legal age for sexual intercourse in Ireland is 17 years this is entirely inappropriate. The 'sex is for pleasure' philosophy underlying the whole RSE curriculum shines through here. What about the importance of **commitment, trust, communication**, and the quality of relationships? What about the morality of sexual intimacy when consent is the only criteria?

A definition of '**sexual activity**' is given in the Glossary of Terms in Appendix 2 of the full draft Senior Cycle SPHE Specification -

*'**Sexual activity**: a range of activities from kissing, touching, fondling to sexual intercourse (in all its forms) which involve giving and receiving sexual pleasure. These activities can be solitary or involve other people.'*

Comment - The NCCA 'sex is for pleasure' approach pervading the whole RSE Curriculum is evident here – no reference to the relationship context (eg sexual activity can be solitary) – hardly the message that parents want to give their students, as with the reference to sexual intercourse '*in all its forms*'.

A definition of 'sexuality' is also given in the Glossary -

*'**Sexuality**: the components of a person that include their biological sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, sexual expression, sexual fantasies, attitudes and values related to sex. Aspects of sexuality can change as we go through different ages and relationships.'*

The highly sexualised nature of the SC SPHE course jumps out from this definition, including the implication that a person can have sexual relationships over time with different people.

LO 2.7 investigate the influence of pornography on attitudes, behaviours and **relationship expectation**

Comment - This is directing students to explore pornography: how could they assess the influence of pornography without actually watching pornography? This would also make young people curious about how pornography depicts sexual relationships. The assumption seems to be that all pupils in school would be watching pornographic material - in effect **normalizing the viewing of pornography** in this age group. It is also indicating that sexual activity is a normal expectation in relationships. What possible good can come from students investigating pornography when they should be directed away from it?

2.8 discuss image-based abuse, sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape and what to do if they or someone they know has experienced any of these

Comment - there may be some good in the above issues, but is it necessary to highlight **image based abuse**? This seems to be the question of intimate photos or images of young people circulating, or threatened to be circulated, on social media. If it warns students from taking intimate selfies or worse and sharing them on social media platforms it could be a good thing – but is this putting the very idea in young peoples' heads?

LO 2.9 explore sexual and reproductive health, including fertility, safer sexual practices, possible responses to an unplanned pregnancy, and how to access sexual health services'

Comment - all of the above aspects arise from sexual intercourse or 'sex in all its forms'. This will require educating students on how to have 'safe sex', which is a myth, as sex often takes place in less than ideal circumstances, especially for young people. But as indicated, the course will teach them how to deal with unplanned pregnancy – no doubt they would be taught about the 'morning after' pill and abortion. Is this what we want 15-18 year olds to be taught? The above learning outcome normalize sexual encounters without the context of relationships or commitment and would give students the impression that they can have safe sex, so there is no need for inherent caution about this.

Note that the draft SC SPHE curriculum has a new dimension to teachings in SPHE/RSE – assessment of what pupils have learned: *'The focus of assessment is to enable students to show evidence of their learning journey'*(Full SC SPHE Specification – see p.16 'Assessment'). Is this inappropriate for the intimate nature of topics covered in the Strand 2 on RSE and a violation of students' rights to privacy in these highly sensitive issues?

Strand 3: Into Adulthood

This includes -

LO 3.6 demonstrate allyship skills to challenge unfair or abusive behaviours and support greater equity and inclusion'.

Comment - These terms are generally used by the NCCA to refer to LGBTQ identified people, and these categories are the prime focus of 'allyship skills' under this heading, including transgender people. The NCCA Information Note on the SC SPHE makes this clear under the heading **'Inclusivity... an approach that is inclusive...of all genders, sexualities, ethnicities, religious beliefs, social classes and abilities/disabilities.'** The introduction to this section states - *'...build the skills needed to be a good ally to those experiencing discrimination or inequality'* – the NCCA have the LGBTQ community in mind in this category.

The 'Allyship skills' definition below is not given in the Submissions Template but it's in the Glossary of Terms in Appendix 2 of the full draft Senior Cycle SPHE Specification available at:

<https://ncca.ie/en/resources/draft-senior-cycle-social-personal-and-health-education-sphe-specification/->

‘Allyship Skills:.. Allyship involves recognising and using **one’s privileged status (for example as white or male or Irish person)** to support individuals from **minority identity groups**’.

Comment - This is an outrageous imposition of critical race theory on Irish school students, especially considering the long history of oppression of the Irish people. It is also a discriminatory statement against men and white people – this is a giveaway of how ideologically driven the NCCA school curriculum is, including gender identity and Queer theory, which have no place in the education of young people. The definition of allyship skills should be strongly rejected.

Note that after each Strand outlined in the Submissions Template it is stated – ***‘Please also let us know if you think anything important is missing from this Strand.’*** On this basis, comments could be made about the definitions in the **Glossary of Terms in Appendix 2** of the full version of the draft SC SPHE Specification (as is often the case, the highly sexualized terms are not included in the Consultation version), which show how sexually charged the new curriculum is; some of these terms are given below:

Appendix 2 Glossary of Terms used in Learning Outcomes

Below are some of the other controversial definitions in Appendix 2

‘Gender: gender means the **socially constructed roles, responsibilities, characteristics...**’ **Comment** - this is the false proposition that gender is socially constructed and unrelated to a child’s physical biological sex.

‘Gender identity: a person’s **felt internal and individual experience of gender**, which may or may not correspond with the sex registered at birth’. **Comment** - This is gender identity theory – that a person’s felt gender may be different from their biological sex; ie *‘a boy could become a girl, neither or both’* – as set out in some of the SPHE textbooks.

‘LGBTQI+: an umbrella term to signify gender and **sexuality diversity** and refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex people’. **Comment** - There is a completely disproportionate focus on LGBTQ matters in the SC SPHE course and this is generally what they are referring to when they use the term ‘diversity’ in the SC Specification.

‘Sexuality: the components of a person that include their biological sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, sexual expression, sexual fantasies, attitudes and values related to sex. Aspects of sexuality can change as we go through different ages and relationships.’ **Comment** - The highly sexualised nature of the SC SPHE course jumps out from this definition, including the implication that a person can have sexual relationships with different people over time.

‘Sexual Orientation: each person’s capacity for emotional and sexual attraction to, and intimate sexual relations with, individuals of a different gender or the same gender or more than one gender’.

Comment - This points to ‘intimate sexual relations’ with more than one person and more than one gender.

Social Norms... ‘it is important to interrogate, question and critique social norms, especially those which may be harmful, unhelpful or not reflective of what people actually feel is important’. **Comment** - This points students in the direction of the prime importance of their feelings – rather than any objective set of values in the area of sexuality and relationships. And it directs students to critique social norms – no doubt the normal conventional morality of sex is for marriage, or at least for a committed heterosexual relationship.

Please email the completed Submissions Template to the NCCA by Tues 17th Oct at - SPHDevelopments@ncca.ie

Also please send a copy to presidentcspa@gmail.com – we want to keep a copy of all Submissions to the NCCA, as they have previously downplayed or ignored comments from parents in consultations on their Sex Education programmes.