

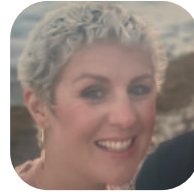
# Teacher Involvement and Engagement in Primary Curriculum Consultations

Curriculum change and reform can be challenging and complex. The development and dissemination of the Primary Curriculum Framework marks a critical period of curriculum change in Ireland, which impacts greatly on primary education. This article draws on the author's doctoral research, undertaken at Mary Immaculate College, into the design and development of the first phase of the Primary Language Curriculum, to examine how consultation processes have developed in the last decade (McGarry, 2017).

Conducting nationwide consultation is an onerous task but is a critical element of curriculum reform. It is therefore necessary to examine the approach adopted by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) during the design of the Primary Language Curriculum (PLC) and the Primary Curriculum Framework (PCF).

Following the initial design of the PLC, where teachers were represented through language development groups, educational committees, and a cluster of network schools, the NCCA endeavoured to consult all primary school teachers on the first phase of this curriculum design. This wider consultation involved posting a draft of the PLC on the NCCA website and inviting teachers to complete a 24-question survey (NCCA, 2014). Teachers were also encouraged to email their views to the NCCA. The NCCA's communication strategy used social media, web pages, events, and partner organisations (NCCA, 2018).

There was a poor response to this wider consultation, however, with an interim NCCA report (2014) suggesting that only 871 teachers engaged – less than 3% of the primary teaching population. This was a significant limitation (McGarry, 2017). The report acknowledged that 'every consultation has its limits' and posited several possible factors in the low response rate, including timing (it was the final and busiest term of the school year) and



**Caroline McGarry**

Lecturer in Education, South East Technological University

---

**The development of the Primary Curriculum Framework marks a critical period of curriculum change in Ireland. This article draws on the author's doctoral research into the design and development of the first phase of the Primary Language Curriculum, to examine how teacher consultation processes have developed in the last decade and to reflect on broader systemic issues of teacher autonomy in Ireland.**

---

the process of facilitating teachers to share their views (NCCA, 2014). Other possible barriers, proposed in my doctoral work, included lack of awareness of the curriculum change or consultation, and perceived lack of time by teachers. There may also be disparity in how teachers' roles and responsibilities are perceived by external and internal stakeholders (McGarry, 2017).

Consultation during the design of the Primary Curriculum Framework incorporated additional measures in an effort to enhance teacher engagement. For example, it was designed to focus on six key messages associated with the draft framework. Data was gathered through bilateral meetings, online focus groups, and questionnaires (NCCA, 2023). At this point in the PCF development, however, the number of teachers engaging in the wider consultation remains relatively low, with 1,178 teachers having completed online questionnaires at the time of writing.

The fact that the vast majority of primary school teachers did not engage in the wider consultation during either curriculum change necessitates reflection. Could it indicate a lack of interest among teachers, who are happy to leave decisions to the experts? It could be argued that it calls into question the NCCA's overall approach to wider consultations, whereby teachers may not be receptive to reading and responding to curricular materials. It may also raise questions about broader systemic issues concerning teacher autonomy.

---

## REFERENCES

- McGarry, C. (2017) 'In between the lines of the primary language curriculum: Teacher involvement in the process of curriculum change'. PhD thesis, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. <http://hdl.handle.net/10395/2099>.
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) (2014) *Consultation on the Draft Primary Language Curriculum: Junior Infants to Second Class: Interim report*. Dublin: NCCA. <https://ncca.ie/media/2046/consultation-on-the-draft-primary-language-curriculum-interim-report.pdf>.
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) (2018) *Primary Developments: Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile: Report on the consultation on the draft curriculum for Stage 3 and 4/Céim 3 agus 4*. Dublin: NCCA. [https://ncca.ie/media/3626/plc\\_consultation-report.pdf](https://ncca.ie/media/3626/plc_consultation-report.pdf).
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) (2022) *Technical Report: To accompany the report on the consultation on the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. Dublin: NCCA. [https://ncca.ie/media/5884/technical-report-to-accompany-the-report-on-the-consultation-on-the-draft\\_december-2022.pdf](https://ncca.ie/media/5884/technical-report-to-accompany-the-report-on-the-consultation-on-the-draft_december-2022.pdf).
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) (2023) *Report on the consultation on the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. Dublin: NCCA. [https://ncca.ie/media/5902/consultation-on-the-draft-primary-curriculum-framework\\_december-2022.pdf](https://ncca.ie/media/5902/consultation-on-the-draft-primary-curriculum-framework_december-2022.pdf).