



NCCA

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

Draft specification

for Senior Cycle SPHE

NCCA consultation, 2023

NCCA consultation on draft specification for Senior Cycle SPHE

The NCCA is currently updating the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum and as part of this work an updated Senior Cycle SPHE curriculum is now available for consultation. A key part of the consultation is feedback from individuals and groups who are interested in this area of young people's education. The consultation on the draft Senior Cycle SPHE curriculum will remain open until October 18th . You can share your feedback by completing this template and sending it to: SPHEdevelopments@ncca.ie

Before completing the template, please read the draft Senior Cycle SPHE curriculum at this link: <https://ncca.ie/en/senior-cycle/curriculum-developments/senior-cycle-social-personal-and-health-education-sphe/>

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Senior Cycle SPHE – Feedback

If you are contributing your views **an individual**, please provide details below

Name:	
Email address:	
Do you wish to be listed as a contributor to this consultation on the NCCA website?	Yes/No
Do you wish to have your written submission published on the NCCA website?	Yes/No

If you are contributing your views on behalf of **an organisation or group**, please provide details below

Name:	Dr Kenny Doyle, Dr Noel Richardson,
Email address:	kenny@mensnetwork.ie
Name of organisation/group:	Men's Development Network, National Centre for Men's Health
Does your organisation wish to be listed as a contributor to this consultation on the NCCA website?	Yes
Does your organisation wish to have this written submission published on the NCCA website?	Yes

Questions to consider

Question 1: Aim

The aim of the updated curriculum is to '*empower students to become healthy, resilient, responsible and empathetic young adults; nurture respectful and caring relationships; and prepare for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life now and beyond school.*'

Please state whether you agree this aim summarises the purpose of SPHE for senior cycle students and your reason for agreeing/disagreeing.

Insert response here:

This submission has been prepared by the Men's Development Network and the National Centre for Men's Health.

Men's Development Network has been active for 26 years in engaging men and boys to promote positive forms of masculinity and to encourage them to be their most authentic selves while promoting social, emotional and inter-personal development and fostering the engagement of men and boys as allies for gender equality and the ending of Gender Based Violence. Working towards these goals MDN presently runs a number of focussed programmes, these include:

- (1) The CHOICES Programme the national domestic violence intervention programme working with male perpetrators to end their violent or abusive behaviour and become non-violent and respectful within their intimate partner relationships.

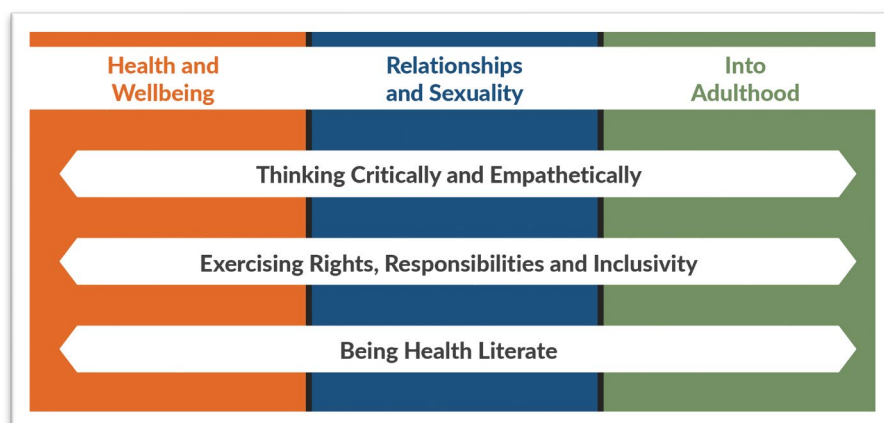
- (2) The Male Advice Line – the national freephone advice and support service for male victims/survivors of domestic abuse.
- (3) The White Ribbon Campaign – MDN is the national delivery agent of the White Ribbon Campaign which aims to engage with men and boys on ending Violence Against Women and Gender Based Violence.

The National Centre for Men’s Health aims to develop innovative and applied research programmes in the area of men’s health through the development of partnerships with key stakeholders. In doing so, the Centre seeks to raise the public profile of men’s health issues, and to contribute to effective and gender-competent policy and practice in men’s health in Ireland.

We agree overall with the stated aims of this curriculum. Our submission is one which is primarily based around the methodologies of engagement with young people, particularly young boys which we believe should be strengths based and should incorporate the values of a non-judgemental non-adversarial approach.

Question 2: The Learning

The draft course is structured around three strands and three cross-cutting elements, illustrated below:



Below provides extracts from the draft specification. See draft specification pp 11–15 for a more detailed outline of the learning.

In the following section, we would value your feedback on each of the three strands.

Strand 1: Health and Wellbeing

Within this strand, students will explore the factors that influence their physical, social, emotional and mental health and the relationships between these aspects of health. They will learn ways to take care of themselves and stay as healthy as possible, with a particular focus on gaining awareness, skills, techniques and information to protect their mental health and wellbeing.

Students should be able to

1.1	research the determinants of good health
1.2	discuss the enablers and barriers to managing a healthy life balance - including study, work, play, sleep, people, 'me time', and ways to manage greater balance
1.3	critically analyse the origins and effects of social norms and attitudes to alcohol and drugs
1.4	explore the factors that influence mental health and wellbeing, including the influence of family, peers, societal attitudes, media, technology, alcohol and drugs, and one's sense of self
1.5	recognise unhelpful thinking patterns and negative self-talk and how these can affect emotions and behaviour
1.6	draw on a variety of strategies that can help regulate and manage harmful thoughts and emotions in order to nurture positive mental health
1.7	recognise the signs and symptoms of stress and anxiety in themselves and others and recognise when help should be sought, where to go and how to access help if needed
1.8	discuss healthy and unhealthy ways of responding to stress and anxiety
1.9	explain the pathways towards addiction, the signs and consequences of different kinds of addictions and where to go and how to access help, if needed
1.1	discuss and devise ways to safely manage social situations where their own or others' health or safety may be at risk.

Having considered the learning outcomes in Strand 1, please comment on whether you think the learning outcomes provide (a) clarity on expectations for learning in Senior Cycle SPHE and whether you consider the learning outcomes to be (b) relevant to the lives and needs of 16-18 year olds today. Please also let us know if you think anything important is missing from this Strand.

Insert response here:

Overall, well-balanced set of learning outcomes covering key aspects of health and wellbeing. Consider the following:

- Ensure that Learning Outcome (LO) 1 intersects with other objectives under Strand 1 so that there is a clear acknowledgement of how the broader determinants of health impact students' health and wellbeing, managing a healthy life balance, coping strategies etc.
- The focus on social norms is helpful – should this be extended to the area of mental health also to explore potential obstacles such as stigma, acknowledgement of vulnerability?
- We have some concerns about how the language of LOs 5 and 6 might inadvertently reinforce more restrictive or unhelpful constructions of masculinity – 'unhelpful thinking patterns'; 'regulate and manage harmful thoughts and emotions' – a more fundamental objective, for boys in particular, ought to be i) improved health awareness (in terms of recognising different emotions and what is causing someone to feel a certain way) and ii) improved health literacy (in terms of the language to express emotions). The language used in LOs 5 and 6 might be seen as colluding with the notion that certain emotions (fear and sadness) are off limits for boys (by being 'unhelpful' or 'harmful').
- We propose that the importance of peer-support be named more explicitly in LO7.
- This may be addressed under other Strands, but could there be more of a focus on the importance of loneliness/isolation as a determinant of mental health and wellbeing?

Strand 2: Relationships and Sexuality

Within this strand students will explore the wide range of relationships that are important for their lives with a particular focus on gaining the awareness, knowledge and skills to support them in creating and nurturing respectful, caring and healthy relationships. This strand also supports students to recognise and be empowered to respond to instances of abuse or violence in relationships.

Note: Each of the learning outcomes below should be taught in a way that LGBTQ+ identities, relationships and families are fully integrated and reflected in teaching and learning, as opposed to being addressed within stand-alone lessons.

Students should be able to	
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
2.2	reflect on how their attitudes, beliefs, values and identity can influence the dynamics of friendships, relationships and sexual behaviour
2.3	discuss sexual activity as an aspect of adult relationships characterised by care, respect, consent, intimacy and mutual pleasure
2.4	examine how harmful attitudes around gender are perpetuated in the media, online and in society and discuss strategies for challenging these attitudes and narratives
2.5	identify and consider common signs of abusive relationships, including coercive control
2.6	explain the root causes and consequences of gender-based violence (GBV), with a particular focus on violence against women and girls, and outline the supports available
2.7	investigate the influence of pornography on attitudes, behaviours and relationship expectations
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
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.

Having considered the learning outcomes in Strand 2, please comment on whether you think the learning outcomes provide (a) **clarity** on expectations for learning in Senior Cycle SPHE and whether you consider the learning outcomes to be (b) **relevant** to the lives and needs of 16-year olds today. Please also let us know if you think anything important is missing from this Strand.

Insert response here:

With regard to clarity the learning outcomes presented are clear and concise. There is a worry however that the 9 separate learning outcomes are too large, and we wonder if it would be possible in the time allotted to give each of these crucial topics the time and space that they require and deserve.

With regard to learning outcomes 2.2 and 2.4 we feel that they could be merged. There should be a particular emphasis placed on gendered identities and how they may influence and structure beliefs, practices and behaviours in relationships and friendships. We propose the facilitation of

student workshops where they can explore the prescient aspects of masculinity and femininity as well as the expectations placed on them by their gender. By realising the constructed-ness of many facets of gendered behaviour we believe that it will allow students to rise above many of these expectations and become their most authentic selves.

We see learning outcomes 2.3, 2.7 and 2.8 as being closely linked. The availability and prevalence of pornography has increased exponentially in recent years. Research carried out by the Men's Development Network surveyed men aged between 18 and 55 and found that on average, 50% used pornography weekly or more and a further 18% used pornography daily or more than daily. Amongst the same age range 38% of respondents reported that pornography had influenced their expectations of sex. While there is a lacunae in the research literature with regard to pornography usage among Irish teenagers it is undoubtedly the case that the trends noted above would also be found among the teenage cohort. As such there is a need to confront and counter harmful ideas and attitudes around sex and promote healthy relationships characterised by respect, bodily autonomy, consent, intimacy and mutual pleasure.

There is also a need to include under the aegis of healthy relationships content on how relationships can end. Relationship breakups which are part and parcel of intimate life can be extremely upsetting and it would be beneficial to consider teaching ways in which this can be mitigated against.

With regard to learning outcomes 2.5 and 2.6 we see these as a crucial foundation of the SPHE programme. As an organisation that is the lead agent for the White Ribbon Campaign in Ireland, we see these learning outcomes as being crucial to the prevention of gender-based violence. While we wholeheartedly welcome the importance afforded to this in the curriculum, we wish to highlight the importance of the pedagogical methodology that will be employed in this context. In particular we wish to ensure that young men are not presented as being to blame or as a problem which needs to be fixed. Such an approach would be likely to promote defensiveness and disengagement with the material and so should be avoided. Instead, we wish to ensure that a strengths-based approach is employed in engaging with both young men and women. Such an approach would be founded on the values of being non-judgemental and non-adversarial and present young men with the space to define themselves positively. The teaching SPHE toolkit characterises the programme in terms of praxis, as an ongoing process of critical reflection and action nurtured by dialogue with others. It is important that this dimension of the programme is foregrounded, and we see this as being imperative to its success.

Strand 3: Into Adulthood

Within this strand students will gain specific knowledge and skills to support them as they make the transition to adulthood and learn how to take greater responsibility for themselves. This includes being able to manage choices, develop the skills that are needed to plan for the future, establish and maintain good habits, and achieve goals. It also supports students in learning how to take care of themselves in times of change or challenge, understand their rights and responsibilities before the law, and build the skills needed to be a good ally to those experiencing discrimination or inequality.

Students should be able to	
3.1	explore strategies for self-care that can help maintain health and prevent ill-health
3.2	demonstrate self-management skills necessary for life
3.3	explore a range of life events where they might experience change, loss or heartache and discuss how to care for themselves and/or others during these times
3.4	summarise accurately their rights and responsibilities before the law as a young adult with reference to online communicating, age of consent, alcohol and drug use, their right to access services and work-place rights
3.5	consider the skills needed to stand up for themselves and others, and the range of situations where this might arise
3.6	demonstrate allyship skills to challenge unfair or abusive behaviours and support greater equity and inclusion.

Having considered the learning outcomes in Strand 3, please comment on whether you think the learning outcomes provide (a) **clarity** on expectations for learning in Senior Cycle SPHE and whether you consider the learning outcomes to be (b) **relevant** to the lives and needs of 16–18 year olds. Please also let us know if you think anything important is missing from this Strand.

Insert response here:

We see 3.1 and 3.2 as being similar to the broader content covered under pillar 1.

Under 3.3 we welcome the proposal and furthermore we propose that all students, but particularly young men be guided in a practical way through the grieving process. We see grief and its attendant processes not just in terms of the loss of loved one but also the loss of further facets of life such as the loss of a relationship or the loss of status. In terms of preventing gender-based violence, if young people understand the stages of grief and were able to recognise when they are experiencing them they would be more likely to be able to process and verbalise these experiences and less likely to take their feelings of loss, shock anger and so on out on other people.

As part of both 3.5 and 3.6 we see the value in considering the inclusion of active bystander training to intervene particularly in instances of gender-based violence or harassment.

Question 3: Any further suggestions

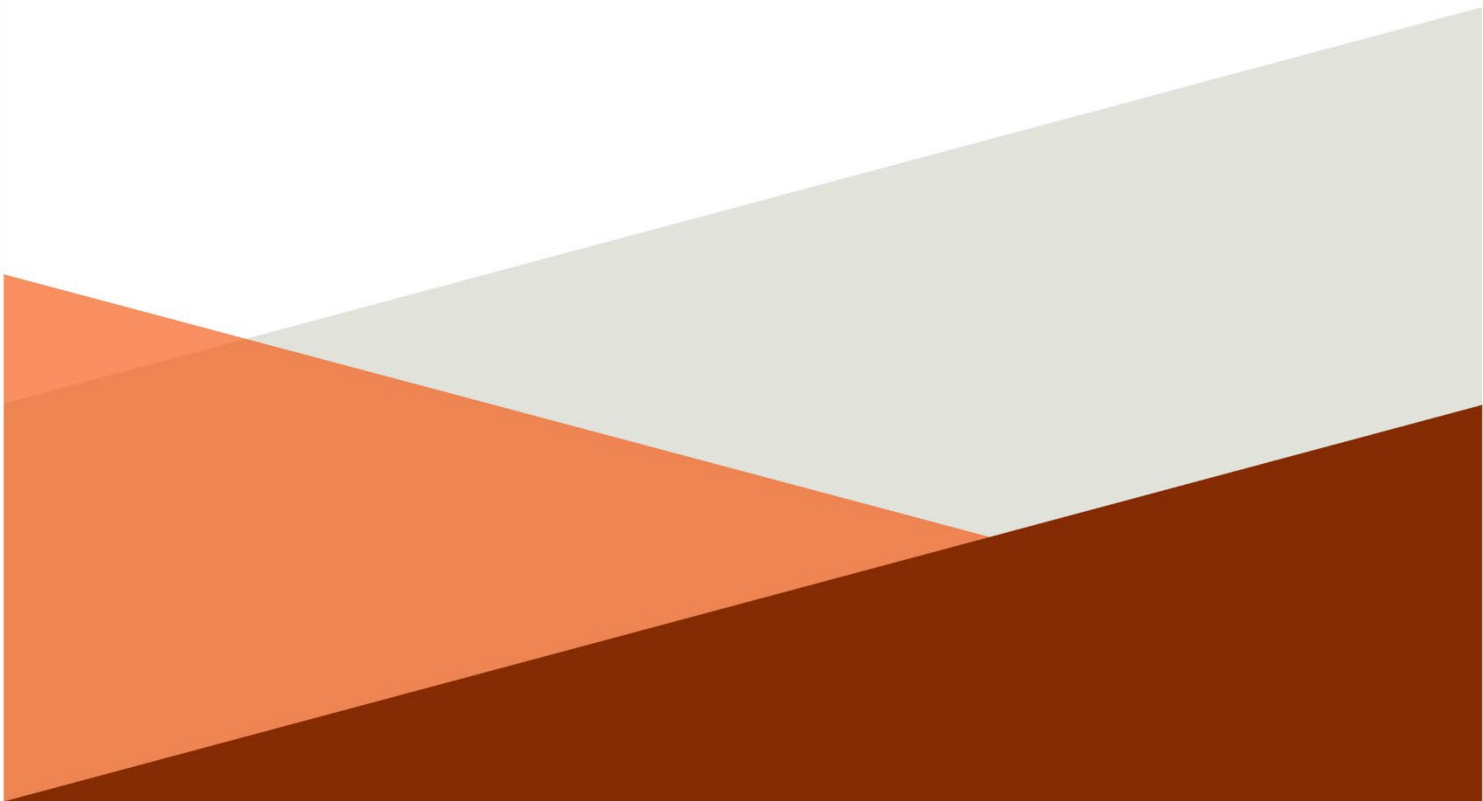
We would appreciate any further suggestions for how the draft updated Senior Cycle SPHE curriculum could be improved?

Insert response here:

While we welcome the depth and breadth of the content of this programme, we wish to ensure that all topics can be covered and given the time and space required for students to meaningfully explore them.

We wish to underline the importance of adopting strengths-based methodological approaches that revolve around creating safety, trust, rapport, and meaningful relationships with boys; connecting positive masculine identities with being healthy and proactive about health and wellbeing; using strong, positive messages that encourage boys to engage with health and wellbeing issues without amplifying shame or blame; enabling ample opportunities and time for boys to share their experiences to show common challenges, to foster peer-support and to create a community of mutual help.

Thank you for taking the time to share your views with us. Please email this document to SPHEdevelopments@ncca.ie before 3 November, 2023



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