



**NCCA**

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

# **Draft specification for Junior Cycle SPHE**

NCCA consultation



## Draft specification for Junior Cycle SPHE - NCCA consultation

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The NCCA is currently updating the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum and as part of that work an updated junior cycle SPHE short course 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 will remain open until Friday, October 14<sup>th</sup> 2022.  
You can send us your feedback by using this template and sending it to [SPHEdevelopments@ncca.ie](mailto:SPHEdevelopments@ncca.ie)

Before completing the template please read the draft junior cycle SPHE short course at this link: <https://ncca.ie/en/updates-and-events/consultations/>.

Extracts from this are provided below.

### Date Protection Statement

The NCCA is committed to protecting your privacy and does not collect any personal information about you through this survey, other than information that you provide by your own consent. Any personal information you volunteer to the NCCA will be respected in accordance with the highest standards of security and confidentiality in accordance with GDPR (2016) and the Data Protection Acts (1998 - 2018). NCCA, as a public body operating under the Open Data and Public Service Information Directive (2021), is required to publish publicly funded research. Further information on the NCCA's Data Protection Policy can be found [here](#).

Any data from this will be further anonymized and aggregated and only made available after the final report is completed. Where a respondent selects 'yes' to the question *Are you willing to be listed as a contributor to the consultation*, respondents are consenting to having their name / organisation's name published with the list of written submission on [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie)

## SPHE Short Course - Feedback

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<b>Name:</b> Sarah Benson	<b>Email address:</b> sarah.benson@womensaid.ie
<b>Are you contributing views as:</b>	
<b>An organisation</b>	Yes
<b>Are you willing to be listed as a contributor to the consultation on the NCCA website?</b>	Yes
<b>Name of organisation</b>	Women's Aid

### Questions to consider:

#### Question 1.

The aim of the updated short course is *'to nurture students' self-awareness and positive self-worth and to develop the knowledge, understanding, skills, dispositions and values that will help them to create and maintain respectful and caring relationships and lead fulfilling and healthy lives.'*

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

#### Insert response here:

Women's Aid is happy with the aim, which overall is positive. The focus on positive self-worth is important, especially for young women, transgender and non-binary people who, due to societal messaging, may not believe they deserve respectful and caring relationships and fulfilling lives.

However, the aim needs specific goals which are linked to the learning outcomes to be most effective and clear.

The Citizens' Assembly recommended that the curriculum should promote gender equality and explicitly cover gender power dynamics, consent and domestic, sexual and gender based violence both offline and online<sup>1</sup>.

This recommendation is echoed in the Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based violence which again links young people's understanding of gender equality with consent and healthy relationships<sup>2</sup>.

Moreover, Women's Aid research on intimate relationship abuse and young people aged 18 to 25 shows that 1 in 5 young women and 1 in 11 young men in Ireland have suffered intimate relationship abuse and that **over half of the affected young women first experienced this abuse under the age of 18**. It is therefore essential to include gender-based violence and intimate relationship abuse in the curriculum<sup>3</sup> of younger students, as a preventative measure.

Therefore, Women's Aid recommends that the following are included under the aim and also in the rationale:

- An overarching focus on gender equality and the links between gender inequality and violence against women and girls. This should include gender stereotypes and gender norms and how these impact relationships and young people's choices and the barriers to realising rights based distinctly on sex/gender, sexuality, and gender identity.
- A focused goal on prevention of gender-based violence and abuse, particularly within the context of dating relationships.
- A focused goal on promotion of healthy relationships and barriers to same.
- An overarching intersectional lens taking into consideration the experiences and barriers of disabled people, people of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity, neuro-divergent people and people from diverse ethnic communities.
- The course should be evidence based, inclusive and objective and should not be influenced by the religious ethos of the school, so that all students have the opportunity to learn these important life lessons.
- The course should promote positive and equal sexuality and reproductive rights, including information on abortion and contraception.

## Question 2.

The course is structured around four strands and three crosscutting elements (see specification pp 9-16). Having considered these please give us your feedback on the proposed course outline.

Specifically, please comment on whether you think the learning outcomes provide *clarity* on expectations for learning in junior cycle SPHE and whether you consider the learning outcomes to be *relevant* to the lives, interests and needs of 12-15 year old's today.

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<sup>1</sup> Recommendation 27, Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality, June 2021

<sup>2</sup> ZERO TOLERANCE Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual & Gender-Based Violence 2022-2026, page 26

<sup>3</sup> Women's Aid (2020) *One in Five Young Women Suffer Intimate Relationship Abuse in Ireland*  
[https://www.toointoyou.ie/assets/files/pdf/one\\_in\\_five\\_women\\_report\\_womens\\_aid\\_2020.pdf](https://www.toointoyou.ie/assets/files/pdf/one_in_five_women_report_womens_aid_2020.pdf)

## Insert response here:

Women's Aid agrees with the draft SPHE curriculum for junior cycle and in particular we are delighted that it includes:

- Reflection on sex/gender equity and gender stereotypes and their impact on relationships (1.5).
- Discussion on the online world and sharing of personal information and images, including the risks and consequences of sharing sexual imagery online (2.7-2.9).
- Education on sexuality and healthy/unhealthy relationships, including support options (3.2-3.4, 3.10).
- Pressures of being sexually intimate (3.5).
- Consent in intimate relationships (3.7).
- (3.9) Influence of digital media, and in particular, the influence of pornography on young people's sexual expression. The need to raise awareness in young people on how pornography fuels misogyny and undermines gender equality is one of the goals of the National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence and Women's Aid warmly welcomes its inclusion here<sup>4</sup>.
- Bystander\* approach to abuse (\*which could be renamed as or paired with 'upstander') (4.8).

In relation to sharing personal images, we would suggest that the curriculum uses more specific language to make sure that the impact of image based sexual abuse is examined in a way that does not inadvertently suggest that victims of image based sexual abuse are in any way responsible for intimate images being shared and that makes it clear that responsibility is totally with the people who take and/or share intimate images without consent. The legislation in this regard should also be covered (Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act 2020).

While the curriculum addressed all of the above topics, it is unclear whether there is a gender analysis and an overall framework that clearly links gender inequality with harmful social norms and gender-based violence, including teenage dating violence, sexual harassment and online abuse of girls. As recommended above we suggest that this link is made explicit.

Women's Aid also recommends:

- Each section should be viewed through a gendered lens, 1.5 should be threaded throughout all other strands.
- Prevention of gender-based violence needs to be prioritised throughout.
- All sections are impacted by intersectional factors. This needs to be clear in examples given. Gender equality will be different for people from more marginalised groups whose experiences, expectations, needs and potential additional barriers must be understood in the context of their particular and distinct experiences which – in addition to structural gender inequality – can relate to their ethnicity, disability, sexuality, or gender identity (for example). The course should be inclusive whereby students of all religions, ethnicities, gender identities, sexualities, social classes, and disabilities should see themselves in it.
- Strands can overlap e.g. relationships can impact emotional and physical well-being and vice versa. This should be reflected in course delivery. There should be opportunity for reflection throughout the course to look back at what has been learned and how it impacts other strands.

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<sup>4</sup> Third Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Strategy Implementation Plan, Goal 1.3.7

### **Specific comments on the four strands:**

#### **Strand 1: Understanding myself and others –**

- Inclusivity and diversity should be at the core of this strand. In delivery, it is important to be aware that some students will have experienced what is being discussed in terms of exclusion, harms, or discrimination.
- It is important to retain distinct language throughout to ensure that content and information are relevant to all in different and distinct ways: Sex/Gender, Sexuality & Gender Identity.
- **1.3** is very important to set expectations for what young people deserve and are entitled to expect in current or future relationships. Empowerment is key.
- **1.4** is also part of relationships and can impact how women are treated in relationships e.g., biphobia (bi women not seen as valid by straight male partners), or how transgender women are treated by male partners.
- **1.5** is key in terms of gender stereotypes and should be threaded across all strands.
- **1.6** should also look at how to respond when someone is subject to these biases, e.g., calling out sexism.

#### **Strand 2: Making healthy choices –**

- **2.1** should refer to possible impact of gender-based violence and discrimination on physical and mental health.
  - **2.4:** Some of the difficult situations included should be scenarios where it is hard to seek support or stand up in relation to gender abuse, for example peer group upholding sexist beliefs, friends not believing a disclosure of abuse.
  - **2.7:** This learning outcome should include discussion on creating digital boundaries, sharing of intimate images and body image pressures.
  - **2.8:** This learning outcome should also include coercion, abuse, stalking and harassment. Again, it needs to be intersectional e.g., transgender women and ethnic minority women experience high levels of online abuse.
- 2.9:** This may be better located in Strand 3. In any case, it is important that the discussion around this learning outcome does not blame young people for sharing their own images, and specifically does not blame the victim of image based sexual abuse. Coercive control needs to be part of this learning, including being coerced into taking and sending intimate images and videos, which is not the fault of the victim. It should be used as an opportunity for students to reflect on the harms of sharing images of others without consent, and to inform them of the relevant legislation.

#### **Strand 3: Relationships and sexuality –**

- As this section is positive and rights based, it must acknowledge that not everyone can realise the same rights. It assumes inclusion and equity.
- Overall, there needs to be a section on understanding what relationship abuse is, i.e., power and control. This needs to include a piece on the types of abuse e.g., emotional, sexual, physical, economic, and online and the complexities of each.
- **3.3** needs to be separated into two separate points: 1. promoting healthy relationships and 2. intimate relationship abuse, the signs (which must be intersectional) and the supports available. It needs to explicitly mention coercive control (including what is it, the impacts and relevant legislation) and grooming.

- **3.5** should not just be about showing respect for people’s choices, but should also be about yourself, understanding what you are or aren’t comfortable with and what coercion means. There is a need to mention power and control in relation to consent.
- **3.7** should include an understanding of what consent is and is not, and an understanding of barriers to consent e.g., coercion and factors that deny consent such as intoxication. It should include recognition that sexual abuse is rooted in gender inequality and is about power and dominance, not about inability to control sexual desire.
- **3.8** should list all contraception and the barriers to contraception access and information on abortion. It should include information on contraception for LGBTQ+ people.
- This section needs a piece on sexual health and positive sexual health.
- *This section could be triggering and lead to disclosures. Teachers need to be equipped to deal with this and school policies need to be in place to support victims/survivors and to respond appropriately to perpetrators.*

#### **Strand 4: Emotional well-being –**

- This section should include external factors which may be impacting on mental health, such as having experienced domestic abuse in the family (including witnessing abuse of a parent or other family member) harassment, sexualisation of young women, relationship abuse, online abuse, sexism etc.
- Again, this needs a gender lens. Young women’s mental health and well-being can be severely impacted by their experiences of gender based violence within and outside of intimate relationships. Women’s Aid’s *One in Five* report<sup>5</sup> tells us that of the young women who were abused, 84% said that the abuse had a severe impact including loss of self-esteem, anxiety and depression, withdrawal from family and friends, giving up work or college, suicidal thoughts/attempting suicide, needing treatment for physical injuries, and living in fear.
- An intersectional lens also needs to be included, such as impacts of abuse on people with minority sexual orientation or gender identity, young people from ethnic minority backgrounds and young disabled people.
- **4.6** should include the impact of these behaviours on mental health and well-being.
- **4.7** should include what would be a barrier to speaking out, how to overcome these i.e., bystander/upstander approach, and how this needs to be supported by a culture of equality within the school.
- **4.8** should link in with Bystander Training, but should also acknowledge where it should be brought further and is not the responsibility of the student e.g., student acting abusively.
- Stigma surrounding mental health and mental illness should be addressed. Stigma can act as a particular barrier to emotional wellbeing, especially if a young woman has not disclosed abuse to anyone and how it has affected her. According to Women’s Aid research<sup>6</sup>, 32% of young women never spoke to anyone about the abuse they experienced with many suffering in silence. When asked about the impact intimate relationship abuse had on them, 84% of young women said that the abuse had a severe impact<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Women’s Aid (2020) *One in Five Young Women Suffer Intimate Relationship Abuse*.

[https://www.womensaid.ie/assets/files/pdf/one\\_in\\_five\\_women\\_report\\_womens\\_aid\\_2020.pdf](https://www.womensaid.ie/assets/files/pdf/one_in_five_women_report_womens_aid_2020.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Women’s Aid (2022) *Women’s Aid research on intimate relationship abuse and young people aged 18 to 25 in Ireland*. [https://www.womensaid.ie/assets/files/pdf/womens\\_aid\\_too\\_into\\_you\\_factsheet\\_2022.pdf](https://www.womensaid.ie/assets/files/pdf/womens_aid_too_into_you_factsheet_2022.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Women’s Aid (2020) *One in Five Young Women Suffer Intimate Relationship Abuse*.

[https://www.womensaid.ie/assets/files/pdf/one\\_in\\_five\\_women\\_report\\_womens\\_aid\\_2020.pdf](https://www.womensaid.ie/assets/files/pdf/one_in_five_women_report_womens_aid_2020.pdf)

### **Observations on the 3 cross cutting elements**

Women's Aid welcomes the 3 cross cutting elements:

- **Awareness** – Great to have gender included in people's sense of self and positive to reference to a common humanity, dignity and rights. It important to acknowledge that people who are further marginalised aren't treated the same, and that they don't have the same access to their rights.
- **Dialogue** – Creating safe spaces is essential. Discussion needs to be led by students and be cognisant of speaking for or about those in the room who are more vulnerable e.g., speaking about experiences of abuse in a room where some may have experienced or be currently experiencing abuse.
- **Reflection and Action** – Reflection could bring things up for students personally. There needs to be an emphasis on help seeking behaviour and disclosure of abuse that may result from reflection. Teachers need to be prepared and appropriately trained to handle these.

### **Question 3.**

Students will complete one Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA) as part of their learning in the SPHE short course. The proposed CBA for the updated short course is a portfolio of learning and is summarised as follows:

*Students will choose three pieces of work, completed over time and linked to different strands of learning within the short course, and present these accompanied by a reflection on why each piece was chosen and how it marked important learning for the student in SPHE.*

Do you think this is a suitable CBA for the updated SPHE short course? Please explain your answer.

### **Insert response here:**

Women's Aid welcomes the reflective nature of the assessment.

As gender equality and prevention of gender-based violence should be key goals of the course, a gender perspective should be mandatory in assessment and at least one of the 3 pieces of work should deal with gender equality or gender based violence.

As this course provides essential and lifelong learnings, it needs to be treated with equal importance to core subjects and this should be reflected in the assessment.

### **Question 4.**

Any further suggestions for how the draft updated SPHE course could be improved?

### **Insert response here:**

A few additional suggestions are outlined below :

- **Consultation:** Women's Aid believes that consultation with students and diverse groups is vital in finalising the course.
- **Six indicators of well-being (Figure 2 and Table 3):** It is important that the wording around these indicators does not inadvertently place the blame on people who may be abused and should recognize that it is not always possible to make the right choices, especially when there is abuse or



coercion. For example, it may not always be possible for a student to make the “right choice” in relation to their safety. Resilience and awareness should include awareness of support available.

- **Training:** Women’s Aid recommends that specific training is provided to SPHE teachers, including on how to manage a safe space and respond to disclosures, and that specialist NGOs are consulted in the development of said training, in particular in relation to intimate partner abuse and coercive control.
- **FAQS:** Should add an FAQ to the SPHE FAQs about why we need to educate young people about abuse and share with them the opposite model of healthy behaviors.
- **Glossary:** needs definitions of coercive control, intimate relationship abuse and the types of abuse e.g. emotional abuse, online abuse.

Finally, Women’s Aid would like to have more information on:

- Specific resources that will be provided to teachers, especially in relation to healthy/unhealthy relationships, consent training, online harassment and non-consensual image sharing.

In this regard Women’s Aid has developed a range of materials for young women experiencing abuse in their relationship. While targeted at an older cohort (18-25), some of these resources can be used/adapted for a younger audience. They include: how to spot the common warning signs of intimate relationship abuse; survivor stories; a relationship quiz; an online safety guide; information on the different types of abuse; tips for helping friends; and research on intimate relationship abuse and young people aged 18 to 25. Many of the materials used as part of Too Into You are relevant to those under 18. These resources are available here: <https://www.toointoyou.ie/>

- How using students’ examples for future discussions (page 12) is going to be evaluated and how can it be ensured that the diversity of students is represented in these banks of examples.

**Thank you for taking the time to share your views with us. Please email this document to [SPHEdevelopments@ncca.ie](mailto:SPHEdevelopments@ncca.ie) before Friday, October 14<sup>th</sup> 2022**



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