



Draft specification for Senior Cycle SPHE

NCCA consultation, 2023

Submission by Global Action Plan

October 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

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

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Name of organisation/group:	Global Action Plan Ireland (GAP)
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:

We broadly agree that the aim summarises the purpose of SPHE for senior cycle students. The student-focused, future-oriented, multi-faceted nature of the aim is welcome, particularly the emphasis on health, resilience, respect, empathy and care. The focus on students' lives now as well as preparing them for the future is an important one.

Furthermore, we welcome the description of multiple literacies and the inclusion of three cross-cutting elements in the SPHE Specification, which strengthen the emphasis and centrality of critical thinking, empathy, rights and responsibilities, inclusivity, and health literacy to the education of the whole person. Each of these elements reinforces

the role of the student as an agent of change, empowered to act for a more equitable, sustainable world for all.

Students taking the new SPHE will be living in a world dramatically altered by human-induced climate change. There are, therefore, a number of important points which we believe should be included and/or further emphasised right across the SPHE Specification, from the aim to the learning outcomes:

1. The incorporation of a global perspective. This specification should be framed by and embedded within the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. SDG 4: Quality Education, is of particular relevance to this, and all, curriculum development. Target 4.7 provides the impetus for ensuring that all learners access quality Global Citizenship Education (GCE).
2. An emphasis on the multiple crises currently facing humanity and an acknowledgment of the urgency with which humanity must grapple with these crises (climate, biodiversity, social), for the sake of the health and wellbeing of current and future generations and of the planet. This should include a recognition of the socio-economic determinants of health and wellbeing. It should also acknowledge the need for Global Citizenship Education values such as empathy, solidarity, inclusivity and learner agency to be promoted and nurtured in the face of these crises.
3. Recognition of the interdependent relationship between humanity and the natural environment. This would include environmental health and its impact on both physical and mental wellbeing; and extending the language of care and respect to the planet and all living beings. This should aim to increase students' appreciation and value for the natural world through opportunities to engage with the outdoors.
4. An emphasis on interdependence and interconnectedness and on collective, as well as individual, wellbeing. This would be consistent with the Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines, and in particular the 'Connected' indicator i.e. connection with my school, my friends, my community and the wider world; appreciation that my actions and interactions impact on my own wellbeing and that of others, in local and global contexts.
The Specification should recognise that being part of, and actively involved in, a community, has a positive impact on personal physical and mental health and wellbeing, and students should be practically supported to build healthy engagements with local and global communities to this end.

5. Extension of the core values of SPHE. Students should develop an appreciation towards 'lifelong learning', recognising that one continually grows and learns throughout one's life. Students should also develop 'respectful relationships with people and the planet', exploring their obligations as beings who share the earth with others.
6. An emphasis on critical thinking skills and problem solving skills, and a recognition that they are essential for students now, and will continue to be essential into their futures, to help them to recognise and respond to misinformation and recognise and challenge vested interests.

Question 2: The Learning

The draft course is structured around three strands and three crosscutting 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:

(a) Clarity on expectations for learning in Senior Cycle SPHE

The individual learning outcomes for Strand 1 are clear.

(b) Relevance of learning outcomes to the lives and needs of 16-18 year olds today

We welcome the existing learning outcomes, all of which are highly relevant to the lives and needs of 16-18 year olds today. Each of these learning outcomes is essential and we particularly agree with the equipping of students with critical thinking skills to analyse societal attitudes, social and cultural norms, media influences etc.

(c) What is missing from this strand

Our health and wellbeing are enhanced by being connected to each other and nature. The SPHE Specification would benefit from explicitly acknowledging this. Overall, the existing learning outcomes could be enhanced by making explicit the interconnected nature of humanity, and the interdependence between humanity and the natural world.

The collective nature of wellbeing is at risk of being missed or deprioritised in favour of an emphasis on the individual, if not identified and promoted clearly in this strand. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development, as referenced in the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice (DES, 2019, p.10), "acknowledges the importance of the individual and his/her immediate relationships in their social context and in their wider community. This model

demonstrates that to be human is to be relational and that wellbeing is always realised in a community”.

This could be referenced and drawn upon to highlight the collective nature of health and wellbeing. Social connection and meaning derived from collective endeavours is well recognised as an essential component of human health and wellbeing.

We this in mind, we recommend:

- Including reference to the Sustainable Development Goals (especially SDG3 Good Health and Wellbeing) and their importance for collective wellbeing of people and planet.
- Ensuring that teachers have access to training, resources and appropriate support, In recognition of the complexity of some of the concepts within this strand.
- Including a specific learning outcome around developing the skills of empathy and solidarity.
- With regard to learning outcome 1.2, include reference to the socioeconomic factors that act as barriers to health e.g. poverty, inequality, discrimination.
- Add a learning outcome around developing skills to maintain positive mental health in a climate-changing world, in particular the capacity to deal with climate anxiety. Include in curriculum support materials guidance for teachers around this challenge e.g. approaches such as Active Hope
- Include in learning outcome 1.2 and 1.4 reference to environmental health and its connection to mental and physical health.

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:

- (a) Clarity on expectations for learning in Senior Cycle SPHE

The individual learning outcomes for Strand 2 are clear.

- (b) Relevance of learning outcomes to the lives and needs of 16-18 year olds today

We welcome the existing learning outcomes, all of which are highly relevant to the lives and needs of 16-18 year olds today. The emphasis on gender inequality, and the impact of violence (including GBV) and attitudes on relationships is much needed and welcomed. It is essential that students understand and discuss critically important topics such as sexuality, gender identity, sexual orientation and all forms of discrimination.

- (c) What is missing from this strand

The Specification could be strengthened by including information about how teacher capacity will be enhanced to enable quality and consistent delivery of the SPHE Curriculum.

We recommend that the Specification acknowledge that, in particular with regard to the delivery of Strand 2: Relationships and Sexuality, specific training to teachers and school leaders will be provided e.g. through Oide. In addition, we suggest the inclusion of a sentence acknowledging that there is a role to be played by groups/organisations who work on issues of relationships and sexuality, gender identity, sexual orientation, teenage mental health, environmental concerns etc.

In addition, there is an opportunity to incorporate a global lens into this strand, with reference to the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 5: Gender Equality. There is also a chance to make valuable links between this strand and wider social and

health issues i.e. expanding learning around harmful attitudes and narratives regarding gender, to other forms of discrimination e.g. related to race, culture, poverty.

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:

- (a) Clarity on expectations for learning in Senior Cycle SPHE

The individual learning outcomes for Strand 3 are clear.

- (b) Relevance of learning outcomes to the lives and needs of 16-18 year olds today

We welcome the existing learning outcomes, all of which are highly relevant to the lives and needs of 16-18 year olds today. We support the emphasis on self-care, rights and responsibilities and allyship within the learning outcomes. The equipping of students with skills to embrace inclusion, diversity and solidarity with others is essential to their lives now and into the future, and is key to the achievement of the overall aims of the SPHE curriculum.

- (c) What is missing from this strand

We recommend renaming this strand 'Lifelong Learning', which better reflects how the skills outlined in these learning outcomes are both immediately relevant and important in the lives of students now, as well as being important into their future lives as adults. For example, self-care is not a skill that is only relevant or unique to adulthood, it is an approach and habit that should be valued and fostered across all stages of life.

In addition, there is an opportunity to draw strong and clear connections between the existing learning outcomes in this strand, and global citizenship. In order to be effective and engaged global citizens, we must practice self-care and resilience building, to enable us to grapple with global challenges such as discrimination, inequality, poverty and the climate crisis.

The fostering of student voice and student agency should be explicitly named and valued in the Specification. Giving students opportunities to develop and share their own perspectives, and to shape their own learning, are essential components of learning about one's own identity as an individual and as a member of society locally and globally. The allyship skills outlined in Learning Outcome 3.6 could readily be presented through the lens of global citizenship. The Sustainable Development Goals are indicative of this allyship at an international level, and can readily be applied to highlight connections between global, community and individual levels of engagement.

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:

1. Underpinning each of our responses and recommendations above is the conviction that SPHE should be positioned as the anchor for all teaching and learning. The SPHE Curriculum is uniquely placed to refocus curriculum development and policy discussions on the overall purpose of education. We recommend that this opportunity be taken to acknowledge that we live in a world facing multiple crises, and that our education system must have as its core priority the physical, mental, social and environmental health and wellbeing of people and planet.
2. We recommend adding a fourth strand on Sustainable Futures and Stewardship. Where a fourth strand is not added, we recommend including Sustainable Futures and Stewardship into Strand 3: Into Adulthood. i.e. a learning outcome on students taking greater responsibility for themselves and the planet. This is an opportunity to extend learning about the 'self' to learning about how that

'self' exists and can be positioned in different ways in relation to others and the wider community and global context. This aligns closely with Global Citizenship Education, Education for Sustainable Development, the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals, and associated critical thinking and problem-solving skills around how to be active agents of positive change in the world.

3. We recommend that information be provided on how sufficient time and resources will be dedicated to the delivery of the SPHE curriculum. Particularly if it does not contribute to examination results, resources must be dedicated to ensure that school leaders and teachers are supported to deliver a consistent and high quality SPHE Curriculum and to emphasise and convince colleagues, students and parents of the value of this Curriculum.
4. We recommend that support materials and training for teachers include clear and explicit guidance on the handling of complex and/or controversial themes and concepts in the classroom and wider school setting. Ensuring that teachers and school leaders are GCE literate will support them in this regard. Global Citizenship Education (GCE) is a long-standing and well-established field of transformative education, providing policy guidance, training and resources for educators and students to explore key questions and challenges around how we live in this interdependent, complex world. We must foster global citizenship competencies in order to a sustainable, healthy way of living for the benefit of humanity and the planet. The adoption of GCE as the foundation for the SPHE curriculum will enhance it and ensure its successful implementation.

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