



Senior Cycle SPHE – Feedback

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Does your organisation wish to be listed as a contributor to this consultation on the NCCA website?	Yes
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Introduction

“For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love be of service to one another.” – Galatians 5:13-14

“Man is not a solitary animal, and so long as social life survives, self-realization cannot be the supreme principle of ethics.” – Bertrand Russell, ‘A History of Western Philosophy’

Catholics value education as a holistic endeavour, with the full totality of the person, physical, moral, intellectual, emotional and social, being brought to flourish. We believe that God’s glory is in the full expression of human life; therefore, human life has an inherent nobility. A holistic education seeks the revelation of the full nobility of human life.

The State too values education as a holistic endeavour, recognising in Article 41(1) of *Bunreacht na hÉireann* the “right and duty of parents to provide ... for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical, and social education of their children.” The State gives life to this in the Education Act, 1998, Section 9(d) in mandating schools to “promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students and provide health education for them, in consultation with their parents, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school”.

SPHE forms an important part of a student’s holistic education. Any such subject area, properly conceived, should seek to address the whole human person, particularly given that the stated aim 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.”



The nurturing of a sense of meaning and purpose is also essential to anything pertaining to a person's capacity to lead a fulfilling and healthy life. The spiritual aspect to the human person will be essential to this.

It is notable that the specification itself contains no discernible overarching ethical perspective. Indeed, it is striking at times to see, for example, relationships mentioned in *Strand Two* with little reference either to the long term good of the person, or the contribution of stable long-term relationships to the common good. The absence of any mention of committed, long-term relationships (and for Catholic schools, in particular, the absence of any mention of marriage) is notable in that regard. The specification contains no *telos*¹, no end or purpose to the activities it discusses. Some parties may seek to criticise the specification in this regard, but we believe that this is a strength as it provides a vital space for the ethos of a school, of whatever religion or ethical worldview, to inform the curriculum.

Considering this, the specification provides a context for the SPHE curriculum within a school's particular ethos, as this will inform the moral, spiritual and intellectual worldview the curriculum is situated within. Schools exist within a pluralist society and within themselves contain a plurality of worldviews. The curriculum, while situated within the ethos of the school, should encourage dialogue and encounter with that plurality. This is pluralism properly conceived, that seeks engagement with difference, rather than seeking to ignore it, or to pretend that an ethical 'view from nowhere' can exist.

Therefore, the specification would be strengthened by an explicit acknowledgement of the role of the ethos in developing it into a fully realised SPHE curriculum.

For schools with a Catholic ethos, this means that the curriculum will be taught within the context of the Church's teaching and with Gospel values. This is not to be understood as exclusionary. The Roman poet Terence's famous line, *Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto* ("I am human, I consider nothing human alien to me"), applies also to Church teaching, grounded as it is in the full humanity of Jesus Christ. A Catholic school, holding to the fore the essential dignity of all men and women, created as they are in the image and likeness of God, can address questions of human sexuality and gender in all its manifestations in individual human persons.

Within a school having a Catholic ethos, the Church's teaching will be presented with confidence in accordance with the requirements of the Education Act (Sections 9 & 15) and in line with the moral duty owed to parents/guardians and in a spirit of respectful encounter and dialogue with other philosophies of life, inside and outside the school.

Role of Parents/adult students

¹ From Aristotelian philosophy: the explanation of something (in this case, human action) as a function of its purpose or goal.



The specification will also need to provide, in a practical way, for the role of parents, as the primary educators of their children, to be respected. This is a fundamental legal and moral right, protected by the State through Article 42(1) of *Bunreacht na hÉireann*, confirmed also in Article 2 of Protocol No. 1 to the *European Convention on Human Rights*:

"... In the exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education and to teaching, the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions."

Article 2 of Protocol No. 1 applies to all subjects and not only religious instruction. Sexual education and ethics thus fall within the scope of Article 2 of Protocol No. 1, as confirmed by *Jimenez Alonso and Jimenez Merino v. Spain*; *Dojan and Others v. Germany*; and *Appel-Irrgang and Others v. Germany*.

Any SPHE curriculum must ensure flexibility for the professional judgment of the teacher in consultation where necessary with the student's parents/guardians. As the specification recognises, adult students (18+) are entitled to make decisions with respect to their own education. The rights of parents/guardians and adult pupils must be respected in the curriculum specification.

Students with Special Education Needs

Supports and guidance will be required to make the curriculum accessible to students with additional education needs or to those with barriers to learning. With that consideration in mind, and taking on board the specialisation requirements of the subject in general, there is a need for specialised training and support for teachers engaging with SPHE with SEN students.

Other school supports may be required with respect to issues that may arise for particular students or their families in light of the curriculum.

Questions posed by NCCA for consideration:

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.

Response

CEP supports the above aim recognising that it has emerged from NCCA's consultation with many stakeholders, most of all from engagement with students.



However, we believe it could benefit from some expansion. The aim of the junior-cycle contained the following phrase: “empower them to create, nurture and maintain respectful and loving relationships”. To be consistent, we believe that the aim of senior-cycle should similarly refer the nurture and *maintenance* of relationships.

That ‘loving’ was left out of the junior-cycle draft specification, only to be included in the final version, makes the absence of ‘loving’ in the senior-cycle draft specification all that more unusual. Again, for the sake of consistency if not for the value that love plays in a fulfilling human life, we believe that *loving* needs to be included.

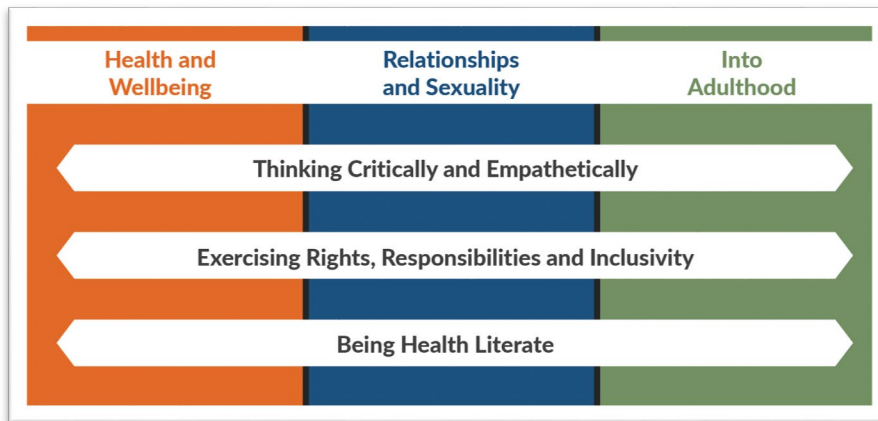
As per the observations in the introduction above, the lack of any sense of a vision for the *telos* of life in the specification, no overarching ethical perspective that can aid the person in achieving holistic wellbeing² renders the aim as expressing an activity with no substantial purpose. The ethos of a school, appropriately expressed in dialogue and encounter with other word views has an important, indeed essential role, to play in assisting the student in forming an ethical view of life.

There are also some concerns with respect to the emphasis on resilience. This is addressed later in this document in the response to Strand 1: Health and Wellbeing. In brief, there needs to be a caution that an emphasis on resilience is not taken to lay the responsibility for responding to suffering or injustice solely on the person, but must be balanced by a concern to address the sources of suffering or injustice.

Question 2: The Learning

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

² What in Greek philosophy would have been termed eudemonia.



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

Response

As with the junior-cycle specification, the course structure with three strands and three cross-cutting elements having an integrated character is welcome and is a sign of the continuing development of SPHE pedagogy within schools.

The three cross-cutting elements in senior-cycle are different to those identified at the junior-cycle, but the draft senior-cycle draft specification retains a mention of the junior-cycle ones on pages 9-10. They are now referred to as 'Overarching features of effective teaching and learning in SPHE'. Is there some risk of inconsistency here that may prove unhelpful to an integrated approach to SPHE at both post-primary cycles and, ultimately, with primary SPHE too?

With respect to these 'Overarching features of effective teaching and learning in SPHE' (Awareness, Dialogue, Reflection and Action) we believe our observations on the junior-cycle specification are still pertinent:

The thinking on dialogue between contrasting perspectives, values and behaviours is welcome, but fails to recognise the role the school's ethos necessarily plays as a stepping off point for such dialogue. Every school, of any ethos type, appropriately, in line with their moral and legal duties, has a fundamental ethical point of view. Catholic schools, rightfully, will seek to propose the Catholic view of matters of morals and meaning, but will, in accordance with the Church's thinking, seek to encourage positive encounters and dialogue with the plurality of views within and without the school. The curriculum specification would benefit from the inclusion of explicit guidance to schools on the need to inform the programme with the school's ethos, and to provide sufficient flexibility for them to do so.

The formation of the ethical character of students as they grapple with the topics addressed in the course should be clearly addressed. The proposal speaks of students developing self-awareness of their values in a manner that seems to be grounded in a platonic idea of learning by remembering, rather than on the role of the school, in line with their ethos and on behalf of and informed by



parents/guardians, in the development of the moral character of the student. A dialogic approach, grounded in the school's ethos, and encouraging encounters with different perspectives and values, seems both to respect the role of education in character formation, while also respecting students' agency in developing their own moral character and ethical beliefs.

The 'awareness' overarching feature rightfully emphasises that we share a common humanity, dignity and rights, and this will be entirely in keeping with the importance within the Catholic ethos of the essential dignity that all persons hold as having been made in the image and likeness of God. The relational reality of being human is also appropriately recognised.

Leaving aside the concerns with respect to continuity and consistency across wellbeing at all levels, the cross-cutting elements in the senior-cycle draft specification (Thinking critically and empathetically; exercising rights, responsibilities and inclusivity; and being health literate) are broadly welcome. However, we wish to make observations on specific aspects of two of the three elements:

Thinking critically and empathetically: This is a positive from our perspective. The emphasis on "supporting young people to critically consider their own and societal attitudes, values, norms and behaviours" fits well with contemporary Catholic pedagogy's emphasis on addressing difference through a respectful encounter and dialogue. The acknowledgment "*that the individual is not solely responsible for their health and wellbeing and builds an appreciation of the wider influences at play*" and that "*how we relate to others has societal impacts*", if grounded in an understanding of our interdependence and the solidarity and respect we owe others as a fellow *imago dei*³, contains a potential rich source of reflection for those entering adulthood⁴.

Exercising rights, responsibilities and inclusivity: The appropriate coupling of rights with responsibilities here is something we had sought with the junior-cycle specification and its inclusion there and now in this draft specification is welcome. Again, the idea of interdependence and consideration for others is maintained. The inclusion of an explicit acknowledgement that teaching across the strands be reflective of all ethnicities and religious beliefs/worldviews is in full sympathy with contemporary Catholic pedagogy, as mentioned above, and it is to be hoped that Catholic schools will draw upon the universal, global nature of the Church in addressing this.

³ Image of God – for Catholics, each person is made in the image and likeness of God, thereby having an essential dignity common to all.

⁴ John Donne's [Meditation XVII](#) comes to mind.



With respect to the list “genders, sexualities, ethnicities, religious beliefs/worldviews, social classes and abilities/disabilities”, we believe this should contain an explicit inclusion of the Traveller and Roma communities.

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.

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
1.10	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.

Response

Despite the inclusion of ‘spiritual’ in the rationale on page 6 of the draft specification, when the list of wellbeing factors (physical, emotional, social) is repeated here, spiritual is oddly absent. We are curious as to the NCCA’s reasoning in deciding to remove that factor from the strand, despite its earlier mention, its mention in Section 9(d) of the Education Act 1998, and the importance of spirituality identified in the



NCCA's own published research overview on wellbeing⁵. We believe that it should be included and that students should be encouraged and enabled to discuss and explore their own spirituality and its contribution to their wellbeing. Section 1.2 would benefit from the inclusion of things broadly in the spiritual realm, e.g. meditation, prayer, mindfulness, time in nature &c.

Similar to our submission on the junior-cycle SPHE specification, we detect references to what we understand to be elements of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) in 1.5, 1.6 and to a certain extent in 1.8. These are welcome, but it should be appreciated that CBT itself drew its techniques from Stoic philosophy, which itself located those techniques within an ethical framework (itself located within a broader physics and metaphysics). These techniques certainly aid in a fulfilling life, but without an ethical *telos* they will not realise their full potential. One common criticism of CBT, and more generally of resilience-based approaches, lies in the emphasis being placed on the individual's response to trauma or injustice. It is important to note that teacher training on this particular aspect of SPHE will be required. This is worthwhile, but misses the broader challenge of addressing the source of the trauma or injustice. Stoic philosophy on justice placed a strong emphasis on improving the world for others. Similarly, schools with a Catholic ethos would be expected to address issues of justice that may arise when discussing this area.

The other elements of Stand One are most welcome, with an underlying approach of assisting the young person in their move into adulthood, in gaining knowledge about their health and general wellbeing and in having an awareness of the social and cultural factors that give rise to attitudes towards alcohol, drugs, and addiction. The emphasis on sources of assistance and practical advice on what to do when faced with addiction or stress in self or others, as well as practical advice on managing the safety of self and others is a valuable part of the specification. Of particular welcome is the emphasis being laid not solely on the self, but on concern for others too, balancing rights with responsibilities and self-care, with the needs of others.

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.

⁵ Nohilly, M. et al (2023) A Systematic Literature Review to Support the Curriculum Specification, MIC



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.

Response

As mentioned in our introduction, the specification is notable for lacking in a discernible overarching ethical perspective. Relationships are discussed in this strand with no reference to the long term good of the person, or the contribution of stable long-term relationships to the common good.

The absence of any mention of marriage is notable in that regard and we question how this is consistent with Article 41(3.1°) of Bunreacht na hÉireann: “*The State pledges itself to guard with special care the institution of Marriage*”. The NCCA as a state agency is ultimately bound by the Constitution and should not, in a discussion of relationships with young people on the entry point to adulthood, neglect to mention marriage as the foundation of the Family, “*the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society*”.

Furthermore, long-term stable relationships, traditionally grounded in marriage, are a well-established contributor to the welfare and flourishing of individuals and is a key contributor to the common good. Needless to say, this is not to state that this is true of all such relationships, but that does not undermine the general truth as to the contribution of them to wellbeing. Schools and teachers will need guidance and



support on how to address the positives of marriage without causing any experience or feeling of exclusion in those in other forms of family situations.

As with the junior-cycle specification, of particular welcome is the emphasis placed on healthy non-sexual relationships. These form the majority of the relationships we have in life and can be healthy or unhealthy, or even harmful, and the specification encourages a fuller exploration of this topic beyond a discussion of bullying or abusive behaviour.

Point 2.2 contains the only mention in all three strands of values or beliefs, and this in terms of their influence on the dynamics of friendships, relationships and sexual behaviour. This will require some sensitive handling in schools, as teachers may not be familiar with the nuances of beliefs and values in various faiths and ethical world-views. Catholic schools will be able to draw on the global nature of the Church and its long history of enculturation into many cultures and the dynamics of those cultural interfaces. We understand this to present an excellent opportunity to engage in respectful dialogue and encounter with a plurality of views.

We welcome the contextualisation of consent in 2.3 into a framework of care, respect, consent, intimacy and mutual pleasure. The importance, legally and morally, of giving and receiving consent in sexual relationships is fully in sympathy with Catholic teaching. We agree that consent should be explicitly acknowledged as a base-line essential condition, but is not, in itself a sufficient condition for appropriate sexual relationships. Contextualising, as the specification does by bracketing consent with care, respect, intimacy and mutual pleasure, provides a richer understanding of the dynamics of sexual activity within a healthy and appropriate relationship. Catholic schools should include as a part of this context that true intimacy can only occur in a long-term committed relationships, ideally in marriage.

A common feature of the contributions provided by students on a recent RTÉ documentary on RSE, *'Let's Talk About Sex'*, presented by Richie Sadlier, was their request for practical information on what to do if subject to sexual abuse, violence, image-based abuse, or abusive relationships. The emphasis laid on such advice in the Strand is welcome. The specification also rightly provides for guidance on how to assist someone else who has been subject to any of these.

That documentary was also interesting in presenting views from young people expressing their concerns as to the damage that pornography is doing to them, to the quality of relationships, and to social expectations around sexual activity. We believe it is appropriate to discuss this with young people and to include alongside that, the ethical questions arising from the production of pornography. Taking a Kantian view on the evil done when the human person is reduced to a mere means, rather than an end, the broader post-primary curriculum should investigate the evils arising when humans are reduced to mere objects, instead of fellow-experiencing-subjects of Being. This can go beyond discussions of pornography and have relevance in other subject areas when discussing subjects such as slavery or other forms of exploitation.

The specific inclusion of an element addressing violence directed towards women and girls is welcome. This should be supported in schools through a whole of school approach to addressing this issue, with Religious Education, literature elements in language curricula and other subject areas aligned to address this in a broad manner at the intellectual, social and emotional levels.

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.

Response

Points 3.1 to 3.5 of this specification are well thought out and considered with respect to the transition into adulthood. No single subject could ever reach a full comprehension of all that is required to be an adult. Indeed, a lifetime is needed to explore the full richness of that. The strictures of time allotted to SPHE also require discrimination as to content, and we believe that the specification has identified many essential and key points.

Point 3.3 is yet another point where spirituality should be one of the sources explicitly acknowledged in playing an important role in how a person addressed change, loss or heartache, reinforcing our earlier point on the need for the specification to lay some additional stress on this factor. The acknowledgement again of our responsibilities towards others and our interdependence is welcomed.



Our objection to point 3.6 is, in many respects, succinctly captured by the following extract from a review by Stephen Bush of Susan Neiman's 'Left is Not Woke' (2023, Polity) in the Financial Times⁶:

I have yet to read a book that better crystallised my sense of unease when I hear people use the word 'ally'. "Convictions play a minor role in alliances, which is why they are often short," she writes. "If my self-interest happens to align with yours, for a moment, we could form an alliance ... to divide members of a movement into allies and others undermines the bases of deep solidarity." For Neiman, what we need is not allyship, but a recognition of our shared humanity.

We have complimented the specification throughout for directing attention toward the other, and avoiding an exclusive focus on the 'I'. We have also complimented the sense of interdependence implicit in aspects of the specification.

'Allyship', particularly as it is defined in the Appendix, is coupled with ideas of privilege. These are concepts and terms associated with a particular view of the world, developed at first in French philosophy in the mid to late 20th century, before being fully developed in the context of the social, economic, and political history of the United States and Canada.

Their inclusion is a demonstration of the NCCA's seeming bias towards English language research and ideas, which in the main does not seem to reflect the trends within (non-English speaking) European thought. It is, to coin a phrase, a preference in favour of Boston over Berlin. It is curious that an EU country would draw so little from the thinking of our continental European partners.

Allyship and privilege are often coupled with other ideas such as intersectionality. Too often, these ideas promote an 'us and them' mentality, with 'victim status' being foregrounded in understanding relationships. This is a consequence of the underlying assumption of the philosophical underpinnings of these ideas: that language itself, the meaning of words, are mere tools by which power is asserted and exercised. Indeed, the world is to be understood, including all human relations, as primarily being about a power.

⁶ <https://www.ft.com/content/03aad35c-2d7e-41a2-8592-4fe44b5ca400> accessed 7th September 2023



The victimhood narrative only serves to disempower people and to work against solidarity. Unlike allyship, solidarity is concerned with our interdependence rather than on intersectionalities of oppression. Solidarity is concerned with our shared humanity.

The definition of allyship in Appendix 2 creates in itself division by picking out male, white or Irish persons, as having 'privilege', and has a sense that they thereby (arising not from their humanity, but from their membership of those groups) have a duty towards 'minority identity groups'. This by implication seems to imply a certain dependence inherent in those 'minority identity groups'⁷, disempowering them from agency and autonomy.

European thought is not uniformly in agreement on these questions, but, in general, it can be said to contain far more concern with concepts such as interdependence, solidarity, and common humanity.

We strongly urge the NCCA to reconsider this aspect of the specification.

Question 3: Any further suggestions

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

Response

For SPHE to be successful, it will need to take account of the ethos of schools. Similarly, the primacy of parents/guardians as educators requires recognition. Parental involvement will necessarily have to form a key part in the planning of the introduction of a curriculum based on this specification. The NCCA itself recognises this on page 5 of the specification: "*At a practical level, senior cycle is supported by ... the involvement of ... parents.*" While recognising this, the specification gives no further guidance as to how this might be achieved.

Similarly, students themselves should be consulted in the development of this specification into a fully realised curriculum with a particular school. The rights of adult students, who will be a significant part of

⁷ Which seems to include, by implication, women, despite women constituting a slight majority of the population in the State.



the student cohort engaging with this specification, must have their rights to determine their own education respected and enabled.


A whole of school approach will be required and integration of SPHE with the policies of the school and other subjects including, in Catholic schools, religious education.

As the NCCA is aware, significant supports in material and professional development for teachers, and in supports to school leadership teams and boards of management, will be required.

Taking a longer view, the aim should be to create a cohort of teachers trained for and with experience in SPHE, and this present draft specification should be seen as something that will be subject to revision once we have a suitable cohort of confident practitioners, representative of the variety of ethos present in schools, available to provide feedback to enhance and improve this subject in the future.

On behalf of the board of the Catholic Education Partnership:

Alan Hynes



Chief Executive
Catholic Education Partnership

30th September, 2023 – Memoria of St. Jerome, Priest, Doctor

