IDEA
IRISH DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

30 January 2025

1. **In what capacity are you responding? Please briefly explain the nature of your organisation/role (for example, parent, teacher, business leader).**

The Irish Development Education Association (IDEA) is the national network for Development Education in Ireland and a leading voice for the Development Education sector. We represent over 100 members, involved in the practice, promotion, and advancement of Development Education in formal, non-formal and informal settings throughout the island of Ireland. Together we work to strengthen Development Education in Ireland and to raise awareness of the crucial role of Development Education in achieving an equal, just and sustainable future.

Development Education helps people to understand the world around them and to take action to transform it. It works to tackle the root causes of injustice and inequality, globally and locally to create a more just and sustainable future for everyone. IDEA uses Development Education as a term that includes **Global Citizenship Education**, **Education for Sustainable Development**, and related terms. Our members sometimes use different terms, depending on the nature of their work, or their areas of specialism.

At least nine of our member organisations (Trócaire, Concern Worldwide, WorldWise Global Schools, Children in Crossfire, Tools for Solidarity, Habitat for Humanity, Centre for Global Education, Self-Help Africa, Christian Aid) deliver or have delivered Development Education programmes, workshops or events in Northern Irish schools or to teachers of the Northern Irish curriculum and/or produce resources for educators and learners in Northern Ireland. Our longstanding member, Centre for Global Education, ran the ground-breaking Global Learning Schools Northern Ireland programme 2018-2021.

We endorse the submissions made by our member organization Concern Worldwide and by CADA, given that most of the members of their Global Citizenship Education Working Group are also IDEA members. Thus, our submission echoes many of the points in the CADA and Concern submissions.

2. **What are your views on the strengths of the Northern Ireland Curriculum?**

From a Development Education perspective, we recognise there are several elements embedded across all stages of the curriculum that support children to be active citizens at local and global levels. We also note there is a clear progression of knowledge and skills related to active citizenship from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 4.

IDEA
IRISH DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

30 January 2025

We agree with the CADA submission that a key strength of this curriculum is the autonomy it offers teachers and schools, allowing flexibility while still adhering to the statutory minimum requirements. We commend the space allowed to develop school-led responses to key topics that are central to Development Education such as climate justice, human rights, poverty and inequality. This space aligns well with the broader educational goals of fostering responsible, informed, and active citizens.

Other strengths we would like to highlight are as follows:

Primary curriculum

- A focus on cultural understanding, including developing an awareness and respect for others. This is vital in our increasingly diverse communities, and interdependent world.
- Encouraging children to understand their choices, rights, and responsibilities in society.
- Ethical awareness of the impact of our choices on other people and on the planet.
- Listening to others and asking questions.
- Developing an awareness of the experiences of people in the wider world.
- An opportunity to explore the impact of injustice and inequality on people's lives.

Key Stage Three

- Key elements necessary for developing empathy, understanding and active citizenship are embedded throughout the curriculum. For example: mutual understanding; moral character; citizenship; cultural understanding; media and ethical awareness; and Education for Sustainable Development
- There are references to aid, development, sustainability, and biodiversity across a range of subjects with useful examples of ways these can be incorporated into learning.
- Communication skills including debate, discussion and to “respect the views and opinions of others… negotiation and compromise” are referenced throughout.

Key Stages Three and Four – Learning for Life and Work curriculum

- The “Local and Global Citizenship” strand is a key strength. It explores cultural diversity and inclusion and individual and societal responsibilities in an NI context and beyond.
- There is also an emphasis on rights and responsibilities, including the need to investigate serious infringement of human rights around the world and why it is important to uphold human rights standards in modern democratic societies.
- Democracy, active participation, and the role of NGOs are explored as well as the promotion of equality and social justice.

- Learning for Life and Work (LLW) promotes student involvement in decision-making and social activism, whether through school-based initiatives or broader community projects. This helps students develop a sense of agency and confidence in making positive changes in their communities and the wider world.

3. **What are your views on the weaknesses of the Northern Ireland Curriculum?**

The current curriculum has substantial strengths and provides a strong base to support children's understanding of the global context in which they live, and the impact of our actions on one another in our interconnected world. However, the world has changed significantly since the curriculum was introduced in 2007. In fact, in recognition of the multiple crises facing humanity and the wider natural world, and a global consensus that we are almost at a tipping point in terms of climate breakdown, we advocate for global citizenship and sustainability to be at the heart of the Northern Ireland curriculum.

The 2024 Global Risk Report identifies both extreme weather events and **misinformation and disinformation** as two of the **highest global risks in the short-term future**, with threats from the latter including societal polarisation, economic impacts, threats to democracy and delays in the behaviour change needed across society and policymaking to address climate breakdown.

We suggest the following areas could be strengthened to equip children and young people with the knowledge, understanding and skills to act as active global citizens, and support their overall educational development.

<u>Critical thinking and media literacy:</u>

- Although critical thinking is referenced in the 2007 curriculum in relation to Drama, History and Science, we strongly recommend introducing critical thinking as a key aspect of the curriculum under all subjects and in particular in relation to LLW (Local and Global Citizenship strand), Geography and any components involving Media Studies. We see critical thinking as the most important skill to teach students of all ages (given the rising threat of misinformation and disinformation). It is central to every aspect of the curriculum, as well as children's own lives.
- Increase the focus on critical assessment of media and the *impact* of media on individuals and on society. All parts of the curriculum should encourage children to question information and understand what a reliable source is, the context in which it is written and the agenda of whoever wrote it.

- Pupils need to acquire critical thinking skills before *and* once they are regularly online, so they can discern the agenda and reliability of media outlets and social media content.

Climate Crisis

- Although terms such as environment, sustainability and biodiversity are referenced in the curriculum, there is no mention of the climate crisis. The concept of the climate crisis should be introduced at Foundation Stage, taught explicitly at Key Stage 3, and explored further at Key Stage 4, including an exploration of climate justice and individual and national responsibilities.
- This could be further emphasised post-16. Example subject areas include geography, science, Local and Global Citizenship and design and technology.

Social emotional learning (SEL)

- We would recommend integrating more SEL elements throughout the curriculum to ensure that pupils learn to understand the world of emotions, what they are, how they shape our lives and most importantly, how they can be regulated.
- Given widely acknowledged concerns about youth mental health in Northern Ireland, is sufficient space provided to address new understandings of trauma, its impact, and how we can better respond? Specifically, how does the curriculum take on board the Department of Education and Department of Health 'Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education Framework', and the CCEA 'SEL Primary Guidance'?

Inclusion of diverse experiences

- Ensuring that teaching materials reflect diverse experiences and perspectives would help pupils challenge stereotypes, develop empathy, and appreciate different worldviews. Books, poems, and other resources that tell the first-hand experiences of pupils' peers from around the world, should be embedded.
- These should highlight the voices and experiences of people from the Global South, without emphasising pity or reinforcing stereotypes of helplessness.
- In the primary curriculum, "Develop an awareness and respect for other cultures" could be strengthened by adding 'and a curiosity' to support the intrinsic value of learning and to encourage children to take an interest in others.
- All the above could be strengthened by examining the impact and harm that othering and stereotyping others can have on all of us.

Other

- We would like to suggest strengthening the content of LLW from a Development Education perspective and making it a compulsory subject from early years to post-16. Themes to be included:
    - human rights, climate crisis/climate justice;
    - politics;
    - migration/forced migration and displacement (including root causes such as conflict and climate breakdown/ "climate displacement");
    - the Sustainable Development Goals;
    - localisation (putting voices from the Global South at the centre of GCE);
    - how to become an advocate for change rather than a passive citizen.
- The Sustainable Development Goals are currently absent from the curriculum. Including these would emphasise the interdependent nature of the world around us and provide opportunities for cross-curricula learning. Specifically, we recommend inclusion of a reference to the importance of SDG 4: Quality Education and SDG Target 4.7, which provides the impetus for ensuring that all learners access quality Global Citizenship Education.
- Some language is outdated and reinforces stereotypes (e.g. "villagers in the developing world" could be changed to "*people living in rural areas in the Global South")*
- Local and global links could be emphasised: how do our actions in our local and national settings impact others around the world?

4. **To what extent do you think the Northern Ireland Curriculum has been successfully implemented in schools, and what do you perceive to be the barriers (if any) to its implementation?**

There is the view among some IDEA members that there is still untapped potential for the curriculum as is, and that implementation sometimes lags behind the vision articulated in the curriculum itself. We suggest that this unfulfilled potential could be connected to some key recurring concerns.

- The volume of what teachers must cover seems to limit space to invest in important areas. We endorse the recommendation of the Independent Review of Education related to 'addressing the issue of excessive curriculum content.'

- This pressure to teach so much, combined with the pressure to 'teach to the exam' through many years of children's lives, may have the effect that many good intentions and ideas cannot be delivered on.
- The lack of clarity about the success in implementing the curriculum also points to a lack of research to examine how well the curriculum has been implemented.
- In 2007 a new curriculum was introduced, but we repeatedly hear that there has not been sufficient ongoing investment in Teacher Professional Learning to ensure effective delivery of what was new in the curriculum. Regular and sustained professional development for teachers is essential to effectively implement curriculum changes.
- *Lack of cross curricular integration*. Another key question is how we can overcome the limits imposed by division of teaching into specific and often siloed subject areas to ensure sufficient space for the cross curricular nature of the challenges we face and the knowledge, skills and understanding we need to develop. Encouraging interdisciplinary teaching approaches, where subjects like Geography, LLW, and Science collaborate, would allow students to better understand the interconnected nature of global challenges.

Another barrier some IDEA members highlighted was an apparent avoidance to address certain complex and controversial issues in some schools. Is there sufficient readiness and support for teachers to acknowledge and address the multiple crises currently facing humanity, and acknowledgement of the urgency with which humanity must grapple with these crises? Many of these are controversial topics – for example climate action and migration. They are complex to understand. Could this result in a marginalisation of explicitly citizenship related dimensions of the curriculum? Does this lead to efforts to provide education on these areas slipping down the scale of priorities? Can they come to be seen as less important than other subjects, or more damagingly still, as soft subjects?

5. **Bearing in mind this is a review of the curriculum, and not of qualifications or assessment, is there anything else you would like to draw attention to that you think should be a focus of the review?**

We endorse the recommendation of the Independent Review of Education to add a further purpose to the curriculum: 'to develop young people as lifelong learners, able to participate successfully through life in a society undergoing rapid and accelerating change'. We believe this would address some of the key concerns above, putting the focus on developing young people as learners (including SEL dimensions), putting a focus on

education for participation in today's society, and putting a focus on preparing learners for the rapid and accelerating change learners are faced with.

Given that lack of resources is often stated as a block to delivering citizenship education, we would highlight that many IDEA members have experience, programmes, and expertise in this area. We would encourage educational authorities and institutions to collaborate more with civil society to strengthen delivery in this area. On this note, we put forward the IDEA Code of Good Practice on Development Education as a tool with a suite of resources for strengthening the global citizenship and sustainable development components across the curriculum. We suggest including it in all resources to support teachers' confidence and competence in designing and delivering lesson plans that incorporate these components in the classroom. Teachers could use the suite of resources to centre critical thinking skills, imaginative and creative thinking, and foster well-being through an emphasis on solutions, hope and possibility.