

Draft Strategic Plan 2019 – 2021

For consultation

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1. Introduction

This Strategic Plan builds on the increased alignment of curriculum developments across sectors in Council's work to date and supports the further development and articulation of a shared vision for learning and development from birth through the period of post-primary education. This alignment is important in how we work to prepare curriculum and assessment advice, but it is also important in how we work with other stakeholders in the education system.

Reaching towards our vision of *Leading innovation in education for learning, living and working in a changing world* involves many layers of innovation, engagement, challenge and learning. These are reflected in the themes identified, which cut across the five strategic goals and the four sectors of the Council's remit: early childhood, primary, junior cycle and senior cycle. The themes are described as cross-cutting because they reflect a shift from 'sectoral' to more 'systemic' ideas in Council's work, and in education developments generally. In and of themselves, the six themes overlap and intersect. They are not exhaustive, but they are particularly significant in the context of the actions outlined for each strategic goal.

While great care has been taken to develop a strategy that combines creativity and realism, any strategy agreed upon must be flexible and allow for change over time. The Strategic Plan is therefore a live document and may change as developments are progressed, new opportunities to innovate arise or new national policy priorities are set. Its implementation is premised on the availability of sufficient resources, and significant new areas of work such as the developments at primary and senior cycle will require extensive resourcing.

Key to implementing our strategy is the expertise, dedicated work and commitment of the staff of the NCCA and the members of our boards and development groups. I appreciate their contribution to the work of the Council over the lifetime of the previous plan and NCCA looks forward to working with them in implementing this plan and in innovating for an exciting future for all learners in our schools and settings.

The current Council was appointed and commenced its work in early 2019 and will continue until December 2021 and this strategic plan sets out the work of the Council within that timeframe. Ongoing progress will be monitored and reported through general updates to the Council, through published annual reports and through an annual output statement.

To be signed by Chairperson

2. Context

The Organisation

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment was established in November 1987 as a successor to the Curriculum and Examinations Board and was reconstituted as a statutory body in July 2001.

The brief of the statutory Council as outlined in the Education Act (1998), is to advise the Minister for Education and Skills on matters relating to:

...the curriculum for early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools and the assessment procedures employed in schools and examinations on subjects which are part of the curriculum. (41.1 a, b)

The Council is responsible for the development and determination of its advice on matters relating to curriculum and assessment. The Council is a representative structure, the membership of which is determined by the Minister for Education and Skills. It has 25 members, all of whom are appointed for a three-year term. The members represent teachers, school managers, parents, business interests, trade unions, and other educational interests. Other members include representatives of the Department of Education and Skills, the State Examinations Commission, a nominee of the Minister for Education and Skills and of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. The Minister appoints the Chairperson.

The NCCA has a full-time executive staff, led by a Chief Executive. Funding for the NCCA is by way of a grant from the Department of Education and Skills. The current Council was appointed and commenced its work in early 2019 and will continue until December 31st 2021. This strategic plan sets out the work of the Council over that timeframe.

External and Internal Environment

Over the period of its last strategic plan 2015-2018, the NCCA conducted its work in a social and economic environment where Ireland was emerging from a previous period of austerity. At its broadest, the aim of the NCCA's work, along with its stakeholders and partners, continued to be – to contribute to children and young people living a full life, creating potential for their future lives and employment chances, and in the process supporting social cohesion and advancing Ireland's global competitiveness through the quality of its education system. Now, as Ireland fully emerges from austerity, the challenge is to continue to lead developments in curriculum and assessment that can contribute meaningfully to addressing the challenges faced by Ireland's society and economy, particularly the challenges faced by families, young people and children.

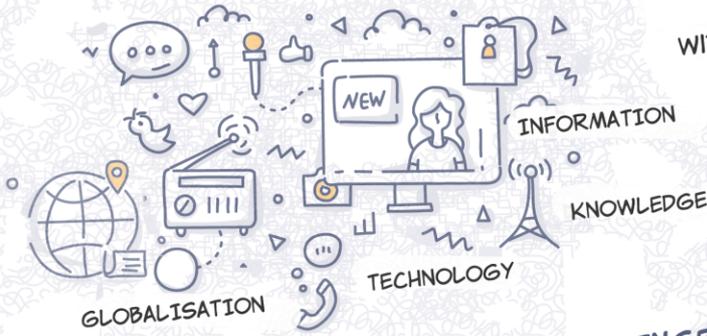
Some of the main environmental factors, external and internal, that will influence the work of the NCCA over the period of its Strategic Plan and beyond are set out on the following page in graphical form.



External Environment



CONSTANT CHANGE AFFECTING EDUCATION



COMMUNICATIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS

WITH PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES



CONCERN FOR THE WELLBEING

OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE WIDER SCHOOL COMMUNITY



THE CHALLENGE OF PROVIDING FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

IN A MORE CULTURALLY DIVERSE, SECULAR AND CHANGING SOCIETY



BUILDING CAPACITY

FOR ADDRESSING NATIONAL PRIORITIES INTO WORK PLANS



BUILDING IN FUTURES THINKING

BUILDING IN FUTURES THINKING AND LONG-TERM PLANNING



PUBLIC AND CIVIL SERVICE REFORM

AND INCREASING REQUIREMENTS OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE





Internal Environment



MAINTAINING STABILITY

AND CONTINUITY WHILE DEVELOPING THE NCCA



BUILDING

THE CAPACITY, KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERTISE OF STAFF



SYSTEMS

PUTTING IN PLACE SYSTEMS THAT SUPPORT DEVELOPMENT, COLLABORATION AND WELLBEING



FORWARD PLANNING

AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT AS THE SIZE AND WORK OF THE NCCA GROWS



STRUCTURES

RENEWING AND IMPROVING NCCA STRUCTURES



INCREASING REQUIREMENTS

MANAGING THE INCREASING REQUIREMENTS OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE IN A SMALL ORGANISATION



3. Strategic planning 2019 - 2021

Vision

Leading innovation in education for learning, living and working in a changing world.

Mission

The Mission of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment is to:

- advise the Minister for Education and Skills on curriculum and assessment from early childhood to the end of second level
- engage with learners, teachers, practitioners, parents and others to support innovation in schools and other educational settings
- undertake, use and share research as a basis for advice and debate on education.

Strategic goals

The 2019-2021 Strategic Plan sets out important actions in Council's work across five strategic goals:

1. Curriculum and Assessment

To develop innovative curriculum and assessment for engagement, progression, quality, inclusion and continuity across sectors and across educational transitions

2. Engagement and Collaboration

To work with all teachers, practitioners, learners and our partners in education to build capacity for change, model ways of working, and inform curriculum and assessment development and implementation

3. Knowledge and Research

To generate, use and share knowledge and research to support the development of curriculum and assessment advice and practice in all educational settings

4. Communications

To communicate, present and share the work and achievements of the NCCA effectively, to improve its capacity to engage with others in leading and supporting educational change

5. Governance and Corporate Affairs

To develop NCCA governance and organisational structures, processes, skills and competences effectively to achieve the vision of the organisation

Cross-cutting themes in the work of the NCCA

In the NCCA's work in recent years, a number of themes have been identified which cut across the five goals of the organisation and the four sectors within the Council's remit - early childhood, primary, junior cycle and senior cycle. The themes are described as cross-cutting because they reflect a shift from 'sectoral' to more 'systemic' ideas in Council's work, and in education developments generally. This Strategic Plan builds on the increased alignment of curriculum developments across sectors in Council's work to-date and supports further developing and articulating a shared vision for learning and development from birth through post-primary education. The six cross-cutting themes are evident in Council's programme of work for learners from birth through to the end of second-level:

1. Focusing on **dispositions, competencies** and **skills** when developing curricula
2. Including the **voice of learners** in the process of curriculum development
3. Contributing to greater **autonomy** and **support** for practitioners and teachers
4. Establishing the focus on **the impact of teaching on learning** as the focal point of educational change
5. Designing and developing curricula to include **ALL Learners**
6. Paying attention to questions of **continuity/progression** across sectors and times of **transition**.

These six themes overlap and intersect. They are not exhaustive, but they are particularly significant in the context of the actions outlined for each strategic goal.

4. Achieving the strategic goals

1. Curriculum and Assessment

To develop innovative curriculum and assessment for engagement, progression, quality, inclusion and continuity across sectors and across educational transitions

We will deliver on this goal through the following planned outcomes:

Outcomes		To achieve this we will	Target completion date
1.1	Aistear is providing the basis for curriculum planning and implementation in early education settings and informing the pedagogical approaches in the early years of primary schooling. Aistear’s guidance for the 0-3 age group is informing developments for this age group through the National Síolta Aistear Initiative.	commence a review of the evidence base for early childhood care and education to inform future developments of the Aistear Framework contribute to work planning for, and the development and quality assurance of, professional development content and training resources for the National Síolta Aistear Initiative, (NSAI) including a focus on STEM experiences	2020 2019 and ongoing
1.2	In primary schools, new curricula are introduced for language (English and Gaeilge) and mathematics.	support the implementation of the primary language curriculum, third to sixth class, through the development of	2019 and ongoing

		<p>support material and examples of children’s learning, including home languages other than English and Irish</p> <p>publish and support the implementation of the primary maths curriculum from infants to sixth class through the development of support material and examples of children’s learning</p> <p>support schools’ work with STEM through examples of STEM learning experiences</p> <p>support schools’ work with content and language integrated learning (CLIL) of Irish in English-medium schools, and with heritage languages</p>	
1.3	An overview of a redeveloped primary curriculum has been agreed and provides the basis for an extensive programme of curriculum development.	<p>complete a review of the primary curriculum</p> <p>publish and consult on a draft overview of a redeveloped primary curriculum</p>	2019

		<p>continue work on ERB and Ethics, and coding and feed the outcomes of this work into the review of the primary curriculum</p> <p>consider including foreign languages in senior classes as part of the review of the primary curriculum</p> <p>agree a timeline for redeveloping the primary curriculum and proceed with the development work</p>	<p>2019</p> <p>2019</p> <p>2019 and ongoing</p>
1.4	In junior cycle, new curricula continue to be developed and introduced as part of the junior cycle developments. Post-primary schools are using the <i>Framework for Junior Cycle</i> as the basis for planning and implementing their junior cycle programmes.	<p>continue review and development, as needed, of curriculum specifications and assessment guidelines for ongoing development of short courses, programmes and subjects</p>	2019 and ongoing
1.5	A review of senior cycle education has been completed and an extensive plan of development and reform in educational programmes, curriculum, assessment, reporting and certification is under way.	<p>continued development of, and implementation support for, Leaving Certificate subject specifications and programme specifications e.g. new modern language specifications</p> <p>conduct an extensive review of senior cycle</p>	<p>2019 and ongoing</p> <p>2019</p>

		publish and consult on proposals for the development of senior cycle	2019
		agree a timeline and commence development work on the development of senior cycle	2020
1.6	New approaches to assessment and reporting are being introduced and capacity to introduce developments in these areas in schools and other settings is being supported.	continued development of assessment and reporting capacity and support material for new programme, subject and short course specifications at junior cycle	2019
1.7	Curriculum and assessment specifications continue to feature quality-assured examples of children's/student's work that illustrate the expectations for learners and contribute to shared understanding of standards across the education system.	continue development of examples of student work for ongoing development of programmes, subjects and short courses	2019 and ongoing
1.8	A strong line of continuity, a sensitivity to key stages of transition, and a focus on common features and elements, is evident across curriculum and assessment developments at early childhood, primary and post-primary levels.	continued development, informed by <i>Aistear</i> , of reporting capacity and support material for the preschool to primary school transition	2019 and ongoing

		complete a cross-sectoral review of Relationships and Sexuality Education in the curriculum and in schools	2019
1.9	A model of cyclical, systematic curriculum review, encompassing all sectors, has been developed and agreed and its introduction has commenced.	publish and consult on a paper outlining a model for cyclical, systematic, curriculum review and development in Ireland and its relationship to the implementation of educational change commence implementation of any outcomes of the process review of junior cycle specifications and learning programmes (L1 and L2) following their implementation in schools by two cohorts of students	2019 2020 2019 and ongoing

2. Engagement and collaboration

To work with all teachers, practitioners, learners and our partners in education to build capacity for change, model ways of working, and inform curriculum and assessment development and implementation

We will deliver on this goal through the following planned outcomes:

Outcomes	To achieve this we will	Target completion date
<p>2.1 NCCA is working with practitioners, groups and networks on ideas, material and initiatives to support their own capacity and that of schools and other settings in curriculum development, assessment practice, and broader educational change.</p>	<p>convene and work with a network of early childhood settings to develop and publish examples of high quality practice with children in the 0-3 age group</p> <p>through a Schools' Forum, work with schools to pilot key aspects of the redeveloped primary curriculum</p> <p>convene and work with a Primary Maths Network to contribute to the development of the new Primary Mathematics Curriculum and to gather and publish examples of children's learning and development in maths</p>	

		<p>continue to work with a School Network to explore approaches to integrating coding in the redeveloped primary curriculum</p> <p>continue to support the implementation and full realisation of the junior cycle developments as they are introduced and embed in schools</p> <p>work directly with a school network on consultation and development of proposals for the development of senior cycle</p> <p>work with teachers and schools to prepare for and facilitate the introduction of new and revised Leaving Certificate subjects such as Computer Science and Physical Education</p>	<p>2019 and ongoing</p> <p>2019</p> <p>2019 and ongoing</p>
2.2	NCCA is supporting the work of education partners and networks in curriculum and assessment development and in supporting teaching and learning.	support the development and activity of partner networks established by other organisations to inform curriculum and assessment developments in early childhood, primary and post-primary education	2019 and ongoing

		through direct work with education partners, continue to support the implementation and full realisation of the junior cycle developments as they are introduced and embed in schools	
2.3	The voice and experience of learners is part of discussions and consultations on developments in curriculum and assessment.	<p>continue to develop materials and models to support the inclusion of the learner's voice in curriculum and assessment development across all sectors</p> <p>incorporate learner involvement in NCCA curriculum and assessment development processes</p> <p>develop, and provide access to, an online bank of materials and models related to capturing the voice of learners in curriculum development and school development</p>	2019 and ongoing
2.4	Liaison and collaborative relationships with a range of organisations are improving the understanding and quality of curriculum and assessment developments and the model for, or approach taken to, their implementation.	<p>collaborate with government departments, agencies and organisations linked to specific aspects or areas of the NCCA's work</p> <p>collaborate with initial teacher education institutions, support teams, services and other organisations to align</p>	2019 and ongoing

		<p>curriculum and assessment developments with teacher professional development</p> <p>continue engagement on the transition from second level to higher education through the Transitions Reform Group</p>	
2.5	<p>Curriculum and assessment developments north and south of the border and in Europe have been supported by strategic collaboration between NCCA and other curriculum development agencies.</p>	<p>collaborate with the curriculum and assessment development agency in Northern Ireland on areas of common interest</p> <p>engage and collaborate with curriculum and assessment development agencies and other development agencies in Europe and internationally on matters of mutual interest</p> <p>engage and collaborate with international networks such as the Consortium of Institutes for Development and Research in Education in Europe (CIDREE) and the Atlantic Rim Collaborative on areas of common interest</p>	2019 and ongoing

3. Knowledge and research

To generate, use and share knowledge and research to support the development of curriculum and assessment advice and practice in all educational settings

We will deliver on this goal through the following planned outcomes

Outcomes		To achieve this we will	Target completion date
3.1	Curriculum and assessment developments are informed by evidence and research.	prepare, agree and regularly review an NCCA research strategy	2019
		draw on the findings of the primary longitudinal study to inform primary curriculum review and all work across early childhood and primary level	2019 and ongoing
		commence a multi-dimensional study evaluating the impact of the implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle and associated junior cycle developments	2020 and ongoing
		publish background papers and consultation reports related to the development of programme, subject and short course specifications in junior and senior cycle	Ongoing

		<p>initiate, commission and use research, as needed, to inform the development of practice with children aged from birth to three years</p> <p>initiate, commission and use research, as needed, to inform and underpin the redevelopment of the primary curriculum, junior cycle developments and senior cycle review and development</p> <p>initiate and commission research to inform the curriculum and assessment development process undertaken by the NCCA e.g the focus on Learning Outcomes</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
3.2	Curriculum and assessment developments are informed through engagement with and participation in research networks.	<p>work with the Research Alive Group (the Teaching Council, the Centre for Effective Services and the NCCA) to develop the Teachers' Research Expertise Exchange, in the process supporting teachers and other professionals to engage with research/researchers to inform practice and build system capacity</p> <p>collaborate with the Research in Early Childhood Education Collaborative (RECEC) and other organisations/networks to</p>	<p>2020</p> <p>2019 and ongoing</p>

		<p>explore the contribution of research in early childhood to developments in early childhood and primary education</p> <p>hold an international conference highlighting NCCA's contribution to the research knowledge base in the education system in Ireland</p>	2020
3.3	The outcomes and findings of research are available, accessible and disseminated to those with an interest in education, policy making and evaluation.	<p>ensure that boards, development groups, partner organisations and networks have access to evidence from research and from all educational settings</p> <p>publish findings from research in easily accessible formats including full reports, executive summaries, presentations, podcasts and interviews</p>	<p>2019 ongoing</p> <p>2019 ongoing</p>
3.4	Research findings and new knowledge are shared and interrogated by NCCA staff as an integral part of their work.	<p>provide regular opportunities for NCCA staff to discuss current research in relevant fields</p> <p>invite researchers and external experts to present and discuss relevant areas of research and expertise with NCCA staff</p>	<p>2019 ongoing</p> <p>2019 ongoing</p>

		provide opportunities for staff to write and present conference papers and findings from research and work with all educational settings	2019 ongoing
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4. Communications

To communicate, present and share the work and achievements of the NCCA effectively, to improve its capacity to engage with others in leading and supporting educational change

We will deliver on this goal through the following planned outcomes:

Outcomes		To achieve this we will	Target completion date
4.1	Using an effective media strategy and process, key messages on educational change are shared internally and externally. NCCA responses and contributions are informed and timely. Communications awareness is built into all areas of the NCCA's work.	<p>prepare, agree and regularly review an NCCA media and communications strategy</p> <p>employ a range of media to ensure key messages are effectively communicated to schools and the general public</p> <p>continue to develop use of social media to share key messages about the work of NCCA and to engage teachers, practitioners, learners and others</p>	<p>2019 ongoing</p> <p>2019 ongoing</p> <p>2019 ongoing</p>
4.2	NCCA websites are updated and maintained in response to system need, customer feedback, statistics on web usage, and developments in online and social media.	continue to develop, maintain and analyse/evaluate the use of the NCCA corporate and other websites	2019 ongoing

		<p>develop video and podcast material for the website highlighting the NCCA's role, work, curriculum development processes and structures</p> <p>continue development of curriculumonline.ie and continually review and renew the examples of learning, teaching and children's/student's work it includes</p> <p>further develop electronic planning tools for teachers and school management that support aspects of curriculum changes underway</p>	<p>2019/2020</p> <p>2019 ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
4.3	The work of the NCCA on curriculum and assessment and on practice in schools is shared with national and international audiences and feedback informs ongoing developments.	have an NCCA presence at relevant national and international events and showcase the NCCA's work in a strategic way at conferences, seminars, and through publications	Ongoing

5. Governance and corporate services

To develop NCCA governance and organisational structures, processes, skills and competences effectively to achieve the vision of the organisation

We will deliver on this goal through the following planned outcomes:

Outcomes		To achieve this we will	Target completion date
5.1	Organisation structures and processes are supporting innovative curriculum and assessment development and collaborative work practices.	implement the findings of the internal Review of NCCA structures and curriculum development processes, 2018	2019/2020
		commission an external review of the NCCA and its effectiveness	2020
		conduct a self-assessment by Council and its sub-committees on an annual basis	2019 and ongoing
		build collaboration across teams and other structures to improve continuity across sectors and improve workflow	2019 and ongoing

		develop approaches and media to extend internal communications among staff, stakeholders and NCCA structures and committees	2019 and ongoing
5.2	NCCA staff has developed the knowledge and competences required to develop innovative curriculum and assessment advice and to support its introduction in schools and other settings.	<p>continue to provide professional development related to competences identified through the Performance Management Development System (PMDS)</p> <p>encourage and support staff to develop their knowledge and competences through higher education studies and research and other forms of professional development</p>	2019 and ongoing
5.3	There is a performance culture focused on positive values, co-operation, support, empowerment and wellbeing of staff across the organisation.	<p>continue to implement the PMDS</p> <p>prepare, agree and regularly review an NCCA human resources strategy and workforce plan</p>	2019 and ongoing
5.4	There is a robust financial management system in place.	monitor and review revised financial management systems and procedures introduced in 2017	2019

		<p>maintain relevant accounting standards in line with government guidelines</p> <p>provide all necessary documentation for internal and external audit</p>	<p>2019 and ongoing</p> <p>2019 and ongoing</p>
5.5	There is full compliance with the governance requirements of, and code of practice for, state bodies.	<p>ensure compliance with the requirements of good governance generally, with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016 and the General Data Protection Regulations 2018 (GDPR)</p> <p>support the work of the Audit and Risk and the Governance committees of the NCCA and develop and implement programmes of work for internal audit and for developments in governance</p> <p>meet all reporting requirements of the Departments of Education and Skills and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform</p> <p>adhere to public procurement guidelines</p>	2019 and ongoing

		maintain and update a risk register and risk management system	
5.6	Customer service standards are developed and improved.	review the customer service charter address any improvements needed in service delivery	2019 and ongoing
5.7	The NCCA has complied with all relevant public sector agreements and development plans.	implement measures to comply with the requirements of public service reform and civil service renewal	2019 and ongoing

5. Monitoring and reporting

This strategic plan sets out the strategic goals, outcomes and targets that will direct the work of the NCCA over the period of the Council from 2019 to 2021. Ongoing progress will be monitored and reported through general updates to the Council and through published annual reports.

The preparation and implementation of an annual Plan of Work and the implementation of the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) are central to guiding and monitoring progress at organisational and individual level.

Progress reports and presentations on the various areas of work will be presented to Council over the course of the strategy. An Annual Report detailing progress made in implementing the strategy will be published each year.

An annual Performance Delivery Agreement (PDA) with the Department of Education and Skills and regular Governance meetings with its Curriculum and Assessment Policy Unit, will provide a framework for reporting to the Department and improve clarity with regards to roles and responsibilities. The Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General conducts audits of receipts and expenditure and of procedures and practices. The outcomes of these audits are published in the C and AG's Annual Report.

