



National Council for Curriculum and Assessment Research Strategy 2019-2021

Contents

Introduction	3
Vision	3
Principles	3
Goals	4
Organisation research profile	5
Internal research	5
Commissioned research	5
Additional research engagement	6
Conclusion	6

Introduction

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) Research Strategy arises from the organisation's Strategic Plan 2019–2021. One of the three elements of the NCCA's Mission is *'to undertake, use and share research as a basis for advice and debate on education'* (NCCA, 2019, 11). The Strategic Goal associated with this aspect of the organisation's mission states that NCCA will *'... generate, use and share knowledge and research to support the development of curriculum advice and practice in all education settings'* (NCCA, 2019, 8), i.e. in early years settings, primary and post-primary schools. In addition to the Strategic Goal on Knowledge and Research, the Research Strategy will contribute to achieving the Strategic Goal on 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 education change'* (NCCA, 2019, 9)) by showing stakeholders and the wider public how NCCA approaches and achieves its research brief. It is also worth noting that such strategies contribute to the ongoing development of *'...governance and organisational structures, processes, skills and competences...'* (NCCA, 2019, 9).

This research strategy articulates the Vision, Principles and Goals that guide NCCA's research activity and outlines the contexts for and scope of that activity. It will be reviewed following each cycle of the organisation's Strategic Plan.

Vision

An evidence-based culture for curriculum and assessment innovation and development across the continuum of Irish education encompassing early years, primary and post-primary.

Principles

This research strategy is grounded in principles of:

- **Integrity**

NCCA grounds its curriculum and assessment development in rigorous and robust research evidence.

- **Inclusivity**

NCCA research actively engages with the diversity of stakeholders in the education system, including children, young people, parents and teachers, in authentic, collaborative and meaningful ways.

- **Influence**

NCCA research stimulates and informs national and international debate on critical issues in education through reciprocal conversations.

- **Impact**

NCCA research is mediated through partnership with stakeholders into learning and teaching contexts.

- **Accessibility**

NCCA makes research openly available and accessible and communicates research evidence through multiple channels.

Goals

- Embed the research principles in NCCA research activity.
- Enhance visibility for the methodological processes that underpin NCCA research outputs.
- Enhance capacity in NCCA to engage in, evaluate and manage research activity.
- Enhance understanding of the influence and impact of NCCA research in national and international contexts.
- Advocate for and support enhanced research capacity within the Irish education system.

Organisation research profile

Consistent with the NCCA Mission statement on research (NCCA, 2019, 11), curriculum development and advice are grounded in research. In general, research is carried out by NCCA in relation to specific aspects or areas of curriculum development across early years, primary and post-primary education. In general, NCCA research output can be categorised as internally and externally generated. Internal research is carried out by the NCCA executive, whereas external research output is conducted on NCCA's behalf by academic institutions and personnel, or by research organisations. Whatever the source of the output, NCCA uses the research to inform and support its processes of curriculum review, policy development and advice.

Internal research

Research is carried out by the NCCA Executive for a number of reasons and in a number of contexts. Background papers, generally desktop reviews of literature, associated with specific areas of work are published which mediate research literature into key messages for internal structures. NCCA staff also engage in data collection through field-work in relation to, for example, consultation with stakeholders and reviews of specific areas of curriculum provision. Such consultations and reviews involve both quantitative and qualitative research, using a broad range of methods, and are often carried out in collaboration with education partners. Increasingly, NCCA is concerned with including children's perspectives in all consultation work, indeed in all research outputs, and this brings particular requirements in terms of ethics and appropriate research methodologies.

Commissioned research

NCCA commissions a considerable range of research, both nationally and internationally. In many cases, these commissions are for literature reviews which encapsulate current theory, research findings and conceptualisation of good practice. NCCA also commissions audits of international provision in specific areas and comparative studies locating Ireland in the international context. In these types of research, there are particular methodological considerations associated with ensuring their validity and trustworthiness. In addition, NCCA commissions academics and practitioners to support the NCCA executive in carrying out field-work (e.g. focus groups). NCCA has also commissioned, through tender processes, major longitudinal research projects which have

contributed to the development of capacity in the research community in Ireland. Currently, the Children's School Lives longitudinal study – funded by the NCCA – is being undertaken by UCD. This is investigating children's primary school experiences and is scheduled for completion in 2024.

Additional research engagement

NCCA contributes to research activity in the broader educational context through involvement and partnership with other organisations. Examples of this engagement are TREX (in partnership with the Teaching Council, Centre for Effective Services and a consortium of NUIG/UL), SCoTENS (the Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South), and membership of committees on TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) and PISA (Program for International Student Assessment). A goal of this research strategy is to support NCCA staff in developing and maintaining their professional knowledge base, thereby enhancing their capacity to engage in this type of activity. Additionally, NCCA staff engage in dissemination of the organisation's research outputs through presentations at national and international conferences and seminars, professional publications and other media.

Conclusion

Research engagement is central to the work of the NCCA. This Research Strategy will provide the framework within which that engagement – national and international, internal and external – will take place in the coming years. It will be used to identify actions through which the Vision, Principles and Goals will be enacted and achieved, and it will be reviewed in tandem with the renewal of the NCCA's Strategic Plan.

Reference

NCCA (2019) *Strategic Plan 2019-2021*. Available at: <https://www.ncca.ie/en/about/corporate-information/strategic-plan>