



**NCCA**

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta  
Curaclaim agus Measúnachta  
National Council for  
Curriculum and Assessment

# National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

## Annual Report 2023



Council Members



Seán Ó Foghlú  
Chairperson



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Nominee of the Minister for Education



Sheila Garrity  
Nominee of the Minister of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth



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Máirín Ní Chéileachair  
Irish National Teachers Organisation



Joe McKeown  
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Finn Ó Murchú  
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Clare Downey  
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Liz Farrell  
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## Foreword

We are currently in a period of significant change and opportunity across sectors in Irish education, and the NCCA's work continues to be central to this from the early years to the end of post-primary school. The Council's approach to curriculum and assessment development prioritises working closely with schools and settings, engaging in research and learning from developments internationally, consulting widely, and bringing all of this into extensive and iterative deliberations with the partners in education. Rooted in the realities of schools and settings in the Irish context, this approach has remained key to the Council's vision of enabling all children and students to experience and benefit from enjoyable, engaging, relevant and appropriately challenging experiences that support learning, living in, contributing to, caring for, and working in a changing world.

A closer look at each sector reveals the variety and scale of the Council's work in 2023. In the case of early childhood education, NCCA continued to update Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework focusing on proposals shaped by research and consultation findings. A key feature of this was a ground-breaking and innovative consultation with babies, toddlers and young children. The review and redevelopment of the primary curriculum progressed at pace with the launch of Ireland's first ever curriculum framework for primary and special schools. Setting out the vision for a redeveloped curriculum, this framework informed the new Primary Mathematics Curriculum which was published at the start of the 2023/2024 school year and represented the first update to this part of the curriculum since 1999. At junior cycle, developments introduced incrementally between 2014 and 2019 have continued to

be embedded in the practice of schools and NCCA's work provided ongoing support for this through examples of student work and early enactment reviews. At senior cycle, 2023 brought accelerated activity with many strands of the redevelopment work being progressed. This included work on updating the Transition Year Programme Statement and seven existing Leaving Certificate subjects, as well as the development of brand new subjects and curriculum provision at Levels 1 and 2. All of this work across sectors was progressed through major stakeholder engagement and close collaboration with teachers/educators, young people and school leaders.

As seen in the tables presented later in the Annual Report, the Council also invested significant funds in research ensuring that the advice it formulates and presents to the Minister is informed by evidence. This investment enabled the continuation of the longitudinal study exploring the experiences of children in primary school and the study capturing schools' experiences of introducing and implementing the Framework for Junior Cycle. The latter part of the year also saw the Council initiating a third study with a longitudinal aspect designed to document and learn from students and teachers' experiences of the Junior Cycle Irish specifications.

Corporate governance too saw key milestones during the year, including the completion of an organisational review. This provided a unique opportunity to review NCCA's internal structure and resources and ensure their appropriateness for delivering on the organisation's strategic priorities into the future. Significant planning was also undertaken to prepare for office moves in Dublin and Portlaoise.



This is only a snapshot of some of the main outputs from the work overseen by the Council in 2023. The infographic presented on pages X-Y gives a visual overview of the scale and complexity of our work. As Chairperson, I am hugely conscious that work as varied and as extensive as this, and on this scale, only happens through the commitment of the Council, its stakeholders and its staff. The list of NCCA meetings presented in the infographic is clear evidence of this. Council members and the members of subject development groups and boards give their time and share their expertise, insights and experience on a voluntary basis. Their interest and commitment to curriculum development is central to the successful delivery of the NCCA's important work. I'd also like to thank those in the Department of Education with whom the NCCA worked during the year—the Minister for Education, Norma Foley, TD., the Department's Management Team led by the Secretary General, Ms Bernie McNally, and colleagues in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Unit and the Senior Cycle Redevelopment Programme Office for the interest, input, co-operation, support and resourcing that enabled the Council to deliver on its agenda.

We are extremely fortunate in NCCA to have a staff team that continues to grow in number to reflect the expanding work programme, and whose specialist expertise, enthusiasm, and clear commitment has ensured the completion of a far-reaching and demanding work programme in 2023, sometimes within tight deadlines.

2023 was my first full year as Chairperson of the NCCA. I want to thank the Deputy Chairs, Mr Joe McKeown and Dr Michael Redmond and the Council members for their work and support throughout the 12 months. The Council's

work programme required members to engage constructively and productively with a variety of complex curriculum and assessment issues. I also want to thank the members of our Audit and Risk Committee and our Governance Committee for their work to ensure high standards in financial management and corporate governance. Finally, I want to acknowledge the work of Joe, Michael and Dr Finn Ó Murchú in providing significant leadership as Chairs to the Boards for Early Childhood and Primary, the Board for Senior Cycle and the Board for Junior Cycle, respectively. I very much look forward to continuing to work with the Council in supporting the Chief Executive and the staff in moving forward with the important work of the NCCA.

*Seán Ó Foghlú*

Mr Seán Ó Foghlú  
NCCA Chairperson







## Introduction

2023 was another busy year for NCCA. The curriculum redevelopment work at primary and senior cycle levels formed a major part of the Council's work programme. The year also brought milestones in the corporate governance area with the completion of the first organisational review since NCCA was placed on a statutory footing more than twenty years ago.

The work to redevelop the primary curriculum and senior cycle, to update Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework, and to provide supports for schools' implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle was significant in 2023. This activity continued to bring important opportunities to focus on the role of curriculum in enabling all young people to experience and benefit from high quality teaching, learning and assessment. Key aspects of this work are set out in Strategic Goal 1 (pages 18–20) and included:

- proposals to update Aistear and wide, public consultation on these
- publication of the Primary Curriculum Framework and the new Primary Mathematics Curriculum
- initial drafts of specifications for all curriculum areas in the redeveloped primary curriculum
- early enactment reviews of Junior Cycle Irish T1 and T2, Modern Languages (French, German, Spanish, Italian) and Visual Art
- new specifications for Junior Cycle PE and Junior Cycle SPHE
- initial drafts of specifications for two new Leaving Certificate subjects—Climate Action and Sustainable Development, and Drama, Film and Theatre Studies
- draft specifications for six Leaving Certificate subjects
- a draft updated Transition Year Programme Statement and a draft Senior Cycle SPHE curriculum
- initial drafts of senior cycle modules for Level 1 and Level 2, the first ever curriculum provision at this level for the senior cycle stage of education.

In addition, we continued to provide a range of practical online supports for teaching, learning and assessing, including examples of pedagogy in early childhood and primary education; examples of student work within junior cycle subjects; guidelines for teaching and learning in care and detention schools; resources for reporting to parents; and text lists for Junior Cycle Irish and Leaving Certificate English.

The infographic presented on pages 16–17 reflects NCCA's strong commitment to the formulation of advice which is evidence-informed and underpinned by wide stakeholder engagement. 2023's programme of work drew

on an extensive range of research. This included a series of literature reviews on the primary curriculum areas, research on Traveller culture and history, and reports from the Council's two longitudinal studies which focus on children's experience of primary school and post-primary schools' experience of the Framework for Junior Cycle. Strategic Goals 1 and 2 provide a summary of the scale and multi-faceted nature of our work with schools, settings and wider stakeholders.



Our close work with schools—with teachers, children/students, school leaders and parents—took place through our continued engagement with the Schools Forum and through the many school visits, around the country, that enabled us to listen and learn first-hand from schools' curriculum experiences. In addition to the 17 public consultations, we explored key ideas on curriculum and assessment through in person and online seminars, and by liaising and collaborating with a range of organisations and government departments. Sincere thanks to the schools, early childhood settings, organisations and individuals, and there were many, who took time to engage with us and to read, reflect on and share their views on draft curriculum specifications. Your interest in our work is appreciated, and your voices and perspectives matter and help shape the advice the Council gives to the Minister.

Good corporate governance underpins NCCA's work. Strategic Enablers 1-4 on pages 25–29 present the scope and scale of our governance work in 2023. Building on our learning from remote working during COVID, we implemented our first blended working policy and we invested significant time in scoping our changing office needs in Dublin and Portlaoise and sourcing suitable new accommodation. The scale of our curriculum and assessment development work brought increased administrative demands which were supported by the Corporate Services Team. Alongside this, day-to-day operations continued apace in areas such as finance, external reporting, human resources, customer service, the maintenance of offices, and health and safety. The Statement on Internal Control, the Report on Protected Disclosures, and other requirements of annual reports as set out in the *Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016*, are included as appendices.

The work undertaken by staff throughout the year was guided by the 2023 Plan of Work and by the Council's strategic direction. In addition, the members of the representative boards and development groups, and the expert/advisory groups supported the Executive across the many projects and areas of work. I also want to acknowledge the support from officials in the Department of Education and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. All of this greatly contributed to the thinking, discussions and deliberations which helped shape NCCA's curriculum and assessment advice in 2023.

Finally, I want to express huge thanks to my colleagues, the NCCA Executive. Colleagues across the organisation continue to bring their specialist knowledge and expertise, high levels of energy, agility and creativity, resilience and leadership, and immense commitment to their work. All of this is underpinned by a deep desire to develop high-quality advice on curriculum and assessment that is inclusive and evidence-based, and that supports each young person to make progress in all areas of their learning and development.

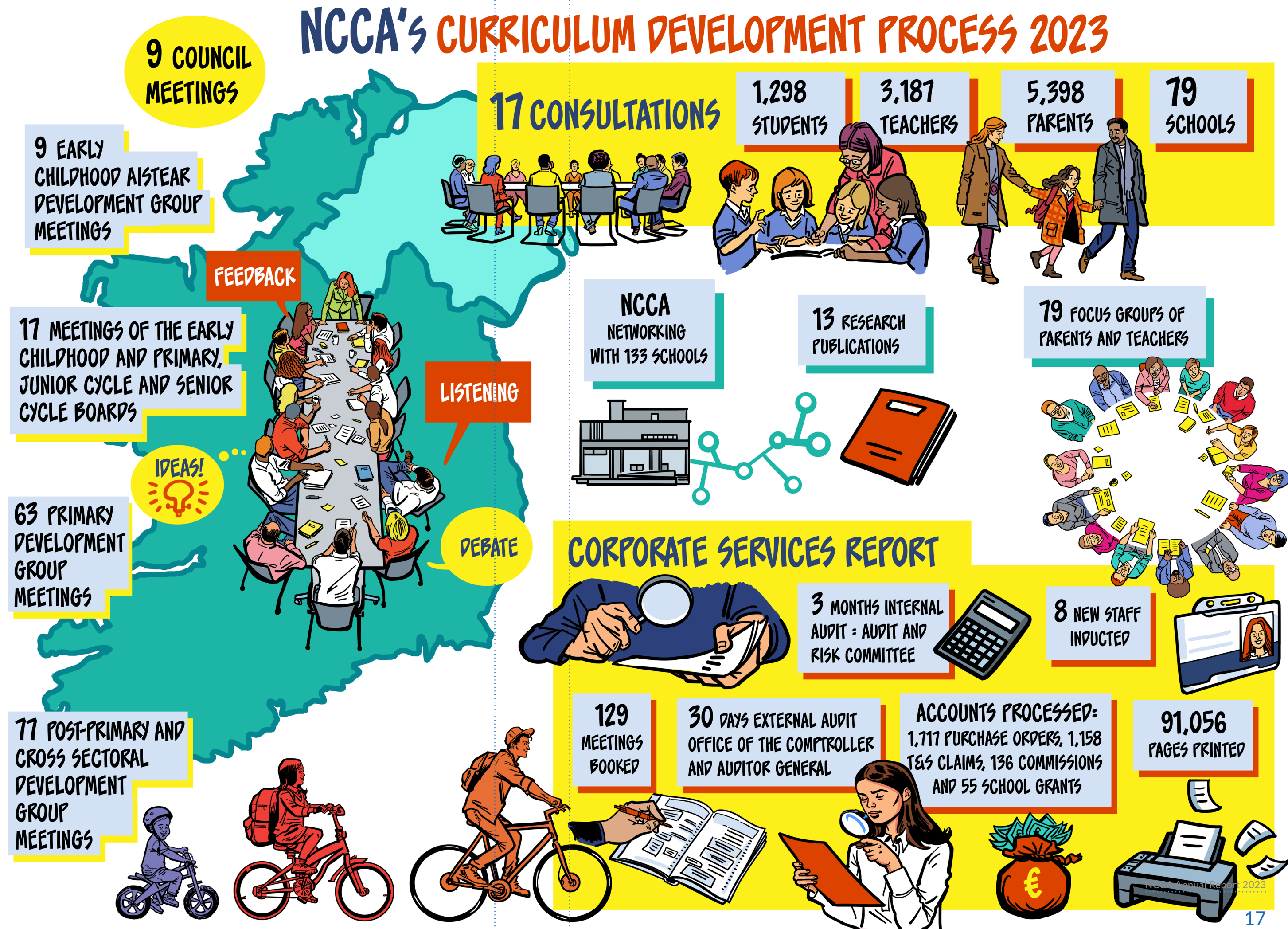
*Arlene Forster*

Arlene Forster  
Chief Executive





# 1. Overview of the work of the NCCA in 2023





2. Progress on NCCA work in 2023

Strategic Goal 1 – Curriculum and Assessment	
We will develop innovative and relevant curriculum and assessment for inclusion, engagement, quality, progression, and continuity across sectors and across educational transitions. We will promote and exemplify effective pedagogies to support all young people as engaged and active learners with opportunities for choice and decision-making. We will align pedagogy and assessment with curriculum purposes, and support reporting that demonstrates the range of young people’s progress and achievements.	
Strategic Plan Outcomes	Progress in 2023
<b>SG1.1</b> Update <i>Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework</i> ensuring its continued support for high quality learning experiences for children throughout their early childhood years and enabling appropriate coherence with the redeveloped primary curriculum.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Proposals to update <i>Aistear</i> published</li><li>Phase 2 consultation on proposals for an updated <i>Aistear</i> completed</li></ul>
<b>SG1.2</b> Strengthen and actively support the National Síolta Aistear Initiative, with particular reference to the online Aistear Síolta Practice Guide.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Additional materials for the <i>Aistear Síolta</i> Practice Guide with a focus on birth to 3 years, partnerships with parents, planning and assessing, and diversity and inclusion published</li><li>Irish support materials for the <i>Aistear Síolta</i> Practice Guide reviewed and updated</li></ul>
<b>SG1.3</b> Finalise the <i>Primary Curriculum Framework</i> and redevelop the curriculum for primary and special schools ensuring its continued support for high quality teaching, learning and assessment experiences and outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><i>Primary Curriculum Framework</i> published</li><li><i>Primary Mathematics Curriculum</i> finalised and published</li><li>Draft specification for Arts Education progressed</li><li>Draft specification for Primary Language Curriculum – including draft Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) progressed</li><li>Draft specification for Science, Technology and Engineering Education progressed</li><li>Draft specification for Social and Environmental Education progressed</li><li>Draft specification for Wellbeing progressed</li></ul>
<b>SG1.4</b> Review and update pedagogical guidance as well as assessment and reporting arrangements for primary and special schools in light of the redeveloped primary school curriculum.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Video resource for parents and children to support reporting in primary and special schools developed and published</li></ul>

Strategic Plan Outcomes	Progress in 2023
<b>SG1.5</b> Support post-primary schools in using the Framework for Junior Cycle as the basis for planning and implementing their junior cycle programmes, and in implementing developments arising from the review of senior cycle.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Review of the early enactment of Junior Cycle Modern Languages (French, German, Spanish, Italian) and Visual Art completed</li><li>Review of Junior Cycle Digital Media Literacy, Coding and Chinese Short Courses completed</li><li>Actions arising from early enactment review of Junior Cycle Irish T1 and T2 progressed</li><li>Updated Junior Cycle SPHE curriculum published</li><li>135 hour Junior Cycle PE curriculum published</li><li>Junior Cycle History Short Course (Level 2) published</li><li>Review of the early enactment of Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes published</li><li>PE Network for the monitoring of the implementation of the 135 hour JC PE specification established</li></ul>
<b>SG1.7</b> Guided by a clear purpose and vision, redevelop senior cycle to provide more varied learning pathways and greater choice and flexibility for progression for all students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Consultation on the Background Paper for the development of senior cycle modules for students currently following JC L1/L2LPs completed</li><li>Draft senior cycle modules (Numeracy; Communication and Literacy) for students accessing Level 1 Learning Programmes (L1LPs) and Level 2 Learning Programmes (L2LPs) in junior cycle progressed</li><li>Programme Statement for students following L1LPs and L2LPs at senior cycle progressed</li></ul>
<b>SG1.9</b> Review and update, as appropriate, existing curriculum and assessment specifications and develop new curriculum and assessment specifications in response to identified needs and policy imperatives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Revised curriculum specifications for Leaving Certificate Arabic, Ancient Greek and Latin developed and made available for consultation</li><li>Revised curriculum specifications for Leaving Certificate Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Business developed and made available for consultation</li><li>Curriculum specifications for the new Leaving Certificate subjects of Climate Action and Sustainable Development, and Drama, Film and Theatre Studies progressed</li><li>New curriculum specification for senior cycle SPHE developed and made available for consultation</li><li>New Transition Year Programme Statement developed and made available for consultation</li><li>Early insights review of Leaving Certificate Computer Science and Physical Education completed</li></ul>
<b>SG1.10</b> Strengthen the focus on and promotion of effective pedagogies to support progression in learning for all children and young people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Primary Language Toolkit to support the implementation of the <i>Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile</i> extended</li><li>Progression Continua and support materials as part of the Primary Mathematics Toolkit published</li></ul>



Strategic Plan Outcomes	Progress in 2023
<b>SG1.11</b> Develop curriculum and assessment advice that actively promotes and supports inclusive education enabling all children and young people to feel valued, motivated and fulfilled in their experience of learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extension, review and monitoring of the SPHE online toolkits completed</li> <li>• Guidelines supporting teaching and learning in care and detention schools published</li> <li>• Traveller culture and history research report published</li> <li>• Leaving Certificate English text lists revised and published</li> <li>• Junior Cycle Irish text list (Teanga 1 and Teanga 2) revised and published</li> <li>• Review of Leaving Certificate Irish literature list commenced</li> </ul>
<b>SG1.12</b> Further develop and enhance quality-assured examples of children's learning that illustrate expectations for learners and contribute to shared understanding of learning progressions at primary level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examples of children's learning as part of the Primary Language Toolkit quality assured and published</li> </ul>
<b>SG1.13</b> Further develop and enhance quality-assured examples of students' work that illustrate expectations for students and contribute to shared understanding of standards across junior cycle.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examples of student learning in a range of junior cycle subjects gathered, quality assured and published on curriulumonline.ie</li> <li>• Further examples of student learning across a range of junior cycle subjects gathered</li> </ul>

## Strategic Goal 2 – Engagement and Collaboration

We will work with and support teachers, practitioners, children, students and the partners in education to inform curriculum and assessment development and enactment, build capacity for change, and model ways of working together. Through engagement and collaboration, we will influence, generate, and share new knowledge about curriculum, assessment, and enactment processes. We will advocate for evidence-informed teaching, learning and assessment practices.

Strategic Plan Outcomes	Progress in 2023
<b>SG2.1</b> Work with partners in education, support services, and further and higher education institutions providing early years educator programmes and initial teacher education to build capacity for curriculum change across the education system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reimagining Curriculum Seminars to inform the development of curriculum specifications as part of the redevelopment of the Primary School Curriculum convened</li> <li>• Integration, Pedagogy and Assessment seminar in collaboration with stakeholders convened</li> <li>• Event on the redevelopment of the Primary School Curriculum to support capacity building within Initial Teacher Education and the support services convened</li> <li>• Meetings with the Schools Forum convened</li> </ul>

Strategic Plan Outcomes	Progress in 2023
<b>SG2.2</b> Ensure diverse voices and the experiences of children, young people and communities are part of discussions and consultations on developments in curriculum and assessment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultation with children in collaboration with Hub na nÓg on the development of the primary curriculum specifications for Wellbeing and Social and Environmental Education completed</li> </ul>
<b>SG2.3</b> Liaise and collaborate with a range of organisations and government departments to align developments and support a coherent approach to curriculum enactment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration with partner organisations and departments in the National <i>Siolta Aistear</i> Initiative on the strategic direction of the initiative progressed</li> <li>• Work of the Early Years Education Policy Unit and Early Years Inspectorate supported</li> <li>• Work of the Department of Education/Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth National <i>Siolta Aistear</i> Initiative Steering Group and its structures supported</li> <li>• Work with education partners and other key stakeholders on advancing conditions for enabling curriculum change at primary level progressed</li> <li>• Work of the Department of Education Primary Steering Committee and the Technical Working Group supported</li> <li>• Work of the Educational Research Centre's (ERC) National Advisory Committees on PIRLS, TIMSS, PISA and on National Assessments supported</li> <li>• Work of Department of Education Advisory Committee for the Gaeltacht Education Policy, and the Steering Committee for Irish-medium education outside Gaeltacht areas supported</li> <li>• Work of the Department of Education Senior Cycle Redevelopment structures supported               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senior Cycle Redevelopment Implementation Group</li> <li>• Senior Cycle Redevelopment Partners' Forum</li> <li>• Senior Cycle Redevelopment Programme Delivery Board</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Meetings of the NCCA/State Examinations Commission Standing Group and sub-group held</li> <li>• Meetings of the NCCA/SOLAS Standing Group and sub-groups held</li> </ul>
<b>SG2.4</b> Support and participate in research, curriculum and assessment initiatives, nationally and internationally, through strategic collaborations with other agencies, organisations and networks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CIDREE Knowledge Carousel, Expert Meetings, Conference and General Assembly attended</li> <li>• Collaboration with partners in supporting the Teacher Research Exchange (T-REX) progressed</li> </ul>



Strategic Plan Outcomes	Progress in 2023
<b>SG2.5</b> Support the capacity of schools and settings to develop, introduce and enact change in curriculum and assessment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close engagement with the Schools Forum on the development of curriculum specifications as part of the redeveloped Primary School Curriculum progressed</li> <li>• Close engagement with post-primary schools through the school-based strand of consultation on all junior cycle reviews and all senior cycle curriculum and assessment developments</li> </ul>

### Strategic Goal 3 – Knowledge and Research

We will generate, use and disseminate rigorous and robust research evidence to support the development of curriculum and assessment advice and practice in all educational settings. Through research design, we will engage with the diversity of stakeholders in the education system, including children, students, parents, teachers/ practitioners and school leaders, in authentic, collaborative and meaningful ways. We will share research to stimulate and inform the discourse on matters related to our curriculum and assessment advice. We will contribute to capacity-building in research across the education system.

Strategic Plan Outcomes	Progress in 2023
<b>SG3.1</b> Use research evidence, including findings from longitudinal research and consultation processes, to inform curriculum and assessment developments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Composite reports on the Reimagining Curriculum Seminars finalised</li> <li>• Engagement with the Advisory Panel (Primary) on the redevelopment of the primary curriculum continued</li> <li>• Engagement with the Advisory Panel (Post-Primary) on the redevelopment of senior cycle continued</li> </ul>
<b>SG3.2</b> Publish and implement the Research Strategy 2023–2026.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research Strategy 2023–2026, published and implemented</li> </ul>
<b>SG3.3</b> Disseminate, nationally and internationally, the outcomes and findings of research we generate to stimulate and inform debate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultation report with babies, toddlers and young children on updating <i>Aistear</i> Phase 1 published</li> <li>• Report on full consultation on Phase 1 of updating <i>Aistear</i> published</li> <li>• Reports on a consultation with children on the nature of STEM Education and Arts Education in a redeveloped Primary School Curriculum published</li> <li>• Reports 5 and 6 from the Children's School Lives longitudinal study published</li> <li>• Report on the consultation with children on learning Mathematics in the primary school published</li> <li>• Consultation reports on the draft <i>Primary Mathematics Curriculum</i> published</li> <li>• Literature review for Arts Education in a redeveloped Primary School Curriculum published</li> <li>• Literature review for STEM Education in the redeveloped Primary School Curriculum published</li> </ul>

Strategic Plan Outcomes	Progress in 2023
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literature review for Wellbeing in the redeveloped Primary School Curriculum published</li> <li>• Report on the consultation on the draft Leaving Certificate Gaeilge curriculum specifications (Teanga 1 and Teanga 2) published</li> <li>• Report on the early enactment review of Junior Cycle Gaeilge curriculum specifications (Teanga 1 and Teanga 2) published</li> <li>• Research into models of provision and frameworks used to inform development of curricula for native languages to inform work on Leaving Certificate Irish commenced</li> <li>• Report on research to support work on developing text lists published</li> </ul>
<b>SG3.4</b> Promote access, sharing and interrogation of research findings and new knowledge by staff and members of NCCA structures as an integral part of their work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff Research Day held</li> <li>• Research Spotlight for staff convened</li> <li>• Resources to support NCCA staff engagement with the EBSCO database provided</li> <li>• NCCA library audited and strategy for a move to an e-library developed</li> </ul>





## Strategic Enabler 1 – People and Organisational Culture

NCCA's people and organisational culture are central to implementing this strategy. We will provide a vibrant, positive and safe workplace where people can perform to the best of their abilities, working collaboratively and creatively with others in support of our strategic goals.

### Strategic Plan Outcomes

**SE1.1** Develop a People Strategy to reflect and further develop the positive and supportive practices that allow us all to work at our best and contribute to a vibrant and effective workplace.

**SE1.2** Implement blended working arrangements which build on the COVID experience, support NCCA's strategic goals and reflect national policies and guidelines.

**SE1.3** Continue to foster a culture of learning and development, facilitated by Performance Management Development (PMD), which encourages and supports staff to develop and share their competencies, knowledge and expertise from induction onwards.

**SE1.4** Support and promote wellbeing in NCCA, including employee wellbeing, through continued reflection and engagement.

**SE1.5** Build on the findings of Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey 2020 to enhance NCCA's positive, inclusive, and supportive workplace culture, in an environment grounded in mutual respect where all feel comfortable and empowered to contribute to and within their workplace.

**SE1.6** Develop NCCA's people, including people managers, across the whole of their NCCA career to acquire the leadership and management skills required to sustain NCCA in its work and to share their knowledge with colleagues ensuring continuity.

### Progress in 2023

- Work on a People Strategy following the implementation of changes arising from the organisational review continued
- Policy piloted successfully
- Support for staff CPD continued with many staff undertaking further studies up to doctoral level
- PMD in 2023 continued to support staff development
- Continued provision of employee support services
- Team meetings and full staff meetings enabled and encouraged staff interaction and promoted social connections in a blended working environment
- NCCA took part in the 2023 Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey achieving a participation rate of over 86%, placing the organisation in the Top Ten for participation; results will be available mid-2024
- Performance Management Development continued to support managers in addition to continuing professional development opportunities



## Strategic Enabler 2 – Governance

We will develop NCCA governance and organisational structures, processes, skills and competences effectively to support the achievement of the three strategic goals while ensuring compliance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (2016).

Strategic Plan Outcomes	Progress in 2023
<b>SE2.1</b> Support the work of Council, Audit and Risk Committee, Governance Committee and other structures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nine Council meetings supported, eight Audit and Risk meetings and six Governance Committee meetings in addition to Boards and Development groups</li> </ul>
<b>SE2.2</b> Review the effectiveness of organisational and enabling structures and implement findings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Progress continued on consideration and implementation of changes following organisational review</li> <li>• Internal review of the Council's effectiveness completed</li> </ul>
<b>SE2.3</b> Maintain and further develop the Corporate Governance Framework and associated policies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policies reviewed at regular intervals and updated where needed</li> </ul>
<b>SE2.4</b> Maintain appropriate risk management policies and procedures in line with the risk appetite of Council.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risk continued to be a key inclusion on Audit and Risk Committee and Council agendas and kept under regular review</li> </ul>
<b>SE2.5</b> Maintain and further develop robust financial systems and internal controls, producing audited Financial Statements to the deadlines and standards required.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deadlines all met and/or exceeded</li> </ul>
<b>SE2.6</b> Adhere to public procurement guidelines and promote the use of environmental and social considerations in public procurement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First Climate Action Roadmap for NCCA developed and approved by Council</li> </ul>
<b>SE2.7</b> Meet all legal and statutory requirements relevant to the organisation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All legal and statutory obligations met</li> </ul>
<b>SE2.8</b> Maintain and further develop customer service, both internal and external, to meet the needs of those who interact with us and the general public.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• External and internal queries responded to</li> </ul>





## Strategic Enabler 3 – Information and Communications Technology

We will continue to invest in and use Information and Communications Technology to provide an important infrastructure in supporting the implementation of the strategic plan. The virtual environment in which much of our work is advanced requires ongoing maintenance, review and updating to ensure the effective management of data and systems, enabling our people to perform at their best and to achieve NCCA's vision and mission.

Strategic Plan Outcomes	Progress in 2023
<b>SE3.1</b> Use ICT innovatively to extend and enhance communication and advocacy with the public and to encourage debate and engagement in NCCA's work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Desk phone systems moved to a cloud-based solution to support hybrid working</li><li>• Microsoft security protocols and policies updated in line with upgrades and advancements</li><li>• Use of PowerApps and Power Automate increased significantly to support productivity and internal processes</li></ul>
<b>SE3.2</b> Take advantage of and use new and emerging technologies to support curriculum enactment, improve operational activities and efficiencies, security matters, and to reduce NCCA's carbon footprint.	
<b>SE3.3</b> Develop staff confidence and competence in using digital technologies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Staff supported in using digital technologies</li><li>• Relevant CPD identified for staff to support their use of digital technologies</li></ul>
<b>SE3.4</b> NCCA websites are updated and maintained in response to system need, customer feedback, statistics on web usage, legal requirements, and emerging developments in online and social media.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Aistear Síolta</i> Practice Guide website (<a href="http://www.aistearsiolta.ie">www.aistearsiolta.ie</a>) maintained and supported in line with its service level agreement</li><li>• Primary planning tool updated to include the Primary Mathematics Curriculum</li></ul>

## Strategic Enabler 4 – Communication

Communication, both internally and externally, plays a key role in NCCA's work. We will use clear and timely communications to build and maintain public trust in our work. We will ensure open communication channels within the organisation which contribute to a culture where people are valued, respected, involved in decision making, and empowered to work to high standards.

Strategic Plan Outcomes	Progress in 2023
<b>SE4.1</b> Develop and implement a communications strategy that includes a strong outreach focus and integrates communications across channels in order to connect with audiences and increase public awareness of NCCA's role and how it carries out its work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Communications Strategy published and accompanying Action Plan developed</li><li>• Three issues of the <i>info@ncca</i> e-newsletter shared with subscribers</li><li>• Range of media platforms used to share NCCA's curriculum and assessment work and to encourage interest and participation</li><li>• Photographs of Council members and the Senior Management Team published online along with a refreshing of the online organisation chart</li><li>• Information articles in educational publications (<i>InTouch</i> and <i>Leadership +</i>) to communicate developments across Early Childhood and Primary to early childhood educators, teachers and school leaders published</li></ul>
<b>SE4.2</b> Capitalise on developments in digital technologies and in digital and print media to extend and enhance internal and external communications.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Licence in place for more detailed feedback on external interaction with NCCA communications</li><li>• Work on enabling the sharing of 'generic videos' across platforms by others commenced</li></ul>
<b>SE4.3</b> Further develop staff expertise in the area of communication, including working with the media.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• External Communications Company appointed on a retainer basis to support NCCA's external communications</li></ul>
<b>SE4.4</b> Continue to develop policy, systems and processes for providing open access to relevant data and for monitoring the effectiveness of this.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Draft Open Data Policy developed and published</li><li>• Planning for adding open data files to website initiated</li></ul>
<b>SE4.5</b> Gather and use internal and external feedback to inform and enhance effective communication approaches and strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Feedback gathered from subscribers to the <i>info@ncca</i> newsletter to enhance and improve future issues</li></ul>



### 3. About The NCCA

The NCCA is a statutory Council and its brief is to advise the Minister for Education on curriculum and assessment for early childhood education and for primary and post-primary schools. This section of the Annual Report provides some background information on the Council, its current membership, organisational structures and financing.

#### Vision

Our Strategic Plan for 2022–2025 sets out that our vision is to lead and sustain developments in curriculum and assessment that are sufficiently far-reaching so that all children and students can experience and benefit from enjoyable, engaging, relevant and appropriately challenging experiences to support learning, living in, contributing to, caring for, and working in a changing world.

#### Mission

Our mission is to advise the Minister for Education on curriculum and assessment from early childhood to senior cycle in post-primary school by

- working in partnership with children, students, teachers, practitioners, parents, school leaders,
- managers, and others
- generating, using and sharing research as a basis for advice, discussion and debate on teaching,
- learning and assessment
- collaborating with education partners and wider stakeholders to create conditions to support the successful enactment of curriculum and assessment developments

- having close regard for inclusion, quality, relevance and progression in young people’s experience of curriculum and assessment

#### Governance

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) was established under the Education Act 1998. The functions of the Council are set out in Part VII of the Act. The Council is accountable to the Minister for Education and is responsible for ensuring good governance and performs this task by setting strategic goals and actions and taking strategic decisions on all key areas of work. The regular day-to-day management, control and direction of the NCCA are the responsibility of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and the senior management team. The CEO and the senior management team must follow the broad strategic direction set by the Council and must ensure that all Council members have a clear understanding of the key activities and decisions related to Council and of any significant risks likely to arise. The CEO acts as a direct liaison between the Council and management of the NCCA.

#### Council Responsibilities

The work and responsibilities of the Council are set out in the Education Act 1998 (Part VII) and its accompanying schedule. The matters specifically reserved for decision by Council are:

- approval of all curriculum and assessment specifications and curriculum frameworks.
- approval of consultative documents.
- approval of policy directions and strategies.
- approval of strategic plans and annual plans of work.
- approval of annual reports.





- approval of quarterly management accounts and annual financial statements.
- approval of any significant change in accounting policies or practice.
- approval of the annual Statement on Internal Control.
- approval of the annual Governance Statement and Board Members' Report.
- approval of the award of contracts to the value of €50,000 or more.
- approval of risk management policies.
- approval of the terms of reference and appointments to any sub committees of Council e.g. the Audit and Risk Committee.
- approval for the establishment of Boards and Development Groups.
- approval of the appointment of Chairpersons to Boards including the Boards for Early Childhood and Primary, Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle.
- approval of the co-option of members to Boards.
- approval to extend the term of a Board, Development Group or sub-committee, in case issues arise which require a meeting in the transition period to the appointment of a new Council.
- approval of Standing Orders.

Standing items considered by the Council include:

- declaration of interests
- reports from the CEO
- reports from sub-committees of Council
- risk management.

Financial reports and management accounts are generated and considered by Council on a quarterly basis. The Plan of Work and the review of the performance of the Plan of Work is considered on an annual basis. Reserved matters are considered as and when they arise.

Part VII (46) of the Education Act, 1998 requires the Council to keep, in such form as may be approved by the Minister for Education and Skills, with consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, all proper and usual accounts of money received and expended by it. In preparing these financial statements, the NCCA is required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and apply them consistently
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that it will continue in operation and
- state whether applicable accounting standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements.





The Council is responsible for keeping adequate accounting records which disclose, with reasonable accuracy at any time, its financial position and enables it to ensure that the financial statements comply with Part VII (46) of the Education Act, 1998. The maintenance and integrity of the corporate and financial information on the NCCA's website is the responsibility of the Council. The Council ensures that internal audit is provided for and overseen by the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC). Internal Audit operates independently of the Executive<sup>1</sup> in terms of its audit work and has rights of access to the Chief Executive and the ARC. It operates within the budget agreed with the ARC, which in turn forms part of the budget of the NCCA. The ARC sets the budget for Internal Audit, having regard to the scale and resources of the NCCA.

The Council is responsible for approving the annual plan and budget. An evaluation of the performance of the NCCA by reference to the annual plan and budget has been undertaken.

The Council is also responsible for safeguarding its assets and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

<sup>1</sup> The term 'Executive' is used in the report to refer to NCCA's fulltime staff.

The Council has considered the financial statements for 2023 and notes that they have been prepared in accordance with the required financial policies set out above. They give assurance of appropriate financial management and internal control in the NCCA. The Council considers that the financial statements of the NCCA give a fair and true view of the financial performance and the financial position of the NCCA at 31 December 2023.

Council Structure

The Council consists of a Chairperson, two Deputy Chairpersons and 23 ordinary members, all of whom are appointed by the Minister for Education on the basis of nominations received from teachers' unions, management bodies, parents and industry and other organisations.

On 6 April, 2022 the Minister for Education Norma Foley T.D. announced the appointment of a new Council for a four year term until 28 February 2026. The term of the previous Council ended on 28 February 2022. The Council usually meets seven times per annum. Nine meetings were held in 2023, two of them were online meetings.

The table below details the appointment period for members in 2023:

Members of Council 2023

Name	Nominating Organisation (where applicable)	Date First Appointed	Date(s) Re-appointed
Mr Sean Ó Foghlú Chairperson	Minister for Education	12 December 2022	
Mr Joe McKeown, Deputy Chairperson	Irish National Teachers' Organisation	1 March, 2019	1 March 2022
Dr Michael Redmond, Deputy Chairperson	Joint Managerial Body 1 April, 2015	1 April, 2015	1 March, 2022
Mr Denis Ring	Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools	1 March, 2022	
Mr Ed Byrne	Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland	18 April, 2019	1 March, 2022
Ms Deirdre MacDonald	Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland	1 March, 2022	
Mr Rory D'Arcy	Catholic Primary Schools Management Association	1 March, 2022	
Ms Joyce Perdue	Church of Ireland Board of Education	1 March, 2019	1 March, 2022
Ms Orlaith O'Connor	Department of Education	9 September, 2019	1 March, 2022
Ms Anne McHugh	Education and Training Boards, Ireland	1 March, 2019	1 March, 2022
Edel Ní Chorráin, Uas.	Foras na Gaeilge	1 March, 2019	1 March, 2022
Ms Claire McGee	Ibec	1 March, 2019 to 1 December, 2021	1 November, 2022
Mr Brian Tubbert	Irish Congress of Trade Unions	1 March, 2019	1 March, 2022
Ms Deirdre Murphy	Irish Federation of University Teachers (to 8 March 2023)	1 March, 2022	
Dr Sandra	Irish Federation of University Teachers		
Ms Carmel Browne	Irish National Teachers' Organisation	1 March, 2019	1 March, 2022
Ms Máirín Ní Chéileachair	Irish National Teachers' Organisation	1 March, 2022	
Ms Patricia Gordon	Joint Managerial Body	1 March, 2019	1 March, 2022
Dr Finn Ó Murchú	National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education	1 March, 2019	1 March, 2022
Ms Claire Downey	National Parents Council, Primary (to 26 October 2023)	1 March, 2022	



Members of Council 2023

Name	Nominating Organisation (where applicable)	Date First Appointed	Date(s) Re-appointed
Ms Martina O'Shea	National Parents Council, Post-Primary (to 31 December 2023)	1 March, 2022	
Dr Teresa Hagan	Nominee of the Minister for Education and Skills	1 March, 2019	1 March, 2022
Dr Sheila Garrity	Nominee of the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability , Integration and Youth	2021	1 March, 2022
Ms Elaine Sheridan	State Examinations Commission	1 December 2021	1 March, 2022
Mr David Duffy	Teachers' Union of Ireland	25 June, 2015	1 March, 2022
Ms Liz Farrell	Teachers' Union of Ireland	1 March, 2019	1 March, 2022
Ms Caitlin Faye Maniti	Irish Second Level Students Union (to 8 July 2023)	9 July 2022	
Mr Shari Irfan	Irish Second Level Students Union	9 July 2023	

Gender Balance in the Council membership

As at 31 December 2023, the Council had 14 (56%) female and 11 (44%) male members, with one vacancy.

The Council therefore, as at the 31 December, met the Government target of a minimum of 40% representation of each gender in the membership of State Boards.

Green Procurement and Energy Efficiency

The Government's Climate Action Plan 2021 has set a roadmap for taking action to halve Ireland's emissions by 2030 and reach net zero no later than 2050. The Public Sector will lead by example in this transition by reducing emissions by 51% by 2030, including mandating public sector employers to move to 20% home and remote working.

The NCCA, as part of the public sector, has a responsibility to promote green procurement in order to support Ireland's environmental and wider sustainable development objectives.

In this context, the NCCA undertook several initiatives in 2023 to improve energy efficiency:

- Developed Climate Action Roadmap for NCCA
- Continued to consider findings from a commissioned SI426 Energy Audit carried out by an SEAI approved consultant.
- Reported energy consumption data via the online SEAI Monitoring and Reporting system.
- The required data was submitted by the target deadlines.
- Substantially amended Travel and Subsistence data collection and processes in order to meet the requirement for all public bodies to report annual data on business travel to SEAI from 2021 onwards as part of the 2021 Climate Action Plan.

- Included recommendations on A3 BER ratings in specifications for new Dublin office
- Reduced printing and postage through provision of electronic media.

Equality and Human Rights

Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014 has established a positive duty on public sector bodies to:

- eliminate discrimination
- promote equality of opportunity and treatment
- protect human rights.

This means that all public bodies in Ireland, including NCCA, have responsibility to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of their employees, customers, service users and everyone affected by their policies and plans. This is a legal obligation, called the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty.

Official Languages Acts 2003 and 2021

The Official Languages Acts 2003 and 2021 provides a statutory framework for the delivery of public services through the Irish language. The primary objective is to increase and improve the quantity and quality of services provided for the public through Irish by public bodies.

The NCCA is committed to meeting its obligations under the Official Languages Acts 2003 and 2021. The NCCA's Annual Report, Strategic Plan and key policy documents are published simultaneously in both official languages on NCCA's websites. The NCCA

continues to encourage staff to avail of the range of supports and in particular to attend Irish training courses. Staff are supported on an ongoing basis to complete courses such as the Certificate in Professional Irish (NFQ levels 2 to 6) and the Phone Skills and Customer Service course with Gaelchultúr. On an informal basis, use of Irish is encouraged among staff with informal events taking place every quarter.

In December 2021, the Official Languages Act was amended, placing new statutory obligations on all public bodies regarding the Irish language. The first of these new obligations came into effect on 10 October 2022 and relates to advertising in the Irish language. Section 10A of the Official Languages (Amendment) Act 2021, requires all public bodies to deliver at least 20% of their annual advertising in Irish. In this regard, at least 5% of the annual advertising budget spend must be conducted with Irish language media outlets. In June 2023, NCCA staff attended several online information seminars organised by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, in conjunction with Oifig an Choimisinéara Teanga (OCT) in relation to the new statutory requirements. In addition to this and to comply with provisions 4A and 4B of the amended Act, NCCA appointed a senior official for the purpose of monitoring and reporting on compliance in March 2023.

The NCCA ensures that its two main websites [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie) and [www.curriculumonline.ie](http://www.curriculumonline.ie) can be equally engaged with by users through Irish and English. Translation of all website content through an application programming interface (API) is available for staff to use on both. This API system ensures a much more efficient turn-around of translated materials for our website



content and ultimately helps to ensure material is available simultaneously for users in Irish and in English. NCCA maintains an Irish style guide and sectoral terminology glossaries to provide to translators to ensure better consistency and accessibility in translated materials.

The NCCA is committed to meeting its obligations under the Official Languages Acts and to continually enhancing the quantity and quality of the materials and services provided through Irish.

Provision of Information to Members of the Oireachtas by State Bodies

NCCA also complies with the requirements of Circular 25/2016: Protocol for the Provision of Information to Members of the Oireachtas by State Bodies.

Audit and Risk Committee (ARC)

The ARC comprises four Council members and one independent member. The role of the ARC is to support Council in relation to its responsibilities for issues of risk, control and governance and associated assurance. The ARC is independent from the financial management of the organisation. The Committee ensures that the internal control systems including audit activities are monitored actively and independently. The ARC reports to Council after each meeting, and formally in writing annually. This annual report will be made available early Q3 2024 on [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie).

There were 8 meetings of the ARC in 2023 including a joint session held with the Governance Committee in February 2023. They were all virtual meetings, held online with the exception of the joint meeting which was in person.

Since May 12th, 2022, the membership of the Committee comprised Mr Joe McKeown [Chairperson], Ms Teresa Hagan, Ms Edel Ní Chorráin, Mr Rory D’Arcy with Mr Dave Salter appointed in May 2023 as the external member to the ARC.

Governance Committee (GovC)

The GovC comprises four Council members and one external member. The role of the GovC is to support Council in meeting legal and statutory requirements, as well as adopting good practice in governance. The GovC reports to Council after each meeting, and formally in writing annually. This annual report will be made available early Q3 2024 on [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie).

From May 12th, 2022, the membership of the Committee comprised Mr Dermot O’Riordan (Chairperson and external member), Dr Sheila Garrity, Ms Deirdre Mac Donald, Mr Denis Ring and Ms Mairín Ní Chéileachair.

There were 6 meetings of the GovC in 2023 including a joint session held with the ARC in February, 2023. All of these were virtual meetings, held online with the exception of the joint meeting which was in person.

Schedule of Attendance, Fees and Expenses

A schedule of attendance at the Council and Committee meetings for 2023 is set out below including the expenses received by each member. Council and Committee members do not receive fees for their involvement in the Council:

Name	No. of Council meetings	No. of ARC Meetings	No. of Governance Committee meetings	Expenses (no fees paid to Council members) <sup>2</sup>
Mr Sean Ó Foghlú	9/9			
Dr Michael Redmond	9/9			
Mr Joe McKeown	7/9	8/8		
Mr Ed Byrne	8/9			293
Ms Joyce Perdue	8/9			
Ms Orlaith O’Connor	7/9			
Ms Anne McHugh	7/9			707
Edel Ní Chorráin, Uas.	8/9	5/8		
Ms Claire McGee	4/9			
Mr Brian Tubbert	5/9			
Ms Carmel Browne	7/9			932
Ms Patricia Gordon	8/9			
Dr Finn Ó Murchú	8/9			5,922
Dr Teresa Hagan	8/9	4/8		
Dr Sheila Garrity	9/9		4/6	590
Mr David Duffy	8/9			
Ms Liz Farrell	8/9			507
Ms Caitlin Faye Maniti	5/5			145

<sup>2</sup> The expenses indicated all relate to domestic travel and do not solely relate to attendance at Council meetings. Council members also participate in other structures of Council such as the overarching Boards for Early Childhood and Primary, Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle. They may also participate on NCCA Interview Boards for new staff. Expenses refer to the totality of these involvements.



Name	No. of Council meetings	No. of ARC Meetings	No. of Governance Committee meetings	Expenses (no fees paid to Council members)
Ms Claire Downey	6/7			
Ms Deirdre MacDonald	7/9		4/6	3,089
Ms Deirdre Murphy	0/1			
Mr Denis Ring	7/9		5/6	
Ms Elaine Sheridan	7/9			
Ms Máirín Ní Chéileachair	6/9		5/6	69
Ms Martina O'Shea	0/9			
Mr Rory D'Arcy	6/9	7/8		1,916
Mr Shari Irfan	4/4			
Mr Rory D'Arcy	6/7			
Mr. Dermot O'Riordan (GovC)	–		6/6	
Mr Dave Salter (ARC)		3/3		
<b>Total</b>				<b>14,519</b>

### Key Personnel Changes

Changes to the Executive included the appointment on 9 November 2023 of Tracy Curran as Director, Curriculum and Assessment and on 9 October 2023 of John Behan as Director, Curriculum and Assessment, (Acting). Other changes in seconded/contracted staff included the appointment of 9 Education Officers.

### Disclosures Required by Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (2016)

The Council is responsible for ensuring that the NCCA has complied with the requirements of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (“the Code”), as published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in August 2016. The following disclosures are required by the Code.







Employee Short-Term Benefits Breakdown

Employees’ short-term benefits in excess of €60,000 are set out below; in the case of NCCA, this refers to salary figures only.

From	To	2023	2022
€60,000	€69,999	6	1
€70,000	€79,999	2	9
€80,000	€89,999	9	14
€90,000	€99,999	13	14
€100,000	€109,999	9	4
€110,000	€119,999	4	1
€120,000	€129,999	0	0
€130,000	€139,999	1	0
€140,000	€149,999	0	0
€150,000	€159,999	0	1
€160,000	€169,999	1	0

For the purposes of this disclosure, short-term employee benefits in relation to services rendered during the reporting period include salary, overtime allowances and other payments made on behalf of the employee but **exclude** Employer’s PRSI.

Legal Costs and Settlements

In 2023, NCCA did not incur any legal costs or settlements under the terms set out in the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. Legal fees of €49,623 (2022: €19,387) were incurred for advice and assistance with governance and legislative requirements such as Freedom of Information.

Consultancy Costs

Consultancy costs include the cost of external advice to management and exclude outsourced ‘business-as-usual’ functions in 2023 and were incurred for general advice.

Professional fees and consultancy	2023 (€)	2022 (€)
Accountancy and other professional fees	41,759	44,833
External audit fee	14,000	14,000
Internal audit fee	9,379	8,303
Consultancy (commissioned research for curriculum and assessment work)	577,223	498,771
Totals	642,361	565,907



Hospitality Expenditure

The Income and Expenditure Account includes the following hospitality expenditure. Hospitality costs are classified as Internal (staff events, retirements etc.) and External (visiting conference speakers, meetings with equivalent international agencies etc.).

	2023 (€)	2022 (€)
Internal	100	9,186
External	7,489	2,106
Total	7,589	11,292



Statement of Compliance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies

The Council has policies and procedures in place in priority areas to comply with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. Work will continue on aspects of the Code of Practice with the continued development, review and renewal of policies over the coming period.

The NCCA introduced a Blended Working Policy in 2023 which all staff had the opportunity to apply for. As part of this, NCCA continued to ensure related IT and cyber security controls were in place and that staff were working in safe and ergonomically suitable home office environments. One-to-one health and safety assessments carried out by an independent assessor with each staff member availing of blended working, were completed.

An Organisational Review of NCCA was carried out in 2023 by an external consultant. Business cases were submitted to the Department of Education and sanction received for additional appointments, including some designed to enhance the organisational structure of Corporate Services and allow further development of the Governance and compliance functions in particular. The Governance Committee previously considered an outline for a People Strategy for NCCA, work will continue on this into 2024 following the integration of the additional appointments. Induction and IT support was provided to new members of Council that were appointed in 2023. This included making training and briefing sessions from the Governance Forum of the IPA available to board members as they arose.

An Oversight and Performance Delivery Agreement is in place between the Department of Education and the NCCA covering governance, operational, funding and reporting relationships. In relation to the Code’s provisions that no member of a State Board should serve more than two full terms of appointment on that Board, or should hold appointments to more than two State Boards at the same time, there is a long-standing practice of these provisions not applying to NCCA where organisations nominate a staff member who has direct responsibilities in the areas of curriculum development and curriculum policy in their organisation and, consequently, whose expertise is likely to be of benefit to all concerned in this context.

The Council and its two sub-committees completed a self-assessment in 2023 of its effectiveness. Council will consider the recommendations and put appropriate actions in place in 2024 in response.



Child Protection

The NCCA has developed procedures and guidelines for staff on child protection and welfare matters as part of the requirements enacted in 2017 under the Children First Act, 2015. The NCCA Child Safeguarding Statement, available on our website at [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie), was reviewed and updated in November 2023.

In accordance with NCCA's Child Protection and Safeguarding Statement, in-person Child Protection training is scheduled by Tusla for all staff in the organisation in our Portlaoise office in Spring 2024.

Tusla have also advised on current NCCA Child Protection arrangements and this advice will inform the annual review of the Child Protection and Safeguarding Statement in 2024.

Staff

The NCCA has a full-time executive staff led by the Chief Executive, Arlene Forster. The staff in 2023 was as follows.

Chief Executive	
Arlene Forster	
Deputy Chief Executives	
Barry Slattery	Patrick Sullivan
Directors, Curriculum and Assessment	
John Behan (Acting from 9 October 2023)	
Tracy Curran (From 9 November 2023)	
Jacqueline Fallon (to 31 August 2023)	
Derek Grant	
Diarmuid Mooney (Acting)	
Ben Murray	
Elaine Ní Neachtain	
Evelyn O'Connor (Acting)	
Ger O'Sullivan (Acting)	
Jacinta Regan	
Aoife Rush	
Corporate Services	
Aine Armstrong-Farrell, Assistant Principal	
Maura Dee, Higher Executive Officer	
Bernard Plunkett, Higher Executive Officer (until 8 December 2023)	
Ann Young, Higher Executive Officer	
Morgan Lockhart, Executive Officer	
Deirdre Dunne, Executive Officer	
Alan Cooling, Clerical Officer	





**Corporate Services (continued)**

Bernie Gallagher, Clerical Officer

Ger Heffernan, Clerical Officer

Maria Phelan, Clerical Officer

**Education Officers**

John Behan (to 8 October 2023)

Paul Behan

Ciara Blennerhassett

Michelle Bolger

Fred Boss

Elisabeth Butler (from 6 March 2023)

Rachael Byrne

Donna Carolan

Frank Chambers

Tracy Curran (to 8 November 2023)

Mella Cusack

Liam Clohessy (from 1 September 2023)

Lara Dabbagh

Mary Daly

Deirdre Dennehy (from 1 September 2023)

Carol Gardiner (from 16 October 2023)

Michelle Geraghty

Annette Honan

Siobhán Keenan Fitzgerald

Maria Kelly

Patrick Kelly (to 29 September 2023)

David King

**Education Officers (continued)**

Rachel Linney

Hannagh McGinley (to 8 September 2023)

Angela Martin (from 1 June 2023)

Ciarán Mooney

John Moriarty

Aoife Mullen (from 5 January 2023)

Ronan McGovern (from 1 September 2023)

Ursula Ní Dhufaigh (from 1 September 2023)

Deirdre Ní Fhearghail

Siobhán Ní Threasaigh

Dónal Ó Buachalla

Gillian O'Connor

Tony Riley (to 31 August 2023)

Sinéad Ruane

Sharon Skehill

Sinéad Tuohy

Mary-Elaine Tynan

**National Aistear Development Officer**

Lorraine Farrell





## Boards and Development Groups

The Council progresses its work through a range of Boards and Development Groups drawn from the organisations represented on the Council and other agencies as appropriate. In 2023, the Council convened 166 meetings of these groups with most of these meetings held online due to public health guidelines in response to the pandemic. A list of the meetings held in 2023 is in Appendix One.

## Finance

The Council's total income for 2023 was €8,755,385. Core funding of €8,309,702 was received from the exchequer, through the Department of Education.

The funds allocated to the NCCA cover:

- Staff salaries
- Costs related to commissioning specialist staff to support the work of the Council
- Professional development
- Publications and digital media including proofing, design, photography, printing and translation
- Research

- Costs of the meetings of Council, its Boards and Development Groups including hire of conference facilities and travel and subsistence costs
- Administration costs such as office maintenance and equipment, stationery, postage, telephone, rent, lighting and heating
- Costs related to NCCA conferences and events
- IT maintenance and development
- International interaction including membership fees of international organisations such as CIDREE (Consortium of Institutions for Development and Research in Education in Europe) and AEA (Association for Educational Assessment, Europe)
- Advertising.

Financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2023 will be published on completion of the annual audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General.



Appendix 1: NCCA meetings 2023

Group	Total Number of Meetings (brackets indicate number of which were online meetings)
Early Childhood and Primary	
Board for Early Childhood and Primary	7
Primary Mathematics Development Group	3
Schools Forum	5
An Mheitheal Forbartha do Theanga sa Bhunscolaíocht/Primary Language Development Group	10 (3)
Primary STEM Education Development Group	9
Primary Social and Environmental Education Development Group	10
Primary Wellbeing Development Group	7
Primary Arts Development Group	11 (2)
Primary Advisory Panel	8 (3)
Updating Aistear Development Group	9 (3)
Post-primary	
Board for Junior Cycle	2
Board for Senior Cycle	8
Leaving Certificate Drama, Theatre and Film Studies Development Group	9
LC Climate Action & Sustainable Development Development Group	10
Leaving Certificate Classical Languages Development Group	2
Leaving Certificate Business Development Group	8
Leaving Certificate Arabic Development Group	3
Leaving Certificate Biology Development Group	3 (1)
Leaving Certificate Chemistry Development Group	3
Leaving Certificate Physics Development Group	3
SPHE Development Group, Senior Cycle	6 (1)
Transition Year Development Group	7
Post-Primary Special Education Development Group	9

Group	Total Number of Meetings (brackets indicate number of which were online meetings)
Post-primary (continued)	
Senior Cycle Advisory Panel	2
Cross Sectoral	
Traveller Culture and History Expert Group	12
Total number of Groups	25
Total Number of Meetings	166



## Appendix 2: NCCA presentations (selection) 2023

A selection of the presentations and papers delivered, and workshops facilitated by NCCA staff in 2023 are presented in the table below.

Event/Organisation	Theme/Title
Children's Rights, Participation & Education Symposium (Queen's University, Belfast)	Child Voice and Participation in Primary Curriculum Redevelopment in the Republic of Ireland
TY Teacher Professional Network – AGM	Key areas of consideration developing a revised TY Programme Statement
Singapore delegation meetings in ERC	Introducing and developing TY
INTO Joint National Committee Meeting	Publication of the <i>Primary Curriculum Framework</i>
Inspectorate (online)	Publication of the <i>Primary Curriculum Framework</i>
Inspectorate annual conference	Assessment across the continuum of education
INTO Education Conference	Play and Playful Pedagogies in the Redeveloped Primary Curriculum
Mathematics Education Ireland, DCU	Aiming for success with the new <i>Primary Mathematics Curriculum</i>
CAP Unit Irish Mathematics Association HEIs Information Session Clock Tower Inspectorate INTO webinar Primary Forum Oide NCSE	Presentations on the new <i>Primary Mathematics Curriculum</i> – overview and key messages
International Froebel Conference, Maynooth University	'Updating <i>Aistear</i> : What mattered then; what still matters; and what else we need to matter now'
EECERA	Babies, toddlers and young children as Agentic Citizens: Laying the foundation for learning and development in the update of <i>Aistear: the early childhood curriculum framework in Ireland</i> Promoting curiosity and agency in the outdoors through <i>Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework in Ireland</i>
OMEP Annual conference	Babies, toddlers and young children as agentic citizens: Realising the SDGs through the update of <i>Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework in Ireland</i>
Maynooth University (BAECCE lecturers and students)	Slow relational pedagogy in practice in the early childhood setting.
Children's Research Network and UCD Annual Conference	A Shared 'Journey': Including the voices of babies, toddlers, young children and the important people in their communities in the update of <i>Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework in Ireland</i>

Event/Organisation	Theme/Title
Lithuanian delegation	The early childhood curriculum in Ireland
SPHE Network	Overview of the SPHE/RSE Online Toolkit and Wellbeing in the Primary Curriculum Framework
Cypriot and UNICEF delegation	<i>Aistear</i> and the <i>Aistear Siolta</i> Practice Guide
Turkish delegation	<i>Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework</i>
Mary Immaculate College (BAECCE lecturers and students)	Updating <i>Aistear</i> : Principles and Themes
LINC tutors, Mary Immaculate College	Promoting inclusion in an updated <i>Aistear</i>
UAE delegation	Remit and work of the NCCA
Conference of National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals	Panel discussion: Senior Cycle Redevelopment
Mary Immaculate College, Thurles Summer School	Panel discussion: Reflecting on the 25th anniversary of the Education Act 1998



## Appendix 3: Report on protected disclosures

The NCCA has put in place procedures for the making of protected disclosures, which have been developed in line with the Protected Disclosures Act, 2014 and the subsequent Protected Disclosures (Amendment) Act, 2022 and agreed by Council. This sets out in detail the process by which protected disclosures can be made and what will happen when a disclosure is made.

The NCCA has a strong commitment to ensuring that its culture and working environment encourage, facilitate and support any employee or anyone associated with the work of the NCCA to ‘speak up’ on any issue that could impinge on the Council’s ability to carry out its roles and responsibilities to the high standard expected.

### ANNUAL REPORT OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 22 OF THE PROTECTED DISCLOSURES (AMENDMENT) ACT 2022

Under Section 22 of the Protected Disclosures Act 2022 each public body is required to publish an annual report setting out the number of protected disclosures received in the preceding year and the action taken (if any). This report must not result in persons making disclosures being identifiable. In addition, this report should contain a statement that NCCA has established internal reporting channels and procedures in accordance with the Act. We hereby confirm that NCCA has done so.

### Report of NCCA in respect of the Year 2023

Relevant year for Disclosures	Disclosures or Nil Disclosures
2023	Nil Disclosures

## Appendix 4: Statement of Internal Control

### Scope of Responsibility

On behalf of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) I acknowledge the Council’s responsibility for ensuring that an effective system of internal control is maintained and operated. This responsibility takes account of the requirements of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (2016).

### Purpose of the System of Internal Control

The system of internal control is designed, embedded and implemented to assist in managing the work of the organisation and its corporate governance to an appropriate standard. It is also designed to manage risk to a tolerable level but cannot fully eliminate it. In other words, the system can only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance that assets are safeguarded, transactions authorised and properly recorded, and that material errors or irregularities are either prevented or detected in a timely way and corrected/ managed.

### The NCCA and system of Internal Control

The Council undertakes its work by setting strategic goals and actions and taking strategic decisions on all key areas of work. The regular day-to-day management, control and direction of the NCCA are the responsibility of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and the senior management team.

The CEO and the senior management team follow the broad strategic direction set by the Council and ensure that all Council members have a clear understanding of the key activities

and decisions related to Council and of any significant risks likely to arise. The CEO acts as a direct liaison between the Council and management of the NCCA. The management team, in turn, works with a team of Directors (Curriculum and Assessment) and sectoral teams of Education Officers and Corporate Services staff to implement the Strategic Plan and the annual Plan of Work of Council, working within the controls set to manage the work of the organisation and assure the quality of the Council’s work.

The NCCA advises the Minister for Education on the curriculum and assessment for early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools and the assessment procedures used in schools and examinations on subjects which are part of the curriculum. This advice is developed through Research, Deliberation, Consultation and Networks. There are quality control systems in place for the development of this advice:

- research evidence, good practice and international experience informs this advice
- the advice is based on discussions and deliberations by Council and its Boards and Development Groups
- the advice is shaped by feedback from consultations with the public, schools, and early childhood settings, education interests and others
- networks of schools and early childhood settings provide feedback and ideas and approaches under development and provide practical examples of learning, teaching and pupil/student work.



All of these contribute to ensuring that there are effective controls in place in relation to the quality of the advice on curriculum and assessment that is at the core of the Council's work.

The NCCA has policies and procedures in place which are disseminated to staff. These include policies on finance, HR, data protection, procurement and risk management. A system of Performance Management Development, linked to line management arrangements, is in place for staff which includes a strong emphasis on and provision for continuous professional development.

The NCCA is mainly funded by the Department of Education. The Council is responsible for approving the annual Plan of Work and budget, and funds are allocated and spent in accordance with the priorities of the Council. The Council's annual financial statements are prepared by the accountancy firm Harney Nolan Business Advisors and are subject to external audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General. The Council undertakes an effectiveness review on a regular basis.

The Council aims to achieve value for money in its purchases and to ensure probity in its procurement planning and procedures, which operate in accordance with government procurement policy.

The system of internal control, which accords with guidance issued by the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, has been in place in the NCCA for the year ended 31 December 2023 and up to the date of approval of the financial statements.

## Audit and Risk Committee

NCCA has an Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) comprising four Council members and one external member, with financial and audit expertise. The ARC is independent of the management of the organisation. In particular, the Committee seeks to ensure that the internal control systems including audit activities are monitored actively and independently. The ARC met 8 times in 2023.

## Internal Control

The NCCA has also established an internal audit function which conducts a programme of work agreed with the ARC. The work on internal audit is outsourced and conducted by Crowleys DFK, who conducted a review of internal controls in 2023 and reported to the ARC.

The objective of the review is to provide assurance to the NCCA and its stakeholders of the adequacy and the effectiveness of the NCCA's control framework to the extent to which the Council is compliant with the processes in place for ensuring transparency, regularity, and propriety.

The *High-Level Review of the Effectiveness of Internal Controls, 2023* by Crowleys DFK drew attention to many positive features and key strengths of NCCA's internal control environment including the fact that staff members assigned to finance tasks are skilled, competent and experienced.

The audit results indicate that reasonable assurance can be placed on the adequacy and operating effectiveness of controls to mitigate and/or manage financial risks to which the NCCA may be exposed.





The auditors reported 3 Medium and 3 Low risk findings. The normal on-going management supervision, together with the resolution of any findings raised in the report, should ensure that the control risk remains low.

Most of the findings will be addressed by the appointment of a Procurement Officer currently being recruited who will deal with Fixed Assets, Procurement and support the processes of Compliance and Audit.

The recommendations of the review in this context are currently being addressed and the matters involved will be resolved during 2024. To assist with this, internal audit findings will, as helpful, be included in NCCA's live risk registers and appropriate controls applied to mitigate the risk until such time as the risks can be retired.

In addition, NCCA will resolve any issues identified by the external audit. NCCA management will closely monitor this and oversight of the follow-up on internal and external audit items will be carried out by the ARC which will keep progress to resolution under review.

Internal audit is resourced, as needed, in light of the growth in the activity and overall size of the organisation.

### Risk and Control framework

The NCCA operates under a risk management policy which includes a risk appetite statement, the risk management framework, and details of the roles and responsibilities of staff in relation to risk. The risk management policy was reviewed by the Audit and Risk Committee and approved by the NCCA Council in June 2022.

A risk register is in place which identifies the nature of the risks facing the NCCA and these have been identified, evaluated and scored according to their significance. The register is reviewed, and risk management monitored by the Chief Risk Officer, risk owners, management, and the ARC at each of their meeting. Risk management also features on the agenda of each Council meeting. The outcomes of review are used to plan and allocate resources to ensure risks are managed to an acceptable level.

In the risk management policy and process, responsibilities are shared across all staff, including the Chief Risk Officer, the Senior Management Team, the Director Team, the Corporate Services Team and Education Officers. The policy has been issued to all staff who are expected to work within the NCCA's risk management policies, to alert management on emerging risks and control weaknesses and to assume responsibility for risks and controls within their own area of work.

The risk register details the controls and actions needed to mitigate risks and responsibility for operation of controls assigned to specific staff. I confirm that a control environment containing the following elements is in place:

- procedures for all key business processes have been documented.
- financial responsibilities have been assigned at management level with corresponding accountability.
- there is an operating budgeting system with an annual budget, set out in the NCCA's annual Plan of Work, which is kept under review by senior management with improvements made as appropriate.







- there are systems in place and under development aimed at ensuring the security of the information and communication technology systems.
- the systems to safeguard the assets have been updated with a new searchable asset and contracts register and specific responsibilities have been assigned.
- control procedures over grant funding to outside agencies, through the use of Service Level Agreements, ensure adequate control over approval of grants and monitoring and review of grantees to ensure grant funding has been applied for the purpose intended.

### Ongoing Monitoring and Review

Formal procedures have been established for monitoring control processes and control deficiencies are communicated to those responsible for taking corrective action and to management and the Council, where relevant, in a timely way. I confirm that the following ongoing monitoring systems are in place:

- key risks and related controls have been identified and processes have been put in place to monitor the operation of those key controls and report any identified deficiencies
- reporting arrangements have been established at all levels among sectoral teams, specific project teams and the corporate services team where responsibility for financial management has been assigned
- there are regular reviews at meetings of the management team of periodic and annual performance and financial reports which indicate performance against budgets/ forecasts and,

- senior management oversees the implementation of recommendations arising from the reports of the internal and external auditors.

### Salaries and Wages

NCCA staff are paid through the payroll systems run by the National Shared Service Office (NSSO), the Department of Education, and certain Education and Training Boards (ETBs) as follows:

- The Chief Executive, established civil servants and some contracted staff are paid by the Payroll Shared Service Centre (PSSC) which is part of the NSSO.
- Staff seconded from primary and post-primary schools are paid by the DE Primary and Post-primary Teachers' Payroll.
- Staff seconded from ETBs continue to be paid by the relevant ETB.

NCCA pays directly for commissioned work by subject specialists and others with assistance from a payroll service provider (Smith and Williamson).

Assurance in relation to the associated controls in place is achieved via external and internal audit in NCCA and the associated bodies. An Employee Services Management Agreement, a Memorandum of Understanding and a Data Processing Agreement is in place with the NSSO.



Procurement

The Council aims to achieve value for money in its purchases and to ensure probity in its procurement planning and procedures, which operate in accordance with government procurement policy.

I confirm that the NCCA has procedures in place to ensure compliance with current procurement rules and guidelines. There was no non-compliant procurement in 2023. A Corporate Procurement Plan 2023 to 2026 was approved by Council in 2023.

Review of Effectiveness

I confirm that the NCCA has procedures to monitor the effectiveness of its risk management and control procedures. NCCA's monitoring and review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control is informed by the work of the internal and external auditors, the ARC which oversees their work, and the senior management team within the NCCA, which is responsible for the development and maintenance of the internal financial control framework.

I confirm that the ARC conducted an annual review of the effectiveness of the internal controls for 2023. The ARC noted the conclusions of internal audit and reported the results of its review to the Council for consideration.

I confirm that the Council conducted an annual review of the effectiveness of the internal controls for 2023 on (March 21st, 2024). This review was informed by the review undertaken by the ARC.

Internal Control Issues

No weaknesses in internal control were identified in relation to 2023 that require disclosure in the financial statements.

*Sean Ó Foghlú*

Sean Ó Foghlú  
Chairperson







**NCCA**

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta  
Curaclaim agus Measúnachta  
National Council for  
Curriculum and Assessment

