



NCCA

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

Annual Report 2020

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Foreword

2020 was an extraordinary year as the Coronavirus pandemic impacted all aspects of our lives. However, the NCCA staff and Council members adjusted to ensure work on curriculum and assessment continued apace and published resources to support teachers and parents with teaching and learning remotely. Despite the pandemic, we engaged in ground-breaking research and took account of developments internationally as an evidence base for our work in developing and reviewing curricula aimed at promoting high standards of quality, equity and inclusion, sound educational practice and relevance to national social, cultural and economic objectives. Consultations were scaled back given the challenges facing school leaders and teachers to teach remotely and engage with learners and parents in new ways. We collaborated with the Department of Education and the State Examinations Commission in developing plans to ensure the class of 2020 could transition in their lives and schooling with appropriate evidence of their achievements and learnings given the cancellation of state examinations.

In 2020, Council approved a planning process for updating *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*; completed adaptations to the *Mo Scéal* materials to support parents in sharing information with their child's new school as part of DCEDIY's *Let's Get Ready* campaign; and completed phase 1 of the consultation on the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* being mindful of additional challenges for teachers and school leaders during COVID. We published research papers to support the *Draft Primary Maths Curriculum* and reports from the *Children's School Lives* longitudinal study, including a report on schools' experiences of remote teaching and learning from March to May 2020. At Junior Cycle, Council commissioned a four-year, multi-dimensional study to explore the impact and implementation of the *Framework for Junior Cycle* and completed early enactment reviews of JC Science, Business Studies and CSPE, and a review of the enactment of JC English. At Senior Cycle, Council approved specifications for Leaving Certificate Mandarin Chinese, Portuguese, Lithuanian, and Polish, and prepared draft specifications for T1 and T2 Leaving Certificate Gaeilge. We continued work on the *Senior Cycle Advisory Report* on the future shape and development of Senior Cycle and will issue this to the Minister for Education in 2021.

Work as extensive as this, on this scale, only happens through the commitment of the Council, its boards and development groups, its stakeholders and its staff. Their interest and commitment to curriculum development is central to the successful delivery of the NCCA's important work. We are also extremely fortunate in NCCA to have a staff team whose specialist expertise, enthusiasm, and clear commitment ensured the completion of a challenging and far-reaching work programme in 2020.

As Chairperson of the NCCA, I want to thank my Deputy Chairs, Michael Redmond and Deirbhile Nic Craith, and members of our Audit and Risk Committee and Governance Committee for their constructive and productive engagement with a variety of complex curriculum, assessment and corporate governance issues particularly during the pandemic. Deirbhile and Michael also provided leadership to the Board for Early Childhood and Primary and the Board for Senior Cycle, respectively. I thank my colleagues on Council in sharing their expertise and supporting John Hammond (CEO) and the new CEO, Arlene Forster, and the staff of the NCCA in moving forward with the important work of the NCCA during extremely challenging times and where adjustments to the workplan required flexibility and creativity. The Council and staff's commitment and passion for the important work of the NCCA was both sustained and exemplary.

Prof. Mary O'Sullivan
Chairperson

Introduction

2020 was a year like no other, a year which saw every aspect of life, including education, upended by the Coronavirus. Yet, even with the enormous challenges brought about by the pandemic, the work set out in this Annual Report for 2020 continues to be far-reaching, varied and collaborative while also being sensitive and responsive to the significant challenges experienced by teachers, practitioners, school leaders, children/students and parents, as well as by wider stakeholders across the education system.

Like many work places, including early childhood settings and primary and post-primary schools, the announcement of the first national lockdown necessitated NCCA moving to remote working on a full-time basis. As a small organisation with staff already working from 12 locations around the country, this was a relatively straight-forward transition. Within a short number of weeks, meetings of our Council, boards and development groups had resumed online enabling progress to continue in the major areas of curriculum and assessment development.

Infographics on pages 9-13 present highlights across the year. Even with the need to revisit the Plan of Work and make adjustments such as extending project timeframes, deferring work with schools and settings, and redesigning consultations for the online environment, much progress was made across sectors. Commentary on education during the pandemic has centred on some of the most fundamental questions—the purpose of education; the degree to which curriculum and assessment support equity, fairness and social justice; the centrality of relationships in teaching and learning; and the digital divide. These are not new questions. They've been centre-stage in NCCA's thinking and work in 2020 as we prepared for the updating of *Aistear*; as we consulted on the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*; as we continued to support the implementation of junior cycle developments; and as we made further progress with the *Senior Cycle Review: Advisory Report*. Of note too is the work that emerged in response to the pandemic and which didn't feature in Council's 2020 Plan of Work. This included supporting priorities within the Departments of Education (DE) and Children, Equality,

Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY). NCCA's responsiveness was also evident in the supports it provided, including SPHE lesson plans for post-primary schools returning in September, and guidance for primary schools on providing written reports to parents in the summer term and suggestions for using the outdoor learning environment to support teaching and learning. 2020 was also significant from a research perspective with the initiation of the new study on the impact and implementation of the *Framework for Junior Cycle* while the *Children's School Lives* study saw the publication of two reports, including one on the experience of remote teaching and learning.

This Annual Report also includes information, from a governance perspective, about NCCA. 2020 saw the organisation make significant progress in adopting the new Government of Ireland branding, in reviewing and updating policies and in continuing to promote and nurture staff wellbeing. In addition, the Statement on Internal Control and the Financial Statement for 2020 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 progress and achievements set out in this Annual Report have been enabled through the strategic direction and the ongoing support from our Council and its representative boards and development groups, from colleagues in the DE and DCEDIY along with many other stakeholders and researchers who contributed to the thinking and discussions which shape curriculum and assessment. Central in all of this are the teachers, practitioners, school leaders, children, students and their parents who continue to share their experience, expertise and perspectives with us.

Finally, sincere thanks and appreciation to the NCCA staff. Many of the characteristics defining the organisation's approach to work came to the fore this year—agility, flexibility, openness to new ways of thinking and working, collegiality and responsiveness. Never before were these more necessary and more evident than in 2020. Staff brought boundless energy, commitment, creativity, resilience and a strong sense of community and purpose to their work enabling much progress to be made despite living and working through a global pandemic.

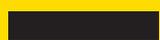
Arlene Forster
Chief Executive

1. Overview of NCCA work in 2020

This section of the Annual Report for 2020 describes the progress made over the year towards achieving the outcomes set out in the Strategic Plan 2019-2021. These outcomes are presented under the five High-Level goals of the Strategic Plan:

- **Curriculum and Assessment:** To develop innovative curriculum and assessment for engagement, progression, quality, inclusion and continuity across sectors and across educational transitions.
- **Engagement and Collaboration:** To work with and support all teachers, practitioners, learners and our partners in education to build capacity for change, model ways of working, and inform curriculum and assessment development and implementation.
- **Knowledge and Research:** To generate, use and share knowledge and research to support the development of curriculum and assessment advice and practice in all educational settings.
- **Communications:** To communicate, present and share the work and achievements of the NCCA effectively, to improve its capacity to engage with others in leading and supporting educational change.
- **Governance and Corporate Services:** To develop NCCA governance and organisational structures, processes, skills and competences effectively to achieve the vision of the organisation.

Overview of NCCA work in 2020



Early Childhood
Primary
Junior Cycle
Senior Cycle
Cross-sectoral
Corporate Services



NCCA

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

Early Childhood

Primary



01

Mo Scéal

We adapted the *Mo Scéal* materials for parents to share information with their child's new school as part of DCEDIY's *Let's Get Ready* campaign.



01

Primary Curriculum Framework

- We published the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* and completed phase 1 of the consultation.
- We explored conditions needed to implement a redeveloped primary curriculum by working closely with stakeholders through the *Leading Out* seminars and through the Primary Advisory Panel.



02

Aistear Síolta Practice Guide

We re-designed the *Aistear Síolta* Practice Guide and added a new search function. We developed and published 'bite-sized' CPD materials as part of the Practice Guide.



02

Language and mathematics

- We extended the online toolkit for the *Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile*.
- We published research papers to support the development of the *Draft Primary Mathematics Curriculum*.



03

Aistear

We carried out initial planning and preparatory work for the updating of *Aistear*.



03

Pedagogy

We hosted webinars exploring possibilities for working with the curriculum in the outdoor environment.



04

Creativity and the arts

We contributed to the inter-agency steering group overseeing the development of 'draft principles' for facilitating the arts in early childhood settings.



04

Children's School Lives longitudinal study

We published the first two reports from the study—an introduction to the children and schools, and a second report on the experiences of remote teaching and learning from March to May 2020.

Junior Cycle

Senior Cycle



01

Research

We commissioned a multi-dimensional four-year study to explore the impact and implementation of the *Framework for Junior Cycle*.



01

Leaving Certificate

- We completed curriculum specifications for Leaving Certificate Mandarin Chinese, Portuguese, Lithuanian and Polish.
- We prepared draft curriculum specifications for Leaving Certificate Gaeilge (T1 for Irish-medium schools and T2 for English-medium schools) for public consultation.



02

Reviews

We completed the early enactment reviews of Junior Cycle Science, Business Studies, and CSPE; and a review of the enactment of Junior Cycle English.



02

Assessment adjustments

In collaboration with the SEC and the Department of Education, we contributed to the adjustments made as part of the assessment arrangements for the Leaving Certificate examinations in the 2020/21 school year.



03

Examples of student work

We developed, quality assured and published annotated examples of student work across a wide range of subjects to support the professional development of teachers.



04

Student Voice

We collaborated with ACCS and ETBI on Student Voice projects with 54 schools and co-hosted a Leadership for Learning Seminar on Student Voice with JCT.



03

Senior Cycle Review

Through Council's structures, we worked closely with the education partners to further progress the *Senior Cycle Review: Advisory Report*.

Cross-sectoral



01

SPHE/RSE

We established two development groups for SPHE/RSE and initiated work on online toolkits to support schools in planning for and teaching the curriculum area.



02

Traveller Culture

We initiated work on a report on Traveller Culture and History to support learning and teaching of the curriculum.



03

Updating guidelines

We initiated work on updating guidelines on the curriculum for young people in detention and care settings.

Corporate Services



01

Structures

Council and its structures continued their curriculum and assessment work during the pandemic, switching to online meetings:

- 6 meetings of Council
- 6 meetings of the Audit and Risk Committee
- 3 meetings of the Governance Committee
- 57 meetings of Boards and Development Groups.



04

Professional Development

- Staff continued to avail of extensive professional development opportunities.
- Considerable numbers of staff undertook post-graduate research and education studies.



02

Finance

- Quarterly management accounts were produced and approved by Council.
- Financial statements for 2019 were approved and certified by the OCAG following an external audit.
- The Risk Register was updated and approved by Council and monitored on an ongoing basis by the Audit and Risk Committee.



05

Policies approved by Council

- Oversight and Performance Delivery Agreement signed with the Department of Education
- Terms of Reference for the Secretary to Council
- Updated Terms of Reference for the Governance Committee
- Updated Data Protection Policy
- Updated Code of Conduct for Council members
- Updated Risk Management Policy.



03

Wellbeing

The Wellbeing Staff Working Group continued to promote and support the general wellbeing of staff across the organisation, with a particular focus on remaining connected while working from home.



06

Communications

We adopted the Government of Ireland branding and visual identity and implemented this on our websites and stationery.

2. Progress on NCCA work in 2020

1. Curriculum and Assessment

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

Strategic Plan Outcomes	Progress in 2020
<p>1.1 Aistear is providing the basis for curriculum planning and implementation in early education settings and informing the pedagogical approaches in the early years of primary schooling.</p> <p>Aistear’s guidance for the 0-3 age group is informing developments for this age group through the National Síolta Aistear Initiative.</p>	<p>Six ‘bite-sized CPD’ resources developed and published in the <i>Aistear Síolta Practice Guide (ASPG)</i> to support curriculum planning and implementation. Topics included Creative Arts, Play, Maths, Interactions, and Learning Dispositions.</p> <p>Development of further ‘bite-sized CPD’ resources on Supporting children’s Well-being and Empathy, Nurturing Identity and Belonging, and STEM initiated.</p> <p>15 new resources, both tip-sheets and expert testimonials,</p>

		<p>published in the <i>ASPG</i>.</p> <p>Development of new resources on Risky Play progressed for publication in the <i>ASPG</i>.</p> <p>National Síolta Aistear Initiative (NSAI) 'Information for Parents' leaflet progressed.</p> <p>NSAI Introductory workshops edited for online delivery.</p> <p>NSAI CPD on STEAM and Planning and Assessment for Progression in Learning and Development progressed.</p> <p><i>Mo Scéal</i> Templates updated to support transitioning to primary school as part of the DCEDIY (previously DCYA) <i>Let's Get Ready</i> campaign. Two new resources to support parents developed and published for <i>Mo Scéal</i> to share information between home and primary school in the context of COVID-19 closures.</p> <p>Planning initiated on the process of updating <i>Aistear</i>.</p> <p><i>Aistear</i> Tutor Initiative resources updated.</p>
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1.2	<p>In primary schools, new curricula are introduced for language (English and Gaeilge) and Mathematics.</p>	<p>The Primary Language Toolkit, including Examples of Children’s Learning and Support Materials for teachers to support the implementation of the <i>Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile</i>, extended.</p> <p>Further progress made with the development of the draft Primary Mathematics Curriculum.</p> <p>Development of a suite of eight support materials for the Primary Mathematics Teacher Toolkit initiated.</p>
1.3	<p>An overview of a redeveloped primary curriculum has been agreed and provides the basis for an extensive programme of curriculum and development.</p>	<p>Phase 1 of the consultation fieldwork data collection completed.</p> <p>Communications and Stakeholder Engagement progressed.</p> <p>Phase 2 planning across all strands of the consultation initiated.</p>
1.4	<p>In junior cycle, new curricula continue to be developed and introduced as part of the junior cycle developments.</p>	<p>Review of the enactment of Junior Cycle English and review of the early enactment of Junior Cycle Science and Business Studies completed and reports published.</p>

Post-primary schools are using the Framework for Junior Cycle as the basis for planning and implementing their junior cycle programmes.

Review of the implications of designating special core status to Junior Cycle History completed and published. Review of Junior Cycle short courses in CSPE and PE completed.

Due to school closures and changes to student and teacher experiences of the Framework for Junior Cycle, planned reviews of the early enactment of Junior Cycle Irish, Modern Foreign Languages and Visual Art were postponed.

Supports and guidelines for schools in light of the impact of COVID-19 on school closures were published, including *Considerations in planning for Junior Cycle Wellbeing in 2020/2021* and back to school SPHE lessons for first, second and third years.

Revision of Junior Cycle English and Gaeilge text lists commenced.

Review of the enactment of Wellbeing in schools completed and the Guidelines on Junior Cycle Wellbeing updated.

Implementation of recently revised junior cycle subjects, short courses, L1LPs and L2LPs supported. Support and feedback provided to schools as they developed their own short courses.

1.5	A review of senior cycle education is underway and an extensive plan of development and reform in educational programmes, curriculum, assessment, reporting and certification is underway.	<p>Draft curriculum specifications for Leaving Certificate Gaeilge (T1 for Irish-medium schools and T2 for English-medium schools) approved for consultation.</p> <p>Curriculum specifications for Leaving Certificate Mandarin Chinese, Portuguese, Lithuanian and Polish published.</p> <p>A Background Paper and Brief for the review of Leaving Certificate Classical Languages published.</p> <p>A Background Paper and Brief for the review of Leaving Certificate Arabic published.</p> <p>Consultation Report on the Background Paper and Brief for the review of Leaving Certificate Physics, Chemistry and Biology published.</p>
1.6	New approaches to assessment and reporting are being introduced and capacity to introduce developments in these areas in schools and other settings is being supported.	<p>Sample assessment items for phase 4 junior cycle subjects (Mathematics, Home Economics, History, Music, Geography) completed and published.</p> <p>Sample school report templates for 2020 completed and published.</p>

		Assessment Tasks for phase 1 – 4 subjects completed but not used.
1.7	Curriculum and assessment specifications continue to feature quality-assured examples of children’s/student’s work that illustrate the expectations for learners and contribute to shared understanding of standards across the education system.	Examples of student work from a range of Junior Cycle subjects and short courses gathered, quality-assured and published.
1.8	A strong line of continuity, a sensitivity to key stages of transition, and a focus on common features and elements, is evident across curriculum and assessment developments at early childhood, primary and post-primary levels.	<p><i>Final Report on the Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)</i> in primary and post-primary schools published and interim guidance for RSE in primary and post-primary schools commenced.</p> <p>The development of curriculum guidelines to support children in detention and children in care commenced.</p>

2. Engagement and Collaboration

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

Strategic Plan Outcomes	Progress in 2020
<p>2.1 NCCA is working with practitioners, groups and networks on ideas, material and initiatives to support their own capacity and that of schools and other settings in curriculum development, assessment practice, and broader educational change.</p>	<p>Online toolkit of resources to support teaching and learning for JC and SC SPHE/RSE published.</p> <p>Work with post-primary schools took place related to developments in assessment, reporting and wellbeing in Junior Cycle and aspects of Senior Cycle.</p> <p>Webinar sharing good practice on outdoor learning in primary schools recorded and published.</p> <p>Further examples of learning through coding in the primary school published.</p>

2.2	Support the development and activity of partner networks established by other organisations to inform curriculum and assessment developments in early childhood, primary and post-primary education.	<p>Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South (SCoTENS) Doctoral Roundtable (part of the annual conference) supported.</p> <p><i>Leading Out</i> seminars 2 (Professional Development), 3 (Policy Alignment and Coherence) and 4 (Systemwide Leadership) facilitated in collaboration with stakeholders.</p>
2.3	The voice and experience of learners is part of discussions and consultations on developments in curriculum and assessment.	<p>Support continued for ETB sector, ACCS, and Cork and Limerick Education Centres in embedding student voice practice in a number of schools.</p> <p>Contract for consultation with children as part of the review and redevelopment of the primary curriculum awarded.</p>
2.4	Liaison and collaborative relationships with a range of organisations and government departments are improving the understanding and quality of curriculum and assessment developments and the model for, or approach taken to, their implementation.	<p>Presentation to support Better Start induction on the <i>Aistear Síolta Practice Guide</i> and <i>Mo Scéal</i>.</p> <p>National <i>Síolta Aistear</i> Initiative (NSAI) Steering Group, Project Group and Resource Development Group meetings attended.</p>

Input and feedback provided to support DCEDIY work on the development of 'Draft Principles for Facilitating the Arts in Promoting Play and Creativity in Early Learning and Care'.

Participation in the Oversight Group to support DCEDIY on the OECD Quality Beyond Regulation country report.

Presentation to BERA Research Commission seminar '*A Professional Workforce for the Early Years: Policy, Practice and Sector Responses*'.

Two articles published with Early Childhood Ireland (ECI) on *Supporting Transitions to Primary School*

Participation in webinar for ECI on *Mo Scéal*

Presentation at ECI conference '*Pedagogical continuity from Aistear to the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*'

Collaborative engagement with PDST and NCSE on Universal Design for Learning (UDL), inclusion/differentiation, and formative assessment in support of teaching and learning of mathematics initiated and progressed.

		<p>Collaboration with PDST, NCSE and the Inspectorate involving school-based work continued with the development of guidance to support preparation for teaching and learning completed.</p> <p>Assistance given to the Department of Education to develop guidance to support the re-opening of schools.</p> <p>Work of a number of Department of Education Steering and Technical Groups supported.</p> <p>Interagency meetings to support the implementation of the new Leaving Certificate specifications in Economics and Agricultural Science attended.</p>
2.5	<p>Curriculum and assessment developments north and south of the border and in Europe have been supported by strategic and collaboration between NCCA and other curriculum development agencies.</p>	<p>There was continued collaboration and engagement with CCEA.</p> <p>Development of a position paper on 'Assessment Culture' initiated through the International Education Assessment Network.</p>

3. Knowledge and Research

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

Strategic Plan Outcomes	Progress in 2020
<p>3.1 Curriculum and assessment developments are informed by evidence and research.</p>	<p><i>Education in Ireland: An OECD Assessment of the Senior Cycle Review</i> published by the OECD.</p> <p>First two reports from the <i>Children's School Lives</i> study completed and published.</p> <p>Research papers to assist with work on Support Materials for the teaching of Irish in English-medium schools published.</p> <p>Academic Advisory Panel to inform the review and redevelopment of the primary curriculum established and meetings with NCCA and stakeholders convened.</p>

		<p>Report on the <i>Leading Out</i> Seminar Series progressed.</p> <p>Research to inform the development of resources to support teaching and learning of Traveller history and culture in the curriculum commenced.</p> <p>Suite of five research papers on teaching and learning in the senior classes completed and published to support the development of the draft Primary Mathematics Curriculum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Algebra (Twohill, A. 2020) • Data ad Chance (Leavy, A. 2020) • Measure (Nic Mhuirí, S. 2020a) • Number (Delaney, S. 2020) • Shape and Space (Nic Mhuirí, S. 2020b).
3.2	Curriculum and assessment developments are informed through engagement with and participation in research networks.	<p>NCCA participates in the Research Alive consortium (with the Teaching Council, Centre for Effective Services and the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning at Third Level) supporting teacher engagement with research.</p> <p>NCCA participated as a member of the SCoTENS national committee and the Research Committee.</p>

3.3	<p>The outcomes and findings of research are available, accessible and disseminated to those with an interest in education, policy making and evaluation.</p>	<p>Findings from research (outlined in 3.1) were published in easily accessible formats including full reports, executive summaries, presentations and podcasts.</p> <p>The findings from commissioned research informed the deliberations of NCCA Development Groups, Boards and Council, and ongoing work with external organisations and agencies.</p> <p>Chapter on <i>Mo Scéal</i> included in forthcoming Routledge publication</p> <p>See also Appendix 2.</p>
3.4	<p>Research findings and new knowledge are shared and interrogated by NCCA staff as an integral part of their work.</p>	<p>NCCA staff attended online conferences and seminars on a range of curriculum and assessment issues, facilitated by national/international speakers.</p> <p>NCCA staff attended and/or presented papers at national and international conferences on educational research and practice. Details presented in Appendix 2.</p> <p>An update on all relevant national and international research developments is regularly circulated to all staff.</p>

		<p>Staff Research Day held in March 2020 with workshops on the NCCA Research Strategy and the use of large-scale questionnaires for consultation.</p> <p>Research Spotlight event for staff held in November 2020 focusing on research with marginalised groups.</p> <p>Development of an NCCA Ethical Research Statement initiated.</p>
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4. Communications

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

Strategic Plan Outcomes	Progress in 2020
<p>4.1 Using an effective media strategy and process, key messages on educational change are shared internally and externally.</p> <p>NCCA responses and contributions are informed and timely.</p> <p>Communications awareness is built into all areas of the NCCA's work.</p>	<p>Consultations continued to include online surveys (website) social media (Twitter, Facebook and Instagram) and online (bilateral meetings, focus groups) elements as well as options for written submissions.</p> <p>Social media was used effectively to communicate important messages about curriculum developments and consultations and to encourage wider engagement in NCCA events.</p> <p>Video developed and used as to communicate widely about the updated design of the consultation on the <i>Draft Primary Curriculum Framework</i> in response to the pandemic.</p>

		<p>Timely responses were made to media queries about various developments and staff contributed to radio and television interviews. We continued our policy of responding, where possible, to requests from local radio.</p> <p>NCCA newsletter info@ncca was re-established to share key messages about our work and to highlight opportunities for engagement in NCCA processes with stakeholders.</p>
<p>4.2 and 4.3</p>	<p>NCCA websites are updated and maintained in response to system need, customer feedback, statistics on web usage, and developments in online and social media.</p>	<p>New curriculum specifications, support materials and related reports and updates published online across all sectors and across all main websites: ncca.ie, curriculumonline.ie and aistearsiolta.ie.</p> <p>Accessibility of website material and the functionality required for this has been maintained and in some places improved.</p> <p>Analytics related to website and social media communications included in the CEO Reports for Council and used to inform website improvements.</p> <p><i>Aistear Síolta</i> Practice Guide (ASPG) redesigned, with all items tagged and search function developed and published.</p>

5. Governance and Corporate Affairs

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

Strategic Plan Outcomes	Progress in 2020
<p>5.1 Organisational structures and processes are supporting innovative and curriculum and assessment development and collaborative work practices.</p>	<p>Structures and processes, including new Development Groups, were in place for curriculum and assessment work.</p> <p>SharePoint was maintained and further developed using online meeting spaces and collaborative tools to facilitate efficient and effective online work practices.</p> <p>IT protocols were developed to ensure virtual meetings with external participants we conducted in accordance with control measures recorded in the risk register.</p> <p>Due to COVID-19 pandemic, engagement and meetings utilised online meeting technologies to continue with curriculum and assessment work.</p>

5.2	<p>NCCA staff has developed the knowledge and competences required to develop innovative curriculum and assessment advice and to support its introduction in schools and other settings.</p>	<p>Professional development related to competences identified in the performance management process undertaken by staff.</p> <p>Staff involvement in professional, post-graduate and research studies increased.</p> <p>Work of the internal Research Strategy Group continued, including provision of staff professional development on aspects of research.</p>
5.3	<p>There is a performance culture focused on positive values, co-operation, support, empowerment and wellbeing of staff across the organisation.</p>	<p>Wellbeing Staff Working Group continued to promote and support the general wellbeing of staff across the organisation, particularly in light of remote working.</p> <p>Performance Management and Development continued during remote working with an emphasis on supporting staff working from home.</p>
5.4	<p>There is a robust financial management system in place.</p>	<p>Month-end procedures include a reconciliation report reviewed by senior management and the Audit and Risk Committee.</p> <p>Quarterly management accounts were produced and approved by Council.</p>

		<p>All necessary support for internal and external audit was provided using an online, secure space to facilitate the audit in line with public health guidelines.</p> <p>Financial statements for the year ended 31 December, 2019 were approved and certified by the C&AG following an external audit that conducted online during the pandemic.</p> <p>Revised budgetary and estimates processes were implemented in 2020 including variance analysis in the quarterly management accounts.</p> <p>An online contracts register was further developed.</p> <p>A new PO system that supports procurement, accounts and fixed assets was also developed and implemented.</p>
5.5	There is full compliance with the governance requirements of, and code of practice for state bodies.	A review of internal controls was carried out and its findings were implemented.

The additional requirements of the Code of Practice in relation to Gender Balance, Diversity and Inclusion were also noted and incorporated into processes and reporting.

Procurement processes were conducted in line with Office of Government Procurement guidelines and the NCCA Corporate Procurement Plan 2018-2021.

The Annual Report for 2019 was published.

The Risk Register was updated and approved by Council and monitored on an ongoing basis by the Audit and Risk Committee. Risks were updated to reflect the COVID-19 pandemic.

An updated Protected Disclosures Policy was approved by Council.

An updated Data Protection Policy was approved by Council.

An Oversight and Performance Delivery Agreement was signed with the Department of Education.

5.6	Customer service standards are developed and improved.	A review of customer service was undertaken and measures put in place to maintain service during the pandemic.
5.7	The NCCA has complied with all relevant public sector agreements and development plans.	<p>Any measures necessary were implemented to comply with the Public Service Reform Plan, 2014-2016 and the Civil Service Renewal Plan.</p> <p>HR and other relevant civil service policies were implemented and adhered to. Guidance from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in respect of HR matters during the pandemic has been implemented as necessary.</p>

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 2019-2021 sets out the vision for the NCCA:

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

MISSION

The Council's approach to its work is summarised in its mission:

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

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.

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 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.

The Council has considered the financial statements for 2020 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 draft unaudited 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 2020.

COUNCIL STRUCTURE

The Council consists of a Chairperson, two Deputy Chairpersons and 22 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 10th April, 2019 The Minister for Education and Skills Joe McHugh T.D. announced the appointment of a new Council for a three year term until 28th February 2022. The term of the previous Council ended on 31 December, 2018. The Council usually meets seven times per annum. Six meetings in total were held in 2020. A meeting scheduled for 19 March 2020 was cancelled at short notice due to emerging COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. Subsequently, five virtual Council meetings were held online.

The table below details the appointment period for current members:

Members of Council 2020

Name	Nominating Organisation <i>(where applicable)</i>	Date First Appointed	Date(s) Re-appointed
Prof. Mary O'Sullivan, Chairperson	Minister for Education and Skills	1 May, 2019	
Dr Deirbhile Nic Craith, Deputy Chairperson	Irish National Teachers' Organisation	13 June, 2010	25 June, 2015 1 March, 2019 (as Deputy Chairperson)
Dr Michael Redmond, Deputy Chairperson	Joint Managerial Body	1 April, 2015	1 March, 2019
Ms Áine O Sullivan	Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools	25 June, 2015	1 March, 2019
Mr Ed Byrne	Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland	18 April, 2019	
Máire Ní Chiarba. Uas.	Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland	25 June, 2015	1 March, 2019
Mr Fergal Kelly	Catholic Primary Schools Management Association	1 March, 2019	
Ms Joyce Perdue	Church of Ireland Board of Education	1 March, 2019	
Ms Orlaith O'Connor	Department of Education and Skills	9 September, 2019	

Ms Anne McHugh	Education and Training Boards, Ireland	1 March, 2019	
Edel Ní Chorráin, Uas.	Foras na Gaeilge	1 March, 2019	
Ms Claire McGee	Ibec	1 March, 2019	
Mr Brian Tubbert	Irish Congress of Trade Unions	1 March, 2019	
Mr Michael Delargey	Irish Federation of University Teachers	1 April, 2010	25 June 2015 1 March, 2019
Ms Carmel Browne	Irish National Teachers' Organisation	1 March, 2019	
Mr. Joe McKeown	Irish National Teachers' Organisation	1 March, 2019	
Ms Patricia Gordon	Joint Managerial Body	1 March, 2019	
Dr. Finn Ó Murchú	National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education	1 March, 2019	
Ms Áine Lynch	National Parents Council, Primary	25 June, 2015	1 March, 2019
Mr Geoff Browne	National Parents Council, Post- Primary	1 March, 2019	
Dr Teresa Hagan	Nominee of the Minister for Education and Skills	1 March, 2019	

Ms Phil Lynch	Nominee of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs	1 March, 2019	
Dr Tim Desmond	State Examinations Commission	6 November, 2017	1 March, 2019 Resigned 31 October 2020
Mr David Duffy	Teachers' Union of Ireland	25 June, 2015	1 March, 2019
Ms Liz Farrell	Teachers' Union of Ireland	1 March, 2019	

GENDER BALANCE IN THE COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

As at 31 December, the Council had 15 (62.5%) female and 9 (37.5) % male members, with one position vacant.

The Board therefore, as at the 31 December, did not meet the Government target of a minimum of 40% representation of each gender in the membership of State Boards.

However, it is expected that when the vacancy is filled the gender balance will be restored as the Department of Education will make any such appointments with due regard for same.

AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE (ARC)

The ARC comprises four Council members and one independent member with financial and audit expertise. 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.

There were six meetings of the ARC in 2020. Three of these were virtual meetings, held online due to COVID 19 restrictions.

The current ARC was initially appointed on 20 June, 2019 comprising Etain Doyle, Chairperson, Geoff Browne, Teresa Hagan, Anne McHugh and Joe McKeown. Joe McKeown became Chairperson from April 2020. Joan O'Connor joined as an independent member from April 2020 replacing Etain Doyle.

GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

The Governance Committee comprises four Council members and one external member. The role of the Governance Committee is to support Council in meeting legal and statutory requirements, as well as adopting good practice in governance.

The current Governance Committee was initially appointed on 20 June, 2019 comprising Deirbhile Nic Craith (Chairperson), Michael Delargey, Áine Lynch and Áine O'Sullivan. Dermot O'Riordan was approved by Council as an external member of the Governance Committee on 24 September 2020.

There were three meetings of the Governance Committee in 2020. Two of these were virtual meetings, held online due to COVID 19 restrictions.

SCHEDULE OF ATTENDANCE, FEES AND EXPENSES

A schedule of attendance at the Council and Committee meetings for 2020 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) ¹
Prof. Mary O'Sullivan	6			€796.40
Dr Deirbhile Nic Craith	6		3	
Dr Michael Redmond	6			
Ms Áine O Sullivan	5		3	
Mr Ed Byrne	5			€22.20
Máire Ní Chiarba. Uas.	6			€804.96
Mr Fergal Kelly	5			
Ms Joyce Perdue	5			
Ms Orlaith O'Connor	5			

¹ 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.

Ms Anne McHugh	6	5		
Edel Ní Chorráin, Uas.	5			
Ms Claire McGee	6			
Mr Brian Tubbert	6			
Mr Michael Delargey	3		3	
Ms Carmel Browne	6			€234.43
Mr. Joe McKeown	6	5		
Ms Patricia Gordon	5			
Dr. Finn Ó Murchú	6			€373.46
Ms Áine Lynch	4		2	
Mr Geoff Browne	5	3		€698.54
Dr Teresa Hagan	6	5		
Ms Phil Lynch	3			€167.29
Dr Tim Desmond	1			
Mr David Duffy	6			
Ms Liz Farrell	5			
Ms Etain Doyle (ARC)		3		
Ms Joan O'Connor (ARC)		5		

Mr Dermot O’Riordan (Governance Committee)			1	
Total				€3,097.48

KEY PERSONNEL CHANGES

Changes to the Executive included the appointment on 12 October, 2020 of Aine Armstrong Farrell to the post of Head of Corporate Services (Assistant Principal) following the retirement of Paul Brady, Head of Corporate Services (Assistant Principal) on 9 October 2020. Arlene Forster was appointed to the post of Chief Executive Officer on 30 November 2020 following the retirement of John Hammond CEO from 27 November 2020. Other changes in seconded/contracted staff included the appointment of three 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	2020	2019
€60,000	€69,999	8	5
€70,000	€79,999	3	10
€80,000	€89,999	19	8
€90,000	€99,999	3	5
€100,000	€109,999	1	2
€110,000	€119,999	0	0
€120,000	€129,999	0	0
€130,000	€139,999	0	0
€140,000	€149,000	1	1

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. In 2020, work was completed on updated Data Protection and updated Protected Disclosures policies. Terms of the Reference for the Secretary to Council were developed and approved by Council.

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.

Council carried out a self-assessment of its effectiveness, including a survey facilitated by an independent organisation in early 2021.

LEGAL COSTS AND SETTLEMENTS

In 2020, 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 €13,268.15 (2019: €2,750.86) were incurred for general advice in relation to a property lease, a policy review and on procurement.

CONSULTANCY COSTS

Consultancy costs include the cost of external advice to management and exclude outsourced 'business- as-usual' functions in 2020 and were incurred for general advice.

PROFESSIONAL FEES AND CONSULTANCY

	2020	2019
	€	€
Accountancy and other professional fees	59,278	56,779
Audit fee	14,000	14,000
Consultancy (commissioned research for curriculum and assessment work)	663,851	807,873
Totals	737,129	878,652

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.).

	2020	2019
	€	€
Internal	4865	1657
External	8152	3511
Totals	13017	5168

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, was reviewed and updated in 2020. Staff training was completed.

Staff

The NCCA has a full-time executive staff led by the Chief Executive, John Hammond up to his retirement on the 27 November, 2020 and from 30 November, 2020 by the newly appointed Chief Executive Arlene Forster. The staff in 2020 was as follows:

Chief Executive:

John Hammond (to 27 November 2020)

Arlene Forster (from 30 November 2020)

Deputy Chief Executives:

Arlene Forster (to 27 November 2020)

Barry Slattery

Directors, Curriculum and Assessment:

Jacqueline Fallon

Derek Grant

Ben Murray

Elaine Ní Neachtain

Evelyn O'Connor (Acting)

Aoife Rush

Patrick Sullivan

Corporate Services:

Paul Brady, Assistant Principal (to 9 October)

Aine Armstrong-Farrell, Assistant Principal (from 12 October)

Aine Armstrong-Farrell, Higher Executive Officer (to 9 October)

Maura Dee, Higher Executive Officer

Ann Young, Higher Executive Officer

Morgan Lockhart, Executive Officer

Deirdre Dunne, Executive Officer

Alan Cooling, Clerical Officer

Rosaleen Daly, Clerical Officer

Bernie Gallagher, Clerical Officer

Ger Heffernan, Clerical Officer

Education Officers:

John Behan

Paul Behan

Ciara Blennerhassett (from 6 January)

Fred Boss

Lorraine Crean (to 31 August)

Tracy Curran

Lara Dabbagh

Mary Daly

Margaret Flood

Annette Honan

David King

Paul Knox

Rachel Linney

Hannagh McGinley (from 1 September)

Diarmuid Mooney

John Moriarty

Susan Nic Réamoinn

Dónal Ó Buachalla

Colm Ó Cadhain (to 1 November)

Gillian O'Connor (from 1 September)

Louise O'Reilly

Ger O'Sullivan

Jacinta Regan

Claire Reidy (to 3 January)

Tony Riley

Sinéad Ruane

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 2020, the Council convened 57 meetings of these groups with 41 of these meetings held online due to public health guidelines in response to the pandemic . A list of the meetings held in 2020 is in Appendix One.

Finance

The Council's total income for 2020 was €5,940,104. Core funding of €5,696,253 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 31st December 2020 will be published on completion of the annual audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Appendix 1: NCCA meetings 2020

Group	Total Number of Meetings <i>(No. of virtual meetings in brackets)</i>
Early Childhood and Primary	
Board for Early Childhood and Primary	5 (4)
Primary Language 3rd to 6th class	1 (1)
Primary Mathematics Development Group	2 (2)
Advisory Panel (Primary)	8 (8)
SPHE/RSE Development Group, Primary	3 (3)
Post-primary	
Board for Junior Cycle	3 (2)
Board for Senior Cycle	6 (4)
Biology Development Group	6 (3)
Physics Development Group	5 (3)
Chemistry Development Group	6 (3)
Traveller Culture and History Expert Group	1 (1)

Senior Cycle Gaeilge Development Group	3 (1)
Leaving Certificate Foreign Languages Development Group	2 (0)
Leaving Certificate Classical Languages Development Group	2 (2)
Leaving Certificate Arabic Development Group	1 (1)
SPHE/RSE Development Group, Post-primary	3 (3)
Total number of Groups	16
Total Number of Meetings	57
Of which total number of Virtual Meetings	41

Appendix 2: NCCA presentations (selection) 2020

A selection of the presentations and papers delivered, and workshops facilitated by NCCA staff in 2020 are presented in the table below. The arrival of the Coronavirus meant that this work took place online from mid-March to December.

Event/Organisation	Theme/Title
Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) Principals' Conference	Primary Curriculum Review and Redevelopment: <i>The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework</i>
Joint Managerial Body (JMB) Principals' Conference	Developments in Relationships and Sexuality Education
AgVenture 2020 – Irish Agricultural Science Teachers' Association annual conference	LC Agricultural Science: Supporting the Investigative Process
Better Start (new staff induction)	Introduction to the Practice Guide and supporting transitions
Leadership for Learning seminar	Student Voice in teaching, learning and assessment
DCU EC 4 th year students	Supporting the transition from preschool to primary school
Early Childhood Ireland Online Research Symposium, 2020	Pedagogical continuity from <i>Aistear</i> to the <i>Draft Primary Curriculum Framework</i>
Early Childhood Ireland Webinar Series	Supporting positive and effective transitions from preschool to primary school

European Commission	Peer Counselling on Assessment Competences
Meeting of country representatives. OECD, Education Policy and Implementation Division	Implementing education measures during COVID-19 crisis: exploring challenges and ways forward
ESRI Launch of Sexual Behaviour of Young People report	Presentation on NCCA review of RSE
CIDREE expert meeting 'Relevant Topics of the Curriculum in Designing the 21st Century Skills', Tallinn, Estonia	Presentation on Key Skills in Primary and Post-Primary Curriculum development in Ireland

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 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 ACT 2014

Under Section 22 of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 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.

Report of NCCA in respect of the Year 2020

Relevant year for Disclosures	Disclosures or Nil Disclosures
2020	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, work 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, procurement and risk management. A system of Performance Management Development, linked to line management arrangements, is in place for staff which includes 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 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 and Reform, has been in place in NCCA for the year ended 31 December 2020 and up to the date of approval of the financial statements.

Internal Control and Risk

NCCA has an Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) comprising four Council members and one independent member, with financial and audit expertise, who is the Chair. 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 six times in 2020.

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 2020 and reported to the ARC.

The Review of the System of Internal Control, 2020 by Crowley's DFK drew attention to many positive features of NCCA's internal control environment. The review reported no high-risk findings that may result in a material financial loss or operational disruption to the NCCA. The report found that most of the controls tested were operating effectively and that reasonable assurance can be placed on the sufficiency and operation of internal controls to effectively mitigate and / or manage key inherent risks. It recommended a number of aspects of control for attention in 2021 including improved procedures for monitoring fixed assets, improved procedures for monitoring timeliness of travel and subsistence payments and improved procedures for procurement related documents and processes.

The recommendations of the review in this context are currently being addressed and the matters involved will be resolved during 2021, in some cases once public health guidelines permit.

It was noted some actions agreed in 2019 such as a fixed asset inventory were paused due to COVID-19 and the resulting closure of offices and would resume as a matter of priority as public health guidelines permit.

In addition, the review carried out by Crowley's DFK specifically set out to consider the compliance with established internal controls with specific emphasis on months where COVID-19 restrictions were in place. In their conclusion they stated that

“a review on the effectiveness of internal financial controls during the year 2020 further considered the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the control environment of the NCCA. In the context of our review [scope as detailed in section two of our report], results of our tests indicate that in most cases, controls have continued to operate as intended during movement restrictions in place due to the pandemic.”

NCCA will also resolve any issues identified by the external audit and ensure that they do not re-occur.

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.

The NCCA operates within 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 2020. 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 meetings. 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
- risks, controls, budgets and forecasts were further reviewed and adjustments made where appropriate in light of changes of activity levels due to Covid 19 and,
- senior management oversees the implementation of recommendations arising from the reports of the internal and external auditors.

Procurement

I confirm that the NCCA has procedures in place to ensure compliance with current procurement rules and guidelines. A Corporate Procurement Plan is in place for 2018-2021 and a new plan will be developed for the period 2022- 2025.

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 2020. 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 2020 on (16 March, 2021). This review was informed by the review undertaken by the ARC.

Internal Control issues

No weaknesses in internal control were identified in relation to 2020 that require disclosure in the financial statements.

Prof. Mary O'Sullivan

Chairperson