



NCCA

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

Communications Strategy 2023 - 2025

September 2023

Contents

OVERVIEW	1
OUTCOMES OF THE REVIEW	2
PILLARS OF COMMUNICATION	3
COMMUNICATIONS: OBJECTIVES AND DELIVERABLES	5
AUDIENCE POSITIONING AND MESSAGING	8
CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION	10
PERFORMANCE MEASURES	10
Quantitative measures	11
Qualitative measures	12
ANNUAL TIMELINE: LIVE DOCUMENT	13
APPENDIX 1: BARCELONA PRINCIPLES	13

Overview

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is a statutory body under the aegis of the Department of Education. NCCA works with the education partners and wider stakeholders to shape the curriculum for children and students in Ireland. NCCA advises the Minister for Education on curriculum and assessment for early childhood education, and primary and post-primary schools.

The role of this communications strategy is to outline the pathway for the promotion of the work and expertise of NCCA and the outputs it delivers in relation to curriculum and assessment. It will also enhance the reputation of NCCA and help to foster a sense of greater trust in and understanding of its work.

The strategy is organisation-wide, encompassing every aspect of NCCA taking into account the overall goals of the organisation at a high level and aligns the communications objectives with the NCCA Strategic Plan 2022-2025. Actions have been developed in order to achieve these objectives and accomplish the organisational goals.

The aims of this communications strategy are to:

- Support NCCA's overall organisational objectives
- Engage effectively with key partners and stakeholders
- Demonstrate the success of NCCA's work across curriculum and assessment
- Ensure people understand NCCA's role and responsibility.

In developing this communications strategy, Carr Communications, at a high-level, reviewed

- NCCA's Strategic Plan 2022-2025
- NCCA's website and social channels
- NCCA's communications
- The environment in which NCCA currently operates.

Carr Communications also:

- Undertook a stakeholder audit and spoke to key stakeholders
- Carried out two focus groups:
 - NCCA Council workshop
 - NCCA staff workshop

Outcomes of the review

The education landscape is ever evolving as society changes so the need for new or updated curricula can change. Communications can help to embed our important vision where 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.

The review carried out by Carr Communications has informed the strategy. Over 75% of those Carr Communications spoke to felt that there was a need for improved communication. While many felt NCCA is effective at its work, and that it has a positive impact, this is not always well understood. There are some audiences it is either not reaching sufficiently or audiences who are not clear on the messages. Those who come into contact with the staff and council of NCCA trust the organisation, but they feel there is, at times, a lack of transparency and information, and this causes a gap for those that are not in continual contact or have reason to speak directly to NCCA.

The work of NCCA is often complex to communicate and is not always easily understandable for some stakeholders, including parents or students. This is not due to any lack of ability to understand but rather due to the busy nature of their lives and competing priorities for attention. It underscores a responsibility on NCCA to present relevant information in an accessible format. Among many stakeholders it is evident that there is an ongoing challenge in demonstrating the process and systems that underpin NCCA's work and decisions. It is important that this is transparent and that audiences feel it is reflective of input and backed by an open and impartial process based on sound judgment. There is also a significant challenge in telling the story of NCCA, its value to Government and society, the importance of good curricula to children and students and society in general.

The development and implementation of this communications strategy will continue to build on the strong foundation of trust that those who have engaged personally with NCCA communicated during the review by Carr Communications.

Over the course of this strategy there will be a number of priorities that must be addressed in a strategic manner. These are affected by the environment in which the message is landing and as a result take account of:

- The need for NCCA information and the role of NCCA to be understood and ensure cut through in a crowded communication environment.
- To drive awareness that NCCA decisions are informed and underpinned by evidence.
- The need to reach audiences where they are and in a manner they can interact with rather than waiting for them to come to NCCA.
- The need for accountability and transparency.

Finally, it is important to note the changing landscape of communications in Ireland. Information is required that is fast, accessible and actionable. While continuing to engage with traditional broadcast and national print media, there is a requirement for increased activity at a local level where trust in media is higher and across social media which younger audiences use increasingly as their predominant source of information.

Pillars of communication

Excellent communication is fundamental to NCCA's reputation and to building and reinforcing stakeholders' trust in NCCA. It is important that the approach to communication is understood and for this strategy to be effective it requires a strong framework that provides guidance on the direction and emphasis for communication.

To bring the various elements together the approach is presented under pillars of communication that can be used to deploy resources and measure effectiveness under each element over the life of the strategy. These pillars (Figure 1) are informed by the research and feedback received in the development of the strategy.

Figure 1: PILLARS OF COMMUNICATION



These four pillars will require particular strategic tasks over the course of the strategy. This involves programmatic change and will require the involvement of many different elements of the organisation. To fully implement these four pillars will require the strategy to be led and organised from a single point. This can ensure that results are achieved and that the changes have the support and understanding across various teams. The strategic tasks identified under this change are:

Information

- Undertake a rolling review of Council document formats to be carried out and a decision to be taken on any proposed new approach to format in line with Government of Ireland branding guidelines. In particular, research documents should be assessed with a view to obtaining clear summaries of the work and important detail.
- Put an in-depth audience breakdown in place with specific channels identified for particular audiences.

Collaboration

- Continue sharing the E-Newsletter (*info@ncca*) with subscribers and make greater of this as an option for two-way communication and feedback.
- Provide varied formats for sharing news updates with stakeholders so that they are aware of what is happening across developments.
- Use ongoing internal deliberation of feedback received over time (either ad hoc or in organised opportunities) to ensure inclusivity and evolve with audiences over time.

Trust

- Create greater visibility of the Council, its work, and its people. Photos of Council members and Senior Management (CEO, DCEOs, Head of Corporate Services) will be visible on the NCCA corporate website.
- Develop a guide for stakeholders on how decisions about curriculum or projects are taken. This will build on existing information but with a more targeted approach to specific audiences at particular times.
- Provide greater transparency on the key data or details that have influenced decisions and how these were arrived at, particularly for those who contribute to the process.

Accessibility

- Monitor NCCA websites and existing social media platforms as communication tools.
- Review the language register in external communications to ensure that it aligns with the Plain English Style Guide for the Public Service and gives necessary information. In particular, simple changes and guidelines should be put in place to ease editing and to gradually move towards simpler and more direct communication where possible.
- Create greater awareness of how NCCA develops its curriculum and assessment advice by providing information for stakeholders in multiple formats.

Responsibility for this strategy will reside with the Director and a Communications Working Group under the direction of the Senior Management Team. The Working Group will carry out the tasks as set out in the Communications Action Plan. The Group will report periodically on actions taken to advance work set out in the Action Plan.

Communications: Objectives and deliverables

NCCA's communications objectives are linked to the three Strategic Goals outlined in the Council's Strategic Plan 2022-2025 and recognises communications as Strategic Enabler 4.

In order to achieve the deliverables set out below and to ensure we are on track with communications, we will align these high-level deliverables with a Communications Action Plan. This plan will be reviewed each year of the communications strategy to ensure that we are working towards achieving our Strategic Goals.

We will also listen to and engage with the education partners and wider education stakeholders to ensure we are meeting their communications needs.

To ensure we are always on track a Strategic Communications Workshop will be carried out annually with the Senior Management Team in order to identify the priority audiences for that year, develop a set of overarching key messages that fall across all areas of the organisation and from this develop an overall messaging grid to be shared among everyone in the organisation so anyone speaking publicly about NCCA connects with these messages in their communications.

Table 1: Communications objectives and deliverables

Strategic goals	Communications objectives	Deliverables
<p>Strategic Goal 1: Curriculum and Assessment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create awareness of the work NCCA does across sectors and across educational transitions. • Promote and exemplify learning, teaching and assessment to support all children and students as engaged and active learners with opportunities for choice and decision-making. <p>In order to achieve this, we will ensure the education stakeholders and the wider public understand the role of NCCA so they can better understand how curriculum and assessment advice is formed and the benefits of the process to them and Irish society overall.</p> <p>This incorporates work across all pillars of the strategy but will primarily address 'The Information and Accessibility pillars'.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete a high-level annual communications timeline for each sector. Map out the priorities for communications for the year ahead for each sector to identify what work is upcoming and needs to be communicated. E.g., strategic comms events that are priorities for that year, stakeholder events planned that year, curriculum updates, any other key dates etc. • Develop and implement communications

		<p>campaigns¹ with the agreed messaging where there is a need to communicate progress e.g., Updating <i>Aistear</i>, <i>Primary Curriculum Redevelopment</i>; <i>Early enactment reviews of Junior Cycle</i> or <i>Senior Cycle Redevelopments</i>, curriculum changes, and research.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange an internal debrief meeting following each campaign. Ensure learnings are incorporated into each future campaign. • Complete a rolling review of NCCA websites over the course of this strategy to identify what is currently working and not working. . • Carry out a rolling review of existing social media channels to assess their effectiveness to feed into a social media strategy. • Review, update and implement a Social Media Strategy and Policy • Produce organic social media content for each communications campaign.
<p>Strategic goal 2: Engagement and Collaboration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote awareness among key target stakeholders and share knowledge about 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake workshops with project teams to develop messaging for campaigns and for the

¹ *COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGNS CAN BE A SIMPLE UPDATE ON THE WEBSITE, A SERIES OF SOCIAL MEDIA UPDATES ON A PARTICULAR ITEM, A FULL MEDIA CAMPAIGN ETC.

	<p style="text-align: center;">curriculum and assessment advice. .</p> <p>In order to achieve this, we will work with and support teachers, school leaders, early years educators, children, students, parents and the partners in education to inform curriculum and assessment development , build capacity for change, and model ways of working together.</p> <p>Elements of this work will help to address the 'Information, collaboration and trust' pillars.</p>	<p>website where there is a complex area to communicate so everyone is aligned in their messages and across all channels. This is to ensure we have simple and consistent messages agreed for each audience.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce an annual – Year in Review of NCCA highlights document as a companion to the Annual Report to promote the work of NCCA among key target audiences. • Work with a third party to conduct a parents/student/child survey every 2 – 3 years around understanding curriculum and the need for change to complement the communications for the Year in Review. • Carry out a Stakeholder Engagement Audit every 2 – 3 years to benchmark and assess stakeholders' current levels of understanding of NCCA their role, effectiveness etc..
<p>Strategic goal 3: Knowledge and Research</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate NCCA's robust and rigorous research evidence. • Position NCCA as the Authority on education development, curricula and assessment. <p>In order to achieve this, we will be proactive and put ourselves out there as spokespeople and advocates for education. We will proactively share our research with all stakeholders in an easy to digest format so all audiences can understand it.</p> <p>This work will help to address trust, collaboration and accessibility pillars.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Position NCCA as the Authority and an advocate for education and curricula. Do this by identifying key times during the year where NCCA can be a spokesperson on education and curricula using the body of evidence produced to back up your positions. This can be in the form of website blogs, Op-eds to media outlets, speaking at key relevant industry events and broadcast interviews etc. • Provide relevant communications / media

		<p>training for NCCA senior management and directors .</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create communications ambassadors in the organisation by providing employee generated content training. • Provide media training or support ahead of staff contributing to radio for a campaign.
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Audience positioning and messaging

The Communications Strategy is underpinned by the achievement of the communications objectives set out earlier. In order to assist the implementation of the Strategy Table 2 outlines the positions that we want audiences to feel they occupy by the end of the Strategy. It is important that this goal is kept in mind as it will help to evaluate progress and plans over the course of implementation.

The table provides a compass for the direction of resources and emphasis in communication so that audiences can see the purpose of campaigns and evaluate progress.

Table 2: Key audiences

Audience	Desired position of audience	Key themes / messages
Existing educators and potential educators (early years educators, teachers, school leaders)	Knowledgeable Informed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All educators are aware of what NCCA has to offer or know they can come to NCCA for advice and the latest research. • Educators are informed and up to date with latest pedagogical processes to be able to provide evidence-informed learning, teaching, and assessment practices.
Parents / Children / Students	Informed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NCCA is an efficient and effective state agency. • NCCA is impartial, transparent and are experts in their role. • NCCA has children and students front of mind when developing curriculum and assessment advice.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NCCA strives to enable every young person to thrive and fulfil their potential, to have choice and flexibility in their educational experiences, and be respected, supported and empowered as young citizens.
NCCA Staff	Knowledgeable and informed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NCCA is an efficient and effective state agency. NCCA is impartial, transparent and are experts in their role. I am an advocate for the NCCA and proud to be.
Department of Education	Informed and authoritative on the work of NCCA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The implementation of evidence-based new curricula allows Government to reap the benefits of best educational practices in an area of fundamental importance to our future economy not only for business and the environment but also for the citizen. NCCA ensures supports on curriculum and assessment are equally accessible to all who need them. NCCA is an effective and efficient state agency.
Research / Academia	Influential sectoral expert, enabler	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NCCA has the most up to date information on curricula. NCCA is knowledgeable and expert in their area and an excellent partner to work with. NCCA wants to ensure effective pedagogies to support all children and students.
State agencies and other regulators	Informed of NCCA's role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NCCA has the most up to date information and evidence on curricula. NCCA is knowledgeable and expert in its area and is an excellent partner to work with. NCCA is an effective and efficient state agency.
Media	NCCA is an expert source of content and data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NCCA has objective data and evidence which can inform their audiences.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NCCA is an effective and efficient state agency, and an authority on curriculum and assessment. • NCCA is willing to participate in discussions and debates where suitable.
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Channels of communication

The channels and tools that NCCA can use over the course of the communications strategy to communicate with audiences are set out in Table 3.

Table 3: Channels of communication

Media: National, international, regional and local	Meetings and events	Stakeholder relations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Print • Radio • TV • Trade/Specialist journals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face-to-face communications • Seminars • Conferences • Workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports • Literature • Professional bodies and Trade Unions (as a channel) • Department (as a channel)
Digital media	Direct mail	Advertising / sponsorship
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email • E-Newsletter • Website • Social media • Online news media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correspondence • Literature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Print ads / sponsorship • Radio ads / sponsorship • TV ads / sponsorship • Online ads • Awards / Exhibitions

Performance measures

It is important that we measure the impact of our work to ensure it is reaching our overall strategic and communications objectives. An appropriately designed system of measurement will demonstrate when activities are on course to achieve the desired objectives and inform decisions to refine, revise or discontinue the activity.

Measurement will wherever possible focus on the **outcomes** achieved by the communications, relative to stated objectives. Effectiveness will be determined by assessing the **inputs and outputs** which led to the outcomes.

We will employ the seven Barcelona Principles (See Appendix 1) as a framework to measure the impact of our work with audiences to ensure it is reaching our overall communications objectives and to ensure quality assurance is met at all stages of campaigns.

Outlined below are a mix of qualitative and quantitative measures and the type of KPIs that we will implement across our work.

Quantitative measures

Media Measurement

We use the Barcelona Principles as a framework to assess the effectiveness of our PR work. Our approach will include:

- the reach of coverage (readership/listenership/viewership)
the volume of media coverage.

Social Media Measurement

NCCA is active on X, formerly known as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn for social media. We will use best practice measurement metrics across all NCCA platforms. Our approach will include a value-based measurement and each report will include at a minimum:

- engagement of content
- content reach
- growth in followers.

Website Measurement

The NCCA corporate website along with *curriculumonline.ie* and *aistearsiolta.ie* are effectively our shopfront and are often the first place a person will go to seek information about the organisation and its work. The websites are used for 'calls to action' for people wanting to find out more information about a campaign. Therefore, assessing website performance is important to ensure that visitors are getting the information they require in the manner they want to receive it. In reporting on our communications work, we will include:

- number of visitors to the website
- bounce rate
- average time spent on website
general location of visitors across Ireland and the world along with other relevant statistics as required.

Qualitative measures

Stakeholder Engagement

We will use some form of benchmark survey to assess awareness levels across agreed target audiences.

In reviewing the effectiveness of this strategy and in preparing for a future strategy, we will collaborate with a Communications Company to provide additional professional services outside the expertise and skill set of NCCA staff to produce:

- **Parents/Children/Students Awareness Survey:** to assess the attitude of parents/children/students surrounding curricula education and awareness in relation to NCCA (every two / three years). This is a useful rich data source of news hooks often used alongside yearly reviews or annual reports. This is a brand reputation exercise to build awareness of NCCA among the general public.
- **Stakeholder Engagement Audit:** to assess current attitudes among priority stakeholders towards NCCA. This is a process that allows us to score NCCA's current positioning with stakeholders (as we did in the development of this Strategy) and identify the preferred methods of communication to enhance relationships. (every two / three years to benchmark progress).

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) will be assessed annually. When we complete a full year of work as part of the implementation of the Communications Strategy, we will be able to reassess and introduce new KPIs, for example, X% increase in reach through PR.

Achievement of the KPIs will be reviewed twice yearly to assess progress and to ensure we are on track in achieving the communications objectives set out for NCCA.

Table 4: Key performance indicators (KPIs)

Activity	KPIs – Across the timeline of the strategy
Publications	Publication of Annual Report to include a Year in Review Summary
Events	- Minimum of 5 stakeholder events per year
NCCA e-newsletter (info@ncca.ie)	- Minimum of 3 newsletters issued per year, one per quarter - 5% increase in open rate - 5% increase in subscriptions
Web	- 5% increase in sessions in full year. - 30 second increase in dwell time in full year. - Reduce average bounce rate by 5% in full year
Social media	- Social Media Strategy reviewed - 5% growth in followers for 'X'

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 10% growth in followers for Instagram - 5% growth in followers for LinkedIn - 5% growth in followers for Facebook
Digital content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Websites reviewed and monitored for accessibility - Minimum x 12 news items published on website [1 per month]
Communications awareness / upskilling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communications / media training provided

Annual timeline: Live document

NCCA's Communications Action Plan sits under this communications strategy and is aligned with the communications objectives and deliverables set out here to ensure we meet our targets over the life of the strategy.

Appendix 1: Barcelona Principles

The Barcelona Principles are a set of guidelines to measure the efficiency of communications. The principles were agreed upon by PR specialists from 33 countries who met in Barcelona in 2010 for a summit convened by the International Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication.

The seven Barcelona Principles 3.0 (2020) inform this strategy.

1. Setting goals is an absolute prerequisite to communications planning, measurement and evaluation.
2. Measurement and evaluation should identify outputs, outcomes, and potential impact.
3. Outcomes and impact should be identified for stakeholders, society and the organisation.
4. Communication measurement and evaluation should include both qualitative and quantitative analysis.
5. AVEs (Advertising Value Equivalency) are not the value of communication. Communications measurement needs to be rich, nuanced and multifaceted to understand the impact of communications.
6. Holistic communication measurement and evaluation includes all relevant online and offline channels
7. Communication measurement and evaluation are rooted in integrity and transparency to drive learning and insights



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