



NCCA

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

Draft Strategic Plan 2026-2029

For consultation



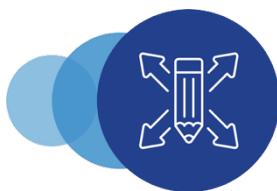
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Introduction



We have much to be proud of and to celebrate in our education system, and locally in our school and early childhood communities. Longitudinal studies¹ show that children and young people, in the main, have a positive experience of education in Ireland. Furthermore, our standing internationally spotlights significant achievements in particular areas of learning and teaching while also highlighting aspects for attention. This reality is shaped, in part, by the curriculum that guides learning, teaching and assessment. In this way, the curriculum and its assessment arrangements continue to play a pivotal role in supporting children and young people to thrive and flourish, realising their full potential in early childhood, primary and post-primary education.

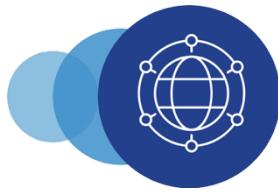
The world continues to be shaped by rapid technological change including artificial intelligence (AI), global interconnectedness, cultural diversity, social fragmentation, climate change, political instabilities, and changing work patterns. These features of modern life influence how children and young people learn; how they encounter and work with information; how they navigate online spaces; how they communicate; how they imagine their futures; and how they contribute to their communities. Education has a vital role in this context. It must enable children and young people to live with complexity by fostering deep understanding, critical thinking, creativity, ethical awareness, respect for diversity, and the ability to learn with and from others. As AI and digital technologies transform society, the curriculum must prioritise what matters most for our youngest citizens. This provides the backdrop for NCCA's work in 2026-2029, during which we will also further our implementation of the [Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty](#).

Responding to the experiences of children and young people is central to having a curriculum that resonates with their lives; recognises their voices and identities; and ensures relevance, engagement and equity in what and how they learn. 2022-2025 involved NCCA in major curriculum review and redevelopment work. Key milestones including the updating of Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework; the redevelopment of the primary curriculum; significant progress with the redevelopment of senior cycle; and early reviews and updating of junior cycle curricula, laid important foundations for achieving such a curriculum across sectors. The next four years will build on this and see the completion of this phase of major curriculum review and redevelopment from early childhood to senior cycle.

As we embark on this work, NCCA will reach its 25th anniversary as a statutory body. This provides an opportunity to further reflect on how well our processes to review and redevelop the curriculum are serving children and young people, and Irish society. Such reflection will assist with evolving those processes as we '*Develop and implement an approach that enables more cyclical, systematic review of the curriculum across all sectors*' (p.11). Significantly also, the coming months will bring the National Education Convention's once-in-a-generation opportunity for Irish society to articulate priorities for education. Such priorities will invariably have relevance for the curriculum. We look forward to contributing to that conversation and playing our part in taking forward the priorities that emerge from it.

¹ Two NCCA-funded longitudinal studies were completed in the lifetime of the Council's 2022-2025 Strategic Plan. These included the [Children's School Lives](#) study undertaken by University College Dublin and [Exploring the introduction of the Junior Cycle Framework in post-primary schools](#) undertaken by the University of Limerick.

Educational landscape



The landscape in which NCCA operates, is continually evolving bringing new opportunities and challenges that emerge from technological advancements, policy changes, and shifts in societal values and needs. The following factors are likely to shape the environment in which the NCCA works and civic society's expectations of the curriculum in the coming years.

Operating Environment – external and internal factors

Sustainability and Rights

- Climate action, equality, and human rights shaping curriculum and policy priorities
- Embedding sustainability and equality in organisational operations and governance

Communities and Participation

- Changing demographics, migration, and civic engagement influencing expectations of the curriculum
- Building inclusive processes and partnerships that amplify voice and expand participation

Wellbeing

- Systemwide focus on wellbeing as an educational goal
- Prioritising staff wellbeing, resilience, and supportive organisational culture

Digital Technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI)

- Rapid technological change and AI impacting learning, teaching and assessment
- Strengthening digital capacity, cybersecurity, and ethical use of technology

Policy and Governance

- New and evolving national policies and priorities, including those arising from the Education Convention
- Legislative and regulatory reforms, and public sector innovation shaping processes
- Increased requirements relating to robust governance and compliance, and growing need for agility in decision-making processes

People and Culture

- Increased diversity in communities, schools and settings and changing expectations and priorities for education
- Evolving workforce expectations and diversity in the workplace
- Investing in professional learning, succession planning, and inclusive organisational culture

Communication and Trust

- Growing demand for transparency and accountability, and multi-dimensional engagement with stakeholders and the public
- Fostering open communication and trust within teams and across organisational structures

Continuous Learning and Review

- Importance of research-based, cyclical curriculum review to respond to settings and schools' experiences with the curriculum, and to societal, economic and policy shifts
- Learning from research, review, evaluation, consultation and the outcomes of the National Convention on Education
- Embedding continuous improvement in systems and practices

Vision, Mission, Values and Ways of Working



Our Vision

Our vision is to lead sustainable curriculum and assessment developments that enable children and young people to thrive now and into the future.



Our Mission

Our mission is to provide quality, research-informed advice to the Minister for Education and Youth on curriculum and assessment for early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools. Keeping children and young people at the centre of the Council's decisions, this curriculum and assessment advice is forward-looking; champions inclusion, equality, and innovation; and promotes learning experiences that are meaningful, enjoyable and appropriately challenging.

We achieve this by:

- working closely with teachers, early childhood educators, children and young people, parents/guardians, school leaders and managers
- generating, using and sharing research as a basis for discussion, reflection and constructive debate on teaching, learning and assessment
- carrying out wide, public consultation on proposed curriculum and assessment developments
- facilitating and supporting deep, iterative discussion and debate within structures representative of the education partners
- collaborating with education partners and wider stakeholders to advance thinking and action in support of early childhood settings and schools' enactment of curriculum and assessment changes.



Our Values and Ways of Working

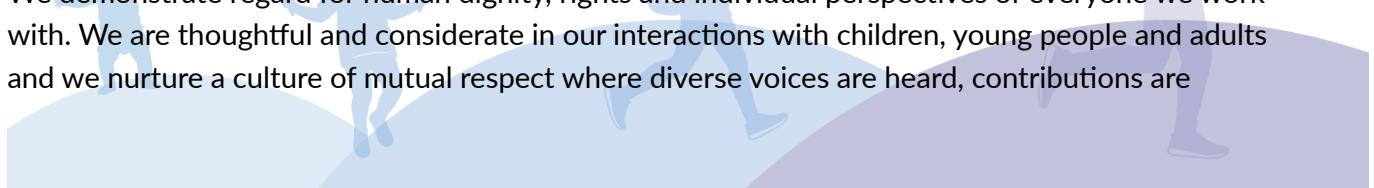
Seven values and ways of working underpin NCCA's approach to curriculum and assessment development, and corporate governance. These reflect our commitment to:

- advice for the Minister that is evidence-informed, inclusive, relevant and that supports progression in children and young people's learning
- excellence in public service.

These Values and Ways of Working are embedded in our processes, decision-making, governance structures, and in our relationships with each other and with everyone external to the organisation. They guide how we fulfil our mission and achieve our vision for curriculum and assessment.

Respect

We demonstrate regard for human dignity, rights and individual perspectives of everyone we work with. We are thoughtful and considerate in our interactions with children, young people and adults and we nurture a culture of mutual respect where diverse voices are heard, contributions are



encouraged and recognised, and everyone feels safe and valued. We also strive to develop and support a diverse and inclusive workforce in NCCA.

Equality and Inclusion

We are committed to promoting equality, preventing discrimination, and ensuring fair treatment for all. We actively work to eliminate barriers to participation and progression, both in curriculum and assessment development and within our organisation. We champion inclusive education that recognises the uniqueness and rights of every child and young person, and celebrates diversity in all its forms.

Professionalism

We hold ourselves to high standards in our work and in our interactions and engagement with others. We value inquiry and openness to new thinking as we build on the education system's strengths and develop advice that is relevant and appropriately ambitious. We take pride in developing quality advice for the Minister that holds the potential to make a positive, lasting difference for the experiences of children and young people.

Trust and Integrity

We act with honesty, transparency and ethical purpose, placing the public interest and stewardship of public resources above individual interests. We build trust through consistency between our words and actions, honest engagement with complexity and challenge, and unwavering commitment to our statutory remit. We take responsibility for our decisions and their impacts.

Collaborative

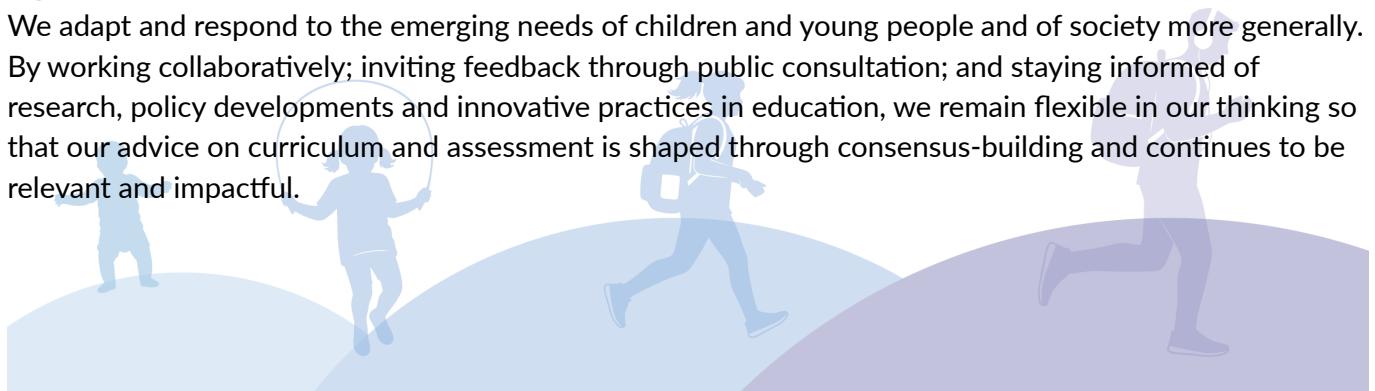
We work with others to develop advice informed by evidence from research, practice and the lived realities of children and young people. We are creative and try new approaches to encourage and enable the public's involvement in shaping the curriculum. By forming and sustaining strategic partnerships, we also build on the knowledge and expertise from across the education system, nationally and internationally, to advance our work and support the work of others.

Forward-thinking

We keep children and young people at the heart of our work. We stay abreast of educational thinking and discuss and debate this. Through interrogating up-to-date research and showing thought leadership, we ensure our advice to the Minister contributes positively to meeting the needs of today's and tomorrow's learners.

Agile

We adapt and respond to the emerging needs of children and young people and of society more generally. By working collaboratively; inviting feedback through public consultation; and staying informed of research, policy developments and innovative practices in education, we remain flexible in our thinking so that our advice on curriculum and assessment is shaped through consensus-building and continues to be relevant and impactful.



Our Remit and Structure



Our Remit

Established as a statutory body in 2001, the role of the NCCA is set out in [Sections 41.1 \(a and b\) 41.2 \(a-l\)](#) of the 1998 Education Act, and sees the Council advising the Minister for Education and Youth on matters relating to:

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



Our Structure

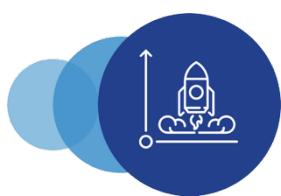
The twenty-six member Council, including the chairperson, is appointed by the Minister for Education and Youth. Most members are nominated by the education partners who represent teachers, early childhood educators, school managers, parents, business interests, trade unions, Irish language organisations, special education, and other educational interests. The Council also includes one nominee of each of the Department of Education and Youth, the State Examinations Commission, the Minister for Education and Youth, and the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality.

The Council meets at least seven times per year. As a public body, the governance arrangements for the Council, its structures and work are set out in the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (2016) and the Council's Terms of Reference. This new strategic plan will be overseen by the Council appointed in March 2026.

The NCCA has a full-time executive staff, led by a Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The Chairperson leads the Council in determining the strategic priorities and direction for the organisation and the CEO leads the executive staff and their work with Council's sub-committees and its enabling structures—Boards and Development Groups—to operationalise these priorities. The organisation is funded through a grant from the Department of Education and Youth.



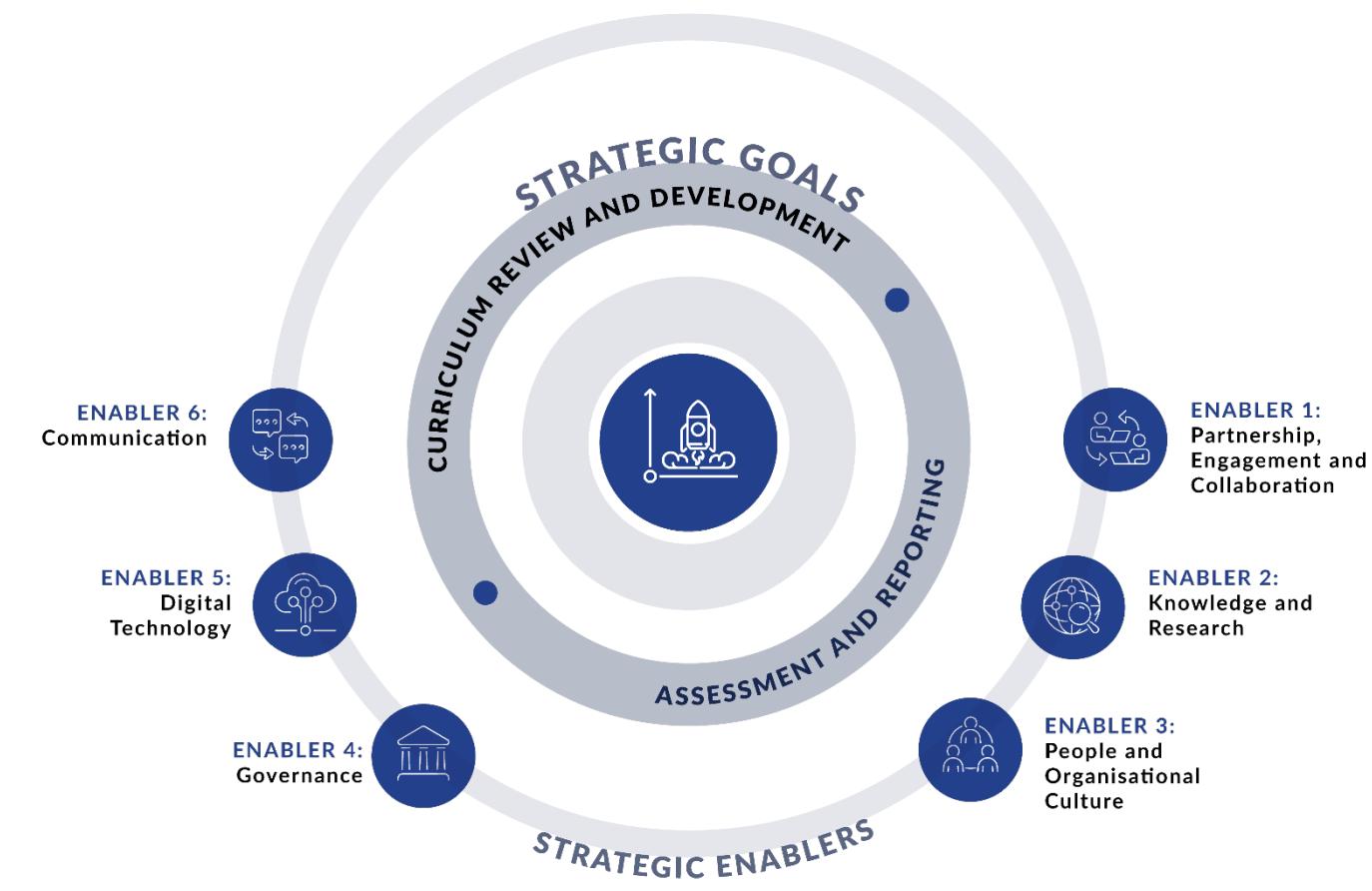
Strategic Goals and Enablers



NCCA's work over the next four years centres on two strategic goals:

- Curriculum Review and Development
- Assessment and Reporting.

These goals present the Council's priorities and take account of commitments in national policies and plans, such as the [Programme for Government 2025](#), the [Department of Education Statement of Strategy 2025-2028](#) and Action Plans for education. Six strategic enablers support the Council in achieving the goals. These enablers align with the principles of [Public Service Transformation 2030](#), ensuring transparency, accountability, and innovation in delivering public value.



Strategic Goals

Goal 1: Curriculum Review and Development



Through the processes of review and development, we will ensure the curriculum and its assessment arrangements support and enable progression in children and young people's learning across sectors and across educational transitions.

We commit to achieving the following by 2029.

Objectives	
Cross-sectoral	SG1.1 Develop and implement an approach that enables more cyclical, systematic review of the curriculum.
	SG1.2 Review and update, as appropriate, existing curriculum specifications and develop new specifications in response to identified needs and policy imperatives.
	SG1.3 Develop a curriculum to support Irish Sign Language (ISL) across the continuum of education.
	SG1.4 Complete the development and integration of Key Competencies in the curriculum for primary and post-primary schools, and support schools' enactment of these.
	SG1.5 Exemplify effective pedagogies to support progression and provide opportunities for choice and decision-making in learning for children and young people.
Early Childhood	SG1.6 Support the early childhood sector in using <i>Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework</i> to provide for high-quality learning experiences for children throughout early childhood.
Primary	SG1.7 Support primary and special schools in using the redeveloped Primary School Curriculum to provide for high-quality learning, teaching and assessment experiences across all curriculum areas.
	SG1.8 Review and update guidance related to planning and preparation, and inclusion for primary and special schools in light of the redeveloped Primary School Curriculum.
Junior Cycle	SG1.9 Support post-primary schools in using the <i>Framework for Junior Cycle</i> as the basis for planning and implementing their junior cycle programmes.
	SG1.10 Update the <i>Framework for Junior Cycle</i> in response to research findings to ensure it continues to support high-quality teaching, learning and assessment.

Senior Cycle	SG1.11	Complete the review and redevelopment of the full suite of senior cycle subjects and modules.
	SG1.12	Enhance pathways for students through senior cycle to provide greater choice and flexibility for progression for all young people.

Goal 2: Assessment and Reporting



Aligning assessment with curriculum purposes, we will promote and exemplify assessment practices that support children and young people's learning in all areas of the curriculum. We will support reporting that demonstrates learners' progress and achievements across the curriculum.

We commit to achieving the following by 2029.

	Objective
Cross-sectoral	SG2.1 Promote formative assessment practices and teacher judgement to support progression in all aspects of learning for children and young people across the continuum of education.
	SG2.2 Replenish and extend the suite of quality-assured examples that illustrate pedagogies and expectations for learners.
Early Childhood	SG2.3 Review and redevelop the Mo Scéal reporting materials to align with the updated Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework.
Primary	SG2.4 Review and update guidance on assessment in light of the redeveloped Primary School Curriculum, and provide examples from practice.
	SG2.5 Review and redevelop reporting materials, including the Education Passport, to align with the developed Primary School Curriculum.
Junior Cycle	SG2.6 Support schools' work with the dual approach to assessment in the <i>Framework for Junior Cycle</i> .
Senior cycle	SG2.7 Broaden assessment arrangements and reporting within and at the end of senior cycle to reflect the breadth and depth of young people's progress and achievement and to support transition from school and other educational settings.



Strategic Enablers

Enabler 1: Partnership, Engagement and Collaboration



We will build strong, inclusive partnerships that involve diverse voices in shaping curriculum and assessment change. The following '*Partnership, Engagement and Collaboration*' actions will support our achievement of the Strategic Goals.

Number	Action
SE1.1	Develop and implement a Consultation Strategy 2027–2029 which enables the involvement of diverse voices and perspectives in shaping curriculum and assessment advice, and which demonstrates the impact of consultation on this advice.
SE1.2	Work closely with schools and settings to gather and learn from their experiences, develop ideas, and inform supports for enactment of curriculum and assessment changes.
SE1.3	Work with partners in education, support services, institutes of educator/teacher education, and further and higher education institutions to build capacity for curriculum and assessment change.
SE1.4	Collaborate with organisations and government departments to achieve alignment between curriculum and assessment developments and wider public policy and commitments.
SE1.5	Contribute to the National Síolta Aistear Initiative through inter-Departmental structures.

Enabler 2: Knowledge and Research



We will generate, use and share high-quality research to inform curriculum and assessment development and continuous improvement in how we carry out our work. The following '*Knowledge and Research*' actions will support our achievement of the Strategic Goals.

Number	Actions
SE2.1	Develop and implement the Research Strategy 2027–2029.
SE2.2	Commission research specific to our curriculum and assessment review and development work.
SE2.3	Develop our processes for early review of curriculum and assessment changes.
SE2.4	Disseminate the outcomes and findings of NCCA-funded research to stimulate and inform debate publicly and within NCCA structures.

SE2.5	Participate in relevant curriculum and assessment networks and initiatives, nationally and internationally, and draw on and disseminate learning from these.
SE2.6	Advocate for and support research-informed teaching, learning and assessment in schools and settings as a foundation for curriculum and assessment innovation and development.

Enabler 3: People and Organisational Culture



We will empower our people through an inclusive, supportive culture that enables collaboration, wellbeing and the capacity and competencies needed to deliver our vision. The following '*People and Organisational Culture*' actions will support our achievement of the Strategic Goals.

Number	Actions
SE3.1	Develop and implement a People Strategy that creates an inclusive and psychologically safe workplace where people are empowered to do their best work, embedding the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty and NCCA's commitment to climate action in how NCCA works and makes decisions.
SE3.2	Provide and evolve blended and sustainable ways of working, office accommodation and employee supports that enable effective collaboration, inclusion, climate responsibility and positive quality of life for all staff, regardless of location.
SE3.3	Develop NCCA's people through tailored learning, leadership development and workforce planning so that current and future skills, including digital, inclusive practice and sustainability, are in place to deliver the Strategic Plan and to ensure continuity, succession and knowledge transfer.

Enabler 4: Governance



We will uphold strong, transparent governance that ensures accountability, ethical practice and effective oversight across all our work. The following '*Governance*' actions will support our achievement of the Strategic Goals.

Number	Action
SE4.1	Enhance the effectiveness of the Council, its sub-committees and the representative structures by carrying out and responding to external and internal reviews.
SE4.2	Embed the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty in how NCCA carries out its remit.
SE4.3	Enhance the Corporate Governance Framework and related practices, including a full review and updating of records management, and an expanded audit function.
SE4.4	Embed a proactive, integrated approach to risk management that anticipates emerging risks, identifies opportunities, informs decision-making, and builds resilience across the organisation.

SE4.5	Maintain and further develop robust financial oversight through reliable financial systems and internal controls, producing audited Financial Statements to the deadlines and standards required.
SE4.6	Comply with governance, administrative, financial and legal obligations and guidance to provide excellent public service, optimise efficiencies and meet all statutory requirements.
SE4.7	Promote the use of sustainable, greener and social considerations in organisational policies and practices, including public procurement.

Enabler 5: Digital Technology



We will use digital technologies innovatively, securely and ethically to enhance engagement and communication, support curriculum enactment and strengthen organisational effectiveness. The following 'Digital Technology' actions will support our achievement of the Strategic Goals.

Number	Action
SE5.1	Use digital technology innovatively, creatively, and ethically to enhance communication and advocacy, foster engagement and debate, and counter misinformation about NCCA's work.
SE5.2	Leverage existing and emerging technologies to support curriculum enactment, strengthen operational efficiency and security, and reduce NCCA's carbon footprint.
SE5.3	Invest in and update NCCA websites to improve accessibility, meet legal requirements, and respond to evolving user behaviours and trends in online and social media.
SE5.4	Integrate AI responsibly into internal operations and curriculum development, in line with government guidance, to drive innovation and efficiency.

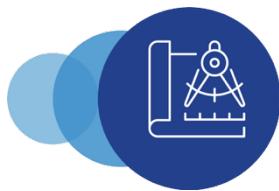
Enabler 6: Communication



We will communicate clearly and openly to build understanding, foster trust and ensure accessible, research-informed information reaches a wide audience. The following 'Communication' actions will support our achievement of the Strategic Goals.

Number	Action
SE6.1	Develop and implement a new Communications Strategy to increase public awareness of NCCA's role and the robust, research-informed approach to developing curriculum and assessment advice for the Minister.
SE6.2	Further develop staff expertise in the development of accessible communications across all media types using English, Irish and Irish Sign Language.
SE6.3	Gather and use feedback to support effective communications.

Implementing, Monitoring and Evaluating the Strategy



The implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Strategic Plan 2026-2029 will be actioned by the NCCA Executive with oversight from the Council. This will be achieved through:

- developing and enacting an annual plan of work, aligned to the strategic goals/enablers, which is submitted to the Department of Education and Youth. Each plan will identify specific outputs with completion dates (by quarters).
- using Performance Management and Development System which is aligned to the strategic objectives. This system will place a strong emphasis on professional development opportunities to support progress in achieving the objectives over the next four years.
- providing regular progress updates to the Council and its sub-committees. This monitoring will also help to identify changing needs and priorities, and will support planning and decision-making.
- compiling and publishing Annual Reports which detail progress in implementing the Strategic Plan. NCCA's Financial Statements and update on implementing the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty will form part of these reports.
- developing an annual Oversight and Performance Delivery Agreement and Financial Drawdown Agreement with the Department of Education and Youth.
- participating in regular Governance meetings with the Department.
- taking assurances and learning from audits by the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) of financial statements (findings of which are published in the C&AG's Annual Reports) to ensure adherence to all relevant laws, regulations, and governing authorities alongside upholding the highest standards of ethical conduct and sound financial management in all our transactions.
- carrying out a midterm review which will draw on the monitoring and reporting work. This review will determine whether adjustments are required for the remaining two years of the Strategic Plan.
- ongoing monitoring of work by the Senior Management Team and sectoral management teams.

Reflecting further on the Strategic Plan towards the end of 2029 will provide an opportunity to focus on the impact of NCCA's work across the four years and to consider key factors underpinning the successes and challenges in implementing the strategy. This final reflection will assist in initiating work on the subsequent strategic plan.





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