

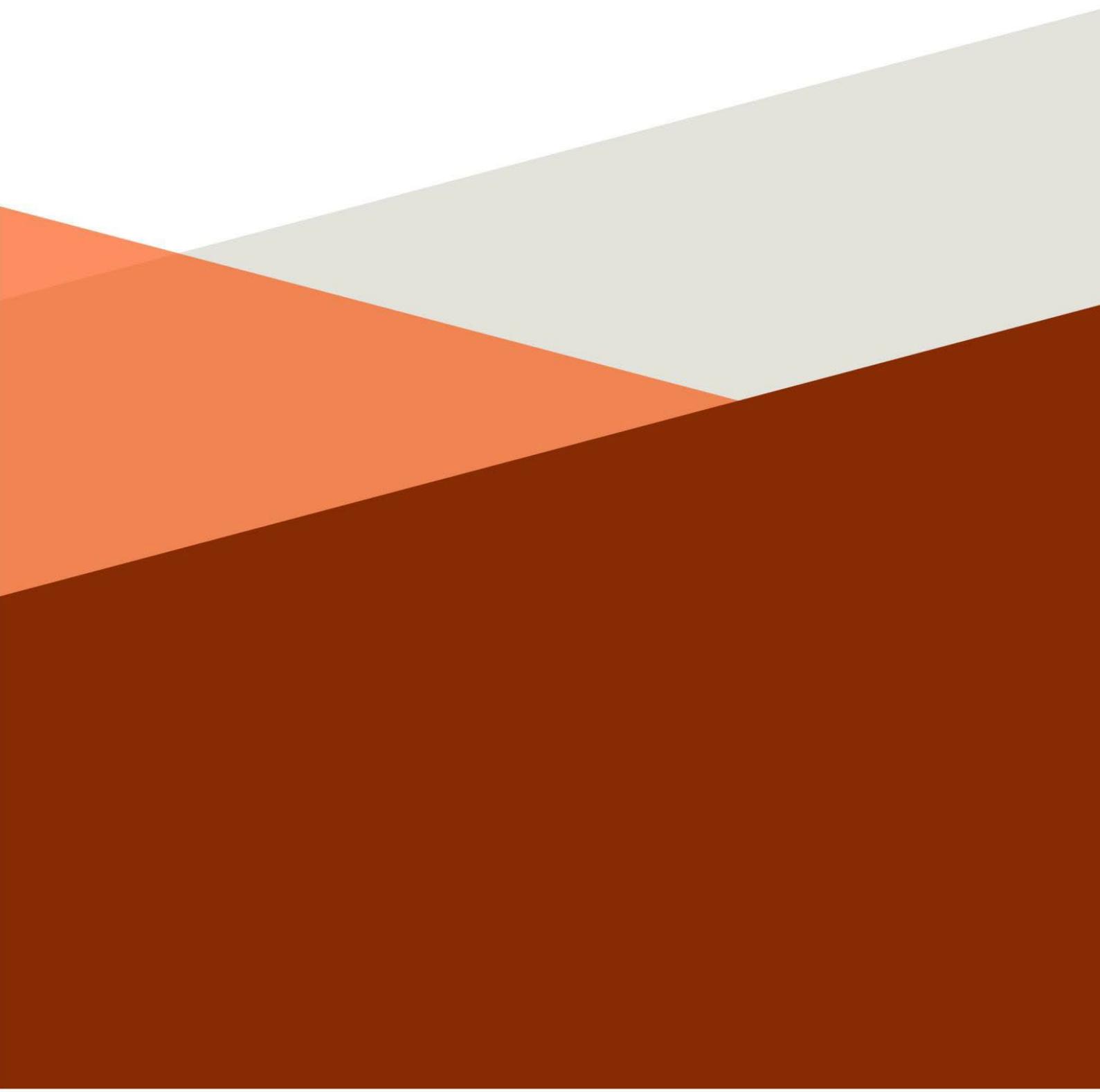


NCCA

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

Leading Out Seminar Series

Report on Seminar 8 - Partners for Change



Leading Out: Partners for Change – Transitioning to the next phase

The NCCA have reached a significant milestone in the redevelopment of the Primary School Curriculum. At the March 2025 meeting, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) approved the specifications for the redeveloped Primary School Curriculum.

The development of the *Primary Curriculum Framework* (2023) and the specifications for the redeveloped curriculum have involved extensive research, consultation, networking, and deliberation, all within a collaborative approach to curriculum development. This achievement marks the most substantial change to primary education in over two decades.

The *Leading Out* Seminar Series is designed to facilitate collaboration and shared sense-making among stakeholders as the primary curriculum is redeveloped and introduced to primary and special schools. To date, *Leading Out* seminars have focused on topics such as, 'Agency and flexibility', 'Policy alignment and coherence', 'System-wide leadership', 'System-wide learning', and 'Teacher agency and identity'. Stakeholder engagements – including research, consultations, Schools Forum input, BEACONS events, and collaboration with the NCCA Advisory Panel (Primary) – have helped organisations identify the conditions needed to support the introduction of the redeveloped Primary School Curriculum. The conditions identified to support curriculum change were documented in [Supporting Systemwide Primary Curriculum Change](#) (NCCA, 2023) which was published in tandem with the *Primary Curriculum Framework* in Spring 2023.

With the *Primary Curriculum Framework* now published, and the introduction of new curriculum specifications imminent, the system is entering a pivotal phase. A comprehensive programme of professional development has been established to support teachers and school leaders as they engage with curriculum change over the coming years. To build on the strengths of partnerships developed so far, a new series of *Leading Out* seminars has been launched. These seminars aim to:

- Promote ongoing dialogue and collaboration
- Strengthen collective efficacy
- Support the transition to the next critical phase of enactment.

The ultimate goal is to realise the vision of the redeveloped Primary School Curriculum in practice and to ensure its long-term success.

The deliberations of the 8th seminar of the *Leading Out* series - *Partners for Change* took place on May 29th 2025 and are recorded in this document. It provides a brief overview of the presentations and a summary record of the discussions at the seminar as stakeholders worked together to consider next steps in the roadmap for change and key messages for curriculum enactment in the years ahead.

Reflecting on the Process of Primary Curriculum Review and Redevelopment

Arlene Forster CEO of the NCCA opened the seminar. Her introductory remarks reminded participants of the vision for children and teachers in the redeveloped curriculum and encouraged them to consider how partnership could be a key lever in supporting curriculum enactment.

Following the introductory remarks, Dr Thomas Walsh a member of the NCCA Advisory Panel (Primary) from Maynooth University led the first session of the day. The presentation provided a summary and key insights from the recently compiled report [The Redeveloped Primary School Curriculum in Ireland: Charting the Redevelopment Process](#). Dr Walsh highlighted key milestones in the curriculum redevelopment process and emphasised the importance of documenting this journey. Doing so ensures transparency and provides a valuable record for both national and international audiences seeking to understand the individual and collective steps taken to reshape Ireland's primary school curriculum. Following Dr Walsh's presentation, participants had an opportunity to reflect on their experiences of the redevelopment process and the following points were noted in the discussions that followed.

Discussion 1: Reflecting on the Process of Primary Curriculum Review and Redevelopment - Key themes emerging from the discussions

In discussion, participants outlined a range of different experiences in relation to the Primary Curriculum Review and Redevelopment process, with differing degrees of involvement within and outside of NCCA structures. The point was made that the NCCA executive had done substantial work reaching out to stakeholders, listening to contrasting perspectives and importantly, actioning what was heard. The comprehensive nature and depth of consultation was acknowledged. It was noted in the discussions that the *Primary Curriculum Framework* and the curriculum specifications very much represent a shared vision. While this shared vision was welcomed, the challenge of enactment was noted.

Involving so many stakeholders was acknowledged as far reaching but challenging. The amount of background papers and research that informed the redevelopment process was described as vast. There was positive feedback on the input from the Advisory Panel. The importance of deliberation within Development Groups and the role the Schools Forum played in the process were also acknowledged. The commitment to child voice and hearing from children throughout the process was commended. It was noted that the voice of teachers and school leaders needs to remain to the fore in the next deliberations for enactment.

From Implementation to Enactment

Dr Patrick Sullivan Deputy CEO of the NCCA presented next and explored the differences between curriculum implementation and curriculum enactment. His session highlighted the importance of curriculum enactment as an open space for professional agency and contextual responsiveness. Professor Louise Hayward, member of the Advisory Panel (Primary), also provided an input during this session. Her video recorded input spoke to the challenges of curriculum implementation experienced in other jurisdictions and provided insight into important considerations for Ireland in the years ahead.

Following the presentations participants had the opportunity to engage in facilitated roundtable discussions. Key points recorded during these discussions included:

Discussion 2: How the shift from curriculum implementation to curriculum enactment might serve to benefit all learners – Key themes emerging from the discussions

It was felt that this shift offers scope for linking in and involving children in conversations about things that impact their learning – in a range of different formats (e.g. small group, paired, individual) as a means of supporting well-prepared teachers to make decisions about learning and teaching. It was commented that connecting learning experiences to children's everyday lives, interests, and local contexts will ensure curriculum relevance. The emphasis on child voice and child agency within the curriculum framework and each of the specifications was identified as a very positive feature.

It was considered that child voice, if activated as intended, could be very powerful, but teachers will have to be trained on how to activate child voice beyond the nod to choices about surface level issues. The shift in power dynamic between child and teacher in classrooms, and empowering children to take ownership and control of their learning, was seen favourably but this also needs to be supported through time and professional development. Given the recent emphasis on Wellbeing in past years – e.g. 'Bí Cineálta', it was suggested that school communities have already refocused to place the central focus on children. This means that the enactment approach aligns with where many schools are at.

Increased collaboration between teachers and local planning were noted as important features of enactment, as no two school contexts are the same. This collaboration could promote shared learning, reflective practice, and collective capacity-building. The potential to build stronger relationships between the teacher, the child and the family was also acknowledged. It was felt that deepening this connection will support each child's holistic development and engage parents as partners in the learning journey.

Discussion 3: How stakeholders can support others in making this transition and equip them to enact the curriculum in their contexts - Key themes emerging from the discussions

It was highlighted that all teachers will need requisite time, knowledge and understanding to engage children's voices in their learning. It was felt that school leaders and teachers need to be provided with trust and time – time to think, time for reflection and time for intentional planning. A reduction in paperwork requirements and expectations is important to supporting upcoming enactment. Affording schools time and space to engage with the Primary Curriculum Framework was seen as critical before engaging with the specifications for the curriculum area and enacting these in their contexts. Participants felt that looking at the big picture will be the starting point.

In professional learning, participants expressed the view that presenting the vision underpinning the curriculum to teachers may avoid tendency to teach how we were taught. It was felt that schools that have been involved in the process will have a pivotal role in supporting other schools through teach meets, space for experimentation, pilot projects, creative clusters, modelling of good practice across schools, school networks and special class/school perspectives. Research could also be conducted across schools to capture good practice and published as supports for other schools, particularly as it pertains to child voice and agency.

Interagency collaboration was highlighted as a key theme throughout all conversations. There will be an onus on organisations to work within their own structures (communication and a shared understanding) and to work with other organisations. Key messages related to the

redeveloped curriculum can be incorporated into the agenda of organisational conferences and events. It is considered important for organisations to understand what support agencies are doing and what services they provide. A clear road map of the plan would be helpful.

The role of Education Centres in providing professional learning to teachers on a regional level was noted. This might take the form of running courses, hosting events online and in-person, and being on the ground with the schools as allies, and identifying areas of challenge or concern to be addressed. Building leadership capacity across organisations was also considered significant in equipping stakeholders to enact the curriculum, whether that is post holders leading curriculum area development, professional learning leaders with Oide or SENO's from NCSE.

Initial Teacher Education (ITE) will have an important role to play in supporting students to appreciate the importance of context (e.g. DEIS) so they in turn will support individuals in their classroom. In terms of the Inspectorate, it was felt that it is important that the Inspectorate is supportive of teachers and school leaders throughout the enactment period, providing space and encouragement for schools to engage with and try out the changes, communicating the importance of trying and experimenting over the idea of having everything right. It should be made clear that in the initial phase that they are supporting/advising in addition to evaluation. It was also commented as necessary that the Inspectorate work closely with Oide to inform supports available for school leaders and teachers.

Discussion 4: Approaches or strategies that could contribute to fostering a stronger culture of collaboration and shared ownership among everyone in the next 1-2 years - Key themes emerging from the discussions

A systemwide commitment to listening was mentioned. The system needs to listen within organisations and among organisations. Collaboration and Partnership is very important – though care and clarity is needed here, and all must be in agreement about this. Ensuring sufficient capacity (resourcing, funding and staffing) within all of the relevant organisations/bodies involved in the enactment of the redeveloped curriculum was considered crucial.

Succinct, comprehensive and targeted in-service with sustained support (and partnership) across the curriculum areas, pedagogies and principles from Oide, NCSE, NCCA and Inspectorate will be necessary. The in-school and in-person work with schools was identified as a vital part of the enactment process. Specific professional learning opportunities for school leaders was identified as an important consideration. It was felt that school closures will be needed to provide space to talk and plan. Two-day closures would allow information sharing on the first day, with a second day where new information can be embedded amongst the school staff. Summer courses could be replaced by staff collaboration time i.e. bring the staff together over the summer to work with a facilitator and give EPV days for this. Ensuring that there is high-quality CPD that meets the need on the ground, including the emotional needs of the teachers, will be essential.

Clear messaging to school leaders and teachers in relation to enactment and support will be very important, particularly regarding the inspectorate position. It was commented that the language of the enactment can be conflicting and confusing. Therefore, there is a need for effective communication, clear messaging and timely sharing of information from the Department of Education and Youth.

The importance of exemplars and supports that can be adapted to teachers/schools own context was also highlighted. The development of support materials and professional learning resources for schools will need to be carefully designed to ensure that schools can work with

them and adapt them to their own particular context. It will be essential that resources are provided and available to schools in time for the enactment. Resources are equally important – human and other and the vast types of schools needs should be considered in this. The role of the principal / school leader in leading curriculum change was discussed and it was emphasised that substantial supports for school principals are required.

In terms of Initial Teacher Education, it was noted that Higher Education Institutions would benefit from a formalised structure of communication and information sharing to ensure that they are fully briefed on any changes/developments, thus enabling the preparation of modules and programmes which are in line with curriculum priorities. Professional conversations, to reflect on existing lecture materials, to make connections between subjects and topics across Curriculum Areas through a playful pedagogy, would be beneficial. The suggestion was also made that ITE professionals might be freed up for at least one day a week to do outreach work in schools. Within ITE's it is hoped that they will have an opportunity to train teachers as they mean to continue – e.g., demonstrating agency. Some participants noted that further thinking is required on how MFL that can be conceptualised and supported at Initial Teacher Education level.

The concern was expressed that this enactment may be overwhelming for some teachers. A balance between agency and support was suggested, with an emphasis on empowerment. Scaffolding was viewed as very important for inclusive practices, outdoor learning and, more generally, to enable the vision to be enacted. Notwithstanding that, it was also suggested that there is greater understanding of and capacity for agency in the system at this stage in the redevelopment process due to the Primary Language Curriculum and Primary Maths Curriculum experiences. It was emphasised that it will be important that there is a shared understanding, across the system, of agency.

Expectations should be realistically communicated to all stakeholders. Ensuring that all communications and resources or guidance relevant to the change are available in Irish and English at the same time will be important. In terms of successful enactment, it will be essential that all stakeholders communicate the same message with a shared understanding of what is being asked of teachers, school leaders and schools. It was mentioned that there is a balance in supporting teachers appropriately but also allowing room for schools to demonstrate agency in enactment. It will be important to place an emphasis on the importance of slowly navigating the changes.

The coordinated, interagency collaboration evident in the seminar was acknowledged and welcomed by attendees. Overall, while issues such as cohesive messaging across stakeholder bodies, the balance between agency and appropriate support, and the importance of time, space and support for sustainable change were consistently highlighted, there was a largely positive response to discussions. A sense of enthusiasm for reaching this stage of the journey, and in looking ahead to enactment was evident throughout the day.

Looking at the Roadmap Ahead

In this session participants first heard from advisory panel member Professor Dominic Wyse through video input where he spoke about supporting the profession to engage with curriculum change. A number of further education stakeholders also contributed to this session by providing insights into the curriculum enactment roadmap ahead from their respective organisations' perspective. These included:

- Karen Murtagh – Department of Education and Youth
- Orla McKiernan and Rory Collins – Oide

- Dr Catherine Merrigan – National Council for Special Education
- Esther Doyle – Inspectorate

Navigating Curriculum Change

Via a pre-recorded input, Professor Jim Spillane spoke about different elements and design principles of curriculum enactment, which could help support successful enactment of the redeveloped curriculum in Ireland.

Participant then engaged in an interactive activity designed to support the co-construction and crafting of guiding statements for all stakeholders to support successful enactment of the redeveloped Primary School Curriculum. Dr Tracy Curran from the NCCA presented 5 draft guiding statements to the participants and feedback was then provided by all participants in a carousel activity. Some of the key points noted during this activity included:

A strong theme that emerged was the **need for accessible and relatable language**. Participants urged the removal of abstract or ambiguous terms, such as "fresh mindset", in favour of more grounded, concrete language that connects with teachers' day-to-day experiences. The tone of messaging should avoid suggesting a reset or break with the past. Instead, communications should affirm a sense of continuity and evolution, positioning curriculum change as a progression that builds on the strengths already present in schools.

There was **widespread agreement on the importance of affirming existing good practice**. Participants expressed concern about change fatigue and emphasised the need for messaging to reinforce what is already working well. Teachers should feel that their current efforts are recognised and that the new curriculum vision is not a departure from, but a deepening of, their professional work. This approach, it was suggested, would empower teachers and educators rather than overwhelm them.

Feedback also centred on **supporting teacher agency and professional judgment**. There was a strong call for the guiding statements to reflect a belief in the capacity of teachers and school leaders to make meaningful decisions in context. Agency was described as collective, evolving, and situated, shaped by school culture, leadership practices, and system supports. Participants emphasised the importance of creating the conditions where agency can flourish, including time, trust, and professional dialogue.

Collaboration and shared learning were also highlighted as critical to successful curriculum enactment. Participants advocated for more structured opportunities such as professional learning communities and protected professional time to foster ongoing conversation and collective reflection. The guiding statements should explicitly support a culture of shared inquiry, where learning is seen as both an individual and collective endeavour.

Concerns about **system coherence and communication** were consistently raised. Participants stressed the need for alignment across agencies, initial teacher education (ITE), professional development, and school support services. Fragmented or inconsistent messaging was seen as a barrier to effective implementation. A more systemic, joined-up approach to communication, would ensure that all partners working together and this was seen as essential.

In terms of **audience**, feedback underscored the importance of tailoring messages to different stakeholders, including teachers, parents, pupils, and broader system actors. The use of visual supports and practical, real-world examples was recommended to enhance clarity and accessibility. Language should be empowering and inspiring, not compliance-driven, helping educators to see themselves as central to the reform rather than passive recipients of it.

Finally, the **need for time and practical supports** featured strongly. Participants noted that for curriculum change to be meaningful and sustainable, teachers and school leaders must be given the space to engage with it thoughtfully. Scaffolding, phased supports, and access to relevant examples were identified as crucial to helping schools navigate change gradually, with confidence and clarity.

Taken together, this feedback presents a clear direction for refining the guiding statements: one that values clarity, coherence, and continuity, while placing trust in the professionalism and collective capacity of all those leading learning in classrooms, schools, support services, teacher education, and across the wider education system.

Panel Discussion

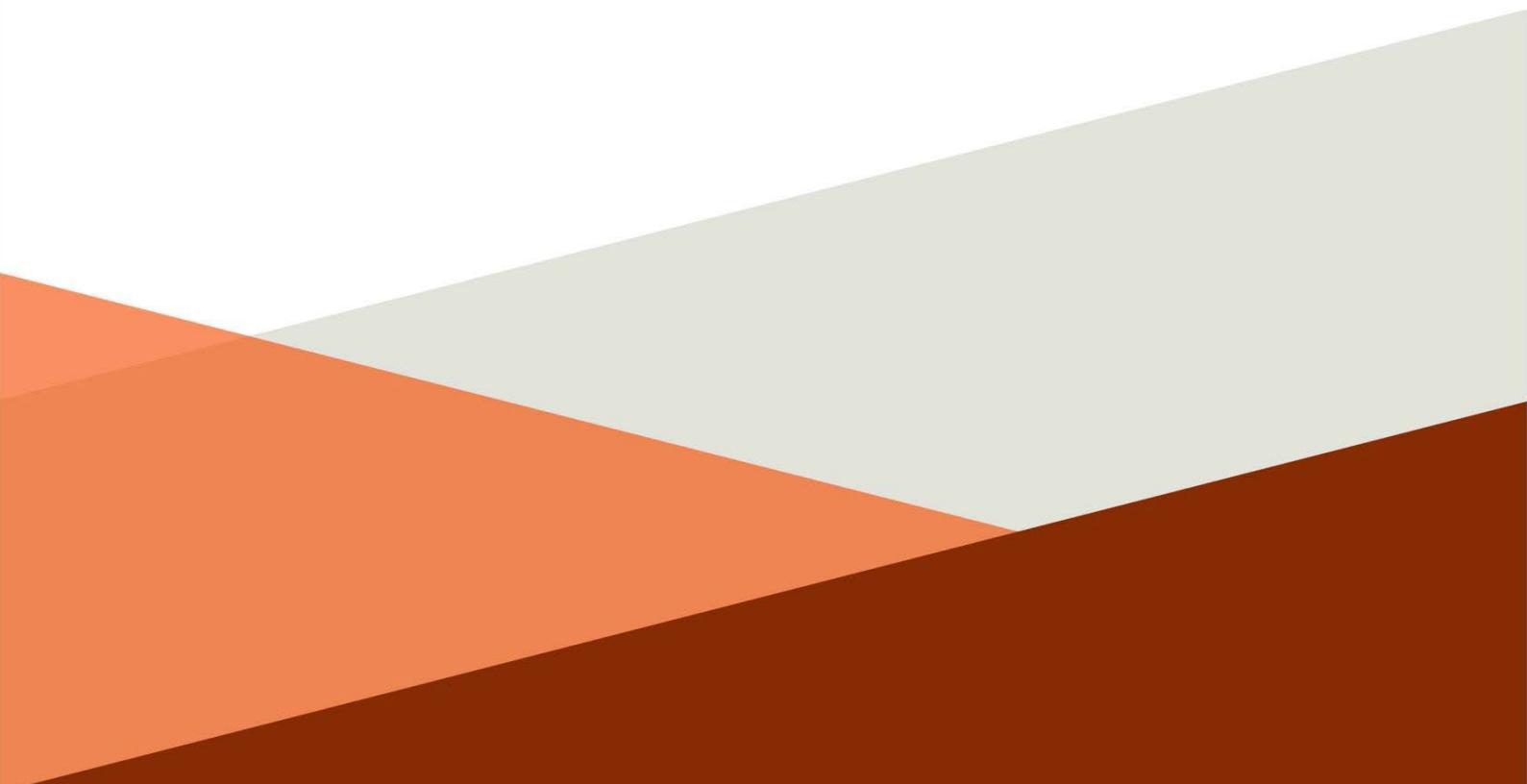
The Seminar was concluded with a panel discussion on key learning from the day and reflections on the importance of partnership and collaboration amongst educational stakeholders. The discussion was facilitated by Dr Tracy Curran NCCA and included the following panelists:

- Noel Loftus, Principal St Attracta's NS
- Rory Collins, Oide
- Karen Murtagh, Department of Education and Youth
- Esther Doyle, Inspectorate
- Patrick Sullivan, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

A number of points of discussion were raised during the panel discussion including the importance of empowering teachers to take on agency through professional learning as well as encouragement to explore and experiment with the redeveloped curriculum. The vital importance of continued collaboration across education partners within the enactment phase was highlighted alongside the importance of clear messaging.

Thinking Forward

Dr Tracy Curran closed the seminar and thanked participants for their valuable contributions throughout the day. The importance of continuing to build and strengthen partnerships for change during the impending period of curriculum enactment was noted. Building on this intention, participants were informed that a future Leading Out seminar Partners for Change 2 will take place in 2025.



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