



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

# Annual Report 2021

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June 2022

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## Foreword

2021 was another extraordinary year as the Coronavirus pandemic continued to impact all aspects of our lives. However, the NCCA staff and Council members adjusted to ensure work on curriculum and assessment continued apace, completed research and published resources to support teachers and parents with teaching and learning remotely.

Despite the pandemic, we continued with ground-breaking research and took account of developments internationally as an evidence base for our work in developing and reviewing curricula and assessment practices aimed at promoting high standards of quality, equity and inclusion relevant to national objectives. Our consultations with schools continued to be scaled back given the challenges faced by school leaders and teachers in teaching remotely and with return to school protocols and engaging with learners and parents.

Regardless of these challenges, this Annual Report for 2021 captures the extent of the work accomplished by Council and the staff of the NCCA, Development Groups and Boards. Some of the major work packages included initiating the updating of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and concluding Phase One of the consultation on the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. In Junior cycle, we published updated Wellbeing Guidelines and completed a new curriculum specification for Physical Education. Following several years of consultation with our education partners we approved *The Senior Cycle Review: Advisory Report* and presented it to the Minister. We are delighted she published the report and presented her plans for Senior Cycle based broadly on the Council's Report and international best practices. We also provided guidance on preparation for teaching and learning in primary schools, examples of student work and assessment items for junior cycle subjects; and contributed to assessment arrangements for Leaving Certificate examinations for the 2021/2022 school year.

The NCCA continues to be informed by best international practice and build a national research base to inform our work. We published a third report from the *Children's School Lives* longitudinal study of children in primary school; completed the first year of the study on the

*Impact and Implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle*; and initiated research to support the updating of *Aistear*.

Council continues to adhere to the highest standards of Corporate Governance. This Annual Report also sets out NCCA's corporate governance work. This year we completed Council's self-review with assistance from Governance Ireland and a strategic, external review overseen by the Institute of Public Administration. The results of both of these reviews points to a professional and highly effective Council who work well together in support of the Irish education system and the children it serves across a myriad of settings. We reviewed and updated several Council policies, including the Protected Disclosures Policy, the Fixed Asset Policy and the Procurement Policy. Staff wellbeing was a key priority ensuring staff could remain connected and feel supported during extended periods of remote working and secondment to the Health Service Executive. A key element of our work was a draft of a new Strategic Plan for the NCCA that provides the vision and direction for the new term of Council. Finally, the Statement on Internal Control and the Financial Statement for 2021 were also concluded as set out in the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016, and are included as appendices.

Work as extensive as this 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 the NCCA to have an Executive and staff whose specialist expertise, enthusiasm, and clear commitment ensured the completion of a challenging and far reaching work programme in 2021. As Chairperson, 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 significant leadership as Chairs to the Boards for Early Childhood and Primary and the Board for Senior Cycle, respectively.

The new four-year term of Council began on March 1 2022. This saw a number of Council members leaving and new members joining the board. I thank all departing members for their

significant contributions to Council during their terms of office and in particular Deirbhile Nic Craith as Deputy Chair of Council and Chair of Governance. I am delighted to welcome our new members to Council and sharing their expertise in moving forward the important work of the NCCA. Adjustments to the work plan and to meeting formats required flexibility and creativity by all and none were found wanting. The NCCA CEO Arlene Forster, her Executive, and the NCCA staff's commitment for the important work Council has been and continues to be professional and exemplary. It bodes well for the coming term of Council. I wish the CEO and her staff as well as the new Chair the very best during this challenging yet exciting term for Council.

Sincerely,



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Mary O'Sullivan  
Chairperson

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## Introduction

Following an extremely challenging year in which the Coronavirus gave rise to a global pandemic, 2021 continued to present difficulties for the education system as school and early childhood communities worked hard to support young people's wellbeing and their learning, including during a further period of remote schooling.

Like many organisations across the public, private and voluntary sectors, NCCA continued to work largely remotely for significant periods during the year. In response to the need for increased supports for schools and early childhood settings in order to remain open and safe, the NCCA was requested to re-assign staff to the Health Service Executive's School Support Teams. Over 70% of staff from across the organisation contributed to this important work on a voluntary basis for periods of time between April and October 2021. As members of the HSE Teams, NCCA staff worked closely with school principals and early childhood managers assisting them to respond appropriately when COVID cases were confirmed. This level of re-assignment was significant and had a direct impact on NCCA's curriculum and assessment work necessitating the Plan of Work being revisited and adjusted on a number of occasions.

Within this changing and uncertain context NCCA progressed work in a responsive and sensitive manner. Even with the need to revisit the Plan of Work and adjust project timeframes, pause or defer certain work until the next school year and take on new work, considerable progress was made across all sectors. This work is captured in this Annual Report for 2021. The infographics on pages 10-15 present highlights under the headings of Early Childhood, Primary, Post-primary, Cross-sectoral and Corporate Services. Of particular note was NCCA's initiation of the process to update *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and the conclusion of phase 1 of the consultation on the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. In junior cycle, we published updated Wellbeing Guidelines and completed a 135-hour curriculum specification for Physical Education while at senior cycle, we worked closely with the education partners to complete the *Senior Cycle Review: Advisory Report*. In addition, and in order to provide practical supports to schools and settings during a time of great challenge for them, we modified the *Mo Scéal* reporting templates; we provided guidance on preparation for teaching and learning in primary schools, examples of student work and

assessment items for junior cycle subjects; and we contributed to adjusted assessment arrangements for Leaving Certificate examinations in the 2021/2022 school year. Research too continued to be a priority for NCCA with the publication of the third report from the *Children's School Lives* longitudinal study of children in primary school; the completion of the first year of the study on the impact and implementation of the *Framework for Junior Cycle*; and the initiation of research to support the updating of *Aistear*.

This Annual Report also sets out NCCA's corporate governance work. 2021 saw the completion of two reviews of the Council—the annual self-review carried out with assistance from Governance Ireland and a strategic, external review overseen by the Institute of Public Administration. Significant progress was also made in reviewing and updating policies, including the Protected Disclosures Policy, the Fixed Asset Policy and the Procurement Policy. The area of staff wellbeing continued to be prioritised helping staff to remain connected and feel supported especially as they experienced an extended period of remote working. In addition, the Statement on Internal Control and the Financial Statement for 2021 and other requirements of annual reports as set out in *the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016*, are included as appendices.

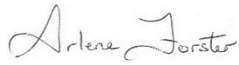
The work undertaken in 2021 was made possible through the strategic direction and the ongoing support from our Council and its representative boards and development groups, and the expert/advisory groups established to support particular areas of work. Thanks also go to Department of Education officials, to researchers and to wider stakeholders who contributed to the thinking, discussions and deliberations which helped shape curriculum and assessment advice in 2021. As we know, that advice comes alive in interactions and conversations between teachers/practitioners and the young people in their care. Sincere thanks to all the teachers, practitioners, school leaders, children, students and their parents who continue to share their time so generously with us as they bring their experience, expertise and perspectives to NCCA's curriculum development processes.

Finally, sincere thanks to the staff of the NCCA. 2021 continued to demand high levels of agility, creativity and responsiveness from colleagues across the organisation. Re-assignment to the HSE brought further demands and challenges. Throughout all of this, staff showed



significant flexibility, resilience and professionalism along with a deep and unwavering commitment to helping to ensure that all young people can experience and benefit from a relevant, meaningful and enjoyable education.

While the Coronavirus is most definitely still with us, the road ahead appears more positive and heartening as we close 2021 with this Annual Report and as we look forward with optimism and hope.



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Arlene Forster  
Chief Executive

# Overview of NCCA work in 2021

Early Childhood  
Primary  
Junior Cycle  
Senior Cycle  
Corporate Services



**NCCA**

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

# Early Childhood



## 01

### Aistear

- We launched Phase 1 of the consultation on updating *Aistear*.
- We awarded contracts to consult with babies, toddlers and young children, and for a literature review to support the updating of *Aistear*.



## 02

### Mo Scéal

- We supported the DCEDIY *Let's get ready for preschool and school* initiative, by modifying the *Mo Scéal* reporting templates.
- We supported the Department of Education Inspectorate and Early Childhood Ireland on their transition work.



## 03

### National Síolta Aistear Initiative (NSAI)

- We continued to support the NSAI by progressing materials for continuing professional development and resources for parents in a variety of languages.



## 04

### Aistear Síolta Practice Guide

- We audited the Practice Guide to bring it in-line with our Data Protection Policy.
- We updated resources across all 6 pillars of practice on the website.
- We continued the series of 'Bite-sized CPD'.



## 05

### Creativity and the arts

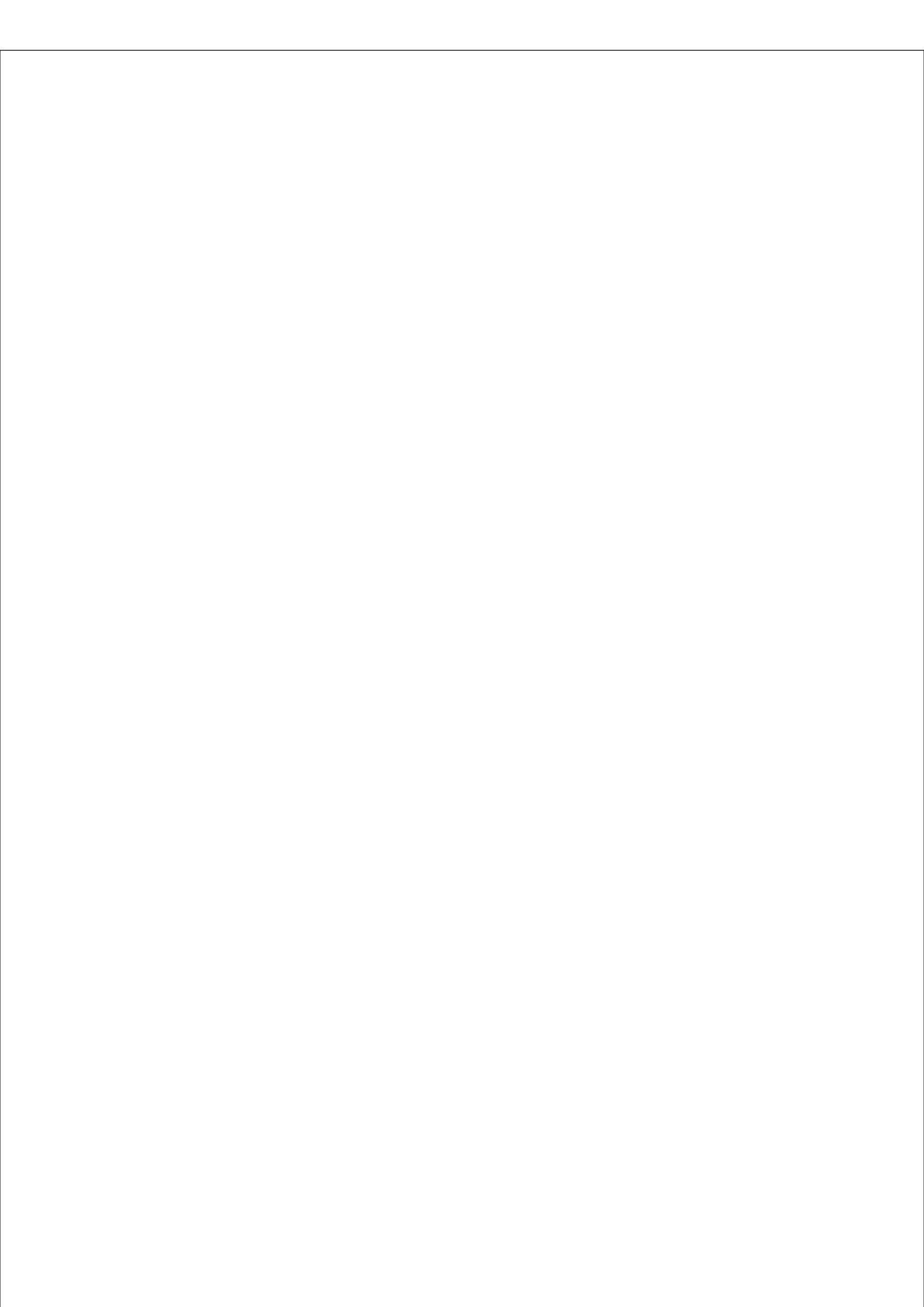
- We contributed to the inter-agency steering group overseeing the development of the arts.



## 06

### Citizen Participation Early Years Working Group

- We contributed to a working group, led by DCEDIY's Hub na nÓg team, to develop guidance materials for early years educators and other adult decision-makers consulting with children from birth to 5 years.



# Primary



## 01

### Consultation on the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework

#### Framework

- We completed Phase 1 of the consultation on the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*, involving meeting with 50+ stakeholder organisations, and publishing questionnaires and written submissions.
- We initiated Phase 2 of the consultation involving work with teachers, school leaders, parents and children in October 2021.



## 05

### Preparation for Teaching and Learning

- In collaboration with NCSE, PDST, the Inspectorate and the Department of Education, we published *Guidance on Preparation for Teaching and Learning* in April 2021.
- We hosted two information webinars to support the guidance.



## 06

### Primary Language Curriculum/

### Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile

- We published further support materials for teachers on the teaching of Irish in English-medium schools.



## 02

### Advisory Panel (Primary)

- We worked with the Advisory Panel (Primary) to publish their collaborative document *From Purpose to Practice*.



## 03

### Leading Out Seminars

- We hosted *Leading Out* seminar 5 - Systemwide Learning - involving a range of stakeholder organisations.



## 04

### Children's School Lives study

- In collaboration with University College Dublin, we published Report 3 of the *Children's School Lives Study* in November 2021.

# Junior Cycle

# Senior Cycle



## 01

### Research

- Year 1 of the multi-dimensional four-year study to explore the impact and implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle was completed.



## 02

### Curriculum

- We completed a 135-hr Junior Cycle Physical Education curriculum specification.
- We reviewed and revised the Junior Cycle CSPE short course.
- We published updated Wellbeing Guidelines.



## 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

### Assessment

- We developed and published sample assessment items for phase 5 junior cycle subjects (Wood Technology, Graphics, Engineering, Classics, Applied Technology, and Religious Education).



## 01

### Leaving Certificate

- We completed draft curriculum specifications for Leaving Certificate Physics, Chemistry and Biology.
- We consulted on draft curriculum specifications for Leaving Certificate Arabic and Classical Languages.
- We completed the public consultation on draft curriculum specifications for Leaving Certificate Gaeilge (T1 for Irish-medium schools and T2 for English-medium schools).



## 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 2021/22 school year.



## 03

### Senior Cycle Review

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

# Cross Sectoral



## 01

### Social, Personal and Health Education/ Relationships and Sexuality Education

- We created a SPHE/RSE resource portal for teachers. We published a suite of support materials for teachers in primary and post-primary schools
- We hosted an information webinar in September 2021.



## 02

### Traveller Culture and History

- We engaged with the Traveller Community to inform the development of resources to support teaching and learning of Traveller history and culture in the curriculum.



## 03

### Assessment Culture

- We contributed to the publication of a position paper on 'Assessment Culture' through the International Education Assessment Network (IEAN).

# Corporate Services



## 01

### Structures

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

- 7 meetings of Council
- 7 meetings of the Audit and Risk Committee
- 4 meetings of the Governance Committee
- 82 meetings of Boards, Development Groups and Advisory 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 2021 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.
- Updated Fixed Assets Policy.
- Updated Protected Disclosures Policy.
- Updated Procurement Policy.
- 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

- The info@ncca newsletter returned and was shared widely to build awareness of NCCA's work and to encourage participation in consultations.



## 2. Progress on NCCA work in 2021

### 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 2021
<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>Resources renewed on the <i>Aistear Síolta</i> Practice Guide, including a fundamental movement skills booklet, expert input on emergent numeracy and practitioner inputs on topics such as emergent literacy and developing a curriculum statement.</p> <p>New resources on risky play, <i>Aistear’s</i> themes and treasure baskets for babies added to the <i>Aistear Síolta</i> Practice Guide.</p>

		<p><i>National Síolta Aistear</i> Initiative (NSAI) 'Information for Parents' leaflet progressed for translation into multiple languages.</p> <p>Modified <i>Mo Scéal</i> Templates used to support transitioning into preschool and into primary school as part of the second year of the DCEDIY <i>Let's Get Ready</i> campaign.</p> <p>Phase 1 of the consultation on updating <i>Aistear</i> initiated, with questionnaires for educators and parents and a submission template published. Online focus groups for early years educators and academics held.</p>
1.2	In primary schools, new curricula are introduced for language (English and Gaeilge) and Mathematics.	<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>Draft Primary Mathematics Curriculum completed for consultation.</p> <p>Eleven support materials for the Primary Mathematics Teacher Toolkit completed for consultation.</p>

<p>1.3</p>	<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 on the <i>Draft Primary Curriculum Framework</i> completed.</p> <p>Phase 2 of the consultation on the <i>Draft Primary Curriculum Framework</i> initiated.</p>
<p>1.4</p>	<p>In junior cycle, new curricula continue to be developed and introduced as part of the junior cycle developments.</p> <p>Post-primary schools are using the Framework for Junior Cycle as the basis for planning and implementing their junior cycle programmes.</p>	<p>Review of Junior Cycle SPHE short course completed.</p> <p>Junior Cycle Physical Education 135-hour curriculum specification completed.</p> <p>Updated Wellbeing Guidelines published.</p> <p>Junior Cycle English text list revision completed.</p> <p>Junior Cycle CPSE short course revised and published.</p> <p>Draft Level 2 Priority Learning Unit: The Arts completed.</p> <p>Implementation of junior cycle subjects, short courses, L1LPs and L2LPs supported.</p> <p>Support and feedback provided to schools as they developed their own junior cycle short courses.</p>

		Revised arrangements for Classroom-Based Assessments published.
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>Consultation on draft curriculum specifications for Leaving Certificate Gaelge (T1 for Irish-medium schools and T2 for English-medium schools) completed.</p> <p>Senior Cycle Review: Advisory Report completed.</p> <p>Draft specifications and consultations for Leaving Certificate Classical Languages completed.</p> <p>Draft specification and consultation on Leaving Certificate Arabic completed.</p> <p>Draft specifications for Leaving Certificate Physics, Chemistry and Biology were completed and approved for consultation.</p> <p>Introduction of new and recently revised Leaving Certificate subjects and Leaving Certificate Applied module descriptors supported.</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 5 junior cycle subjects (Wood Technology, Technical Graphics, Metalwork, Technology, and Religious Education) completed and published.</p> <p>Sample school report templates for 2021 completed and published.</p>
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.	Resource portal and online toolkits to support the teaching of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in primary, special and post-primary schools published.

## 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 2021
<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>Work with post-primary schools related to developments in assessment, reporting and wellbeing in Junior Cycle and aspects of Senior Cycle took place.</p> <p>Webinar on curriculum leadership for middle school leaders in primary schools recorded for use by the Centre for School Leadership.</p> <p>Information webinar for teachers and school leaders on the Updated JC Wellbeing Guidelines recorded in collaboration with JCT.</p> <p>Information webinar on SPHE/RSE for primary, special and post-primary schools completed and published.</p>

		<p>Re-engagement with the Schools Forum following a successful recruitment of additional schools.</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.	<i>Leading Out</i> seminar 5 (Systemwide Learning) facilitated in collaboration with stakeholders.
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 babies, toddlers and young children as part of the updating of <i>Aistear</i> awarded.</p>
2.4	Liaison and collaborative relationships with a range of organisations and government departments are improving the understanding and quality of curriculum	National <i>Síolta Aistear</i> Initiative (NSAI) Steering Group, Project Group and Resource Development Group meetings attended.

<p>and assessment developments and the model for, or approach taken to, their implementation.</p>	<p>Participation in the Oversight Group to support DCEDIY on the OECD Quality Beyond Regulation country report.</p> <p>Two articles published with Early Childhood Ireland (ECI) on <i>Supporting Transitions to Primary School</i>.</p> <p>Collaborative engagement with PDST and NCSE leading to a shared symposium on inclusion at the Maths Education Ireland 8 conference, with subsequent publication of the NCCA paper.</p> <p>Collaboration with DE, PDST, NCSE and the Inspectorate to develop Guidance on 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>Collaboration with colleagues in DE and SEC on revised Assessment Arrangements for Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate Examinations 2021.</p> <p>Work of a number of Department of Education Steering and Technical Groups supported.</p>
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		<p>JCT Critical Friend meetings to support the implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle attended.</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>Position paper on 'Assessment Culture' through the International Education Assessment Network (IEAN) published.</p> <p>Position paper on 'Student voice in assessment processes' through the International Education Assessment Network (IEAN) initiated.</p> <p>Online engagement with the Consortium of Institutions for Development and Research in Education (CIDREE) continued.</p> <p>Design of the Knowledge Carousel as part of the suite of CIDREE activities supported.</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 2021
<p>3.1 Curriculum and assessment developments are informed by evidence and research.</p>	<p>Report 3 from the Children’s School Lives study, <i>Children’s School Lives in Junior Infants</i>, published</p> <p>Meetings with the Advisory Panel (Primary) to inform the review and redevelopment of the primary curriculum convened and the development of a collaborative document progressed.</p> <p>Report on the <i>Leading Out</i> Seminar Series progressed.</p> <p>Engagement with the Traveller Community to inform the development of resources to support teaching and learning of Traveller history and culture in the curriculum.</p>

		<p>Year 1 of the longitudinal study on the Impact and Implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle completed and analysis of the data initiated.</p> <p>Comparative study of English curricula across jurisdictions commenced.</p> <p>Education for Sustainable Development international curriculum audit completed.</p> <p>Contract for a literature review to support the updating of <i>Aistear</i> awarded.</p>
3.2	Curriculum and assessment developments are informed through engagement with and participation in research networks.	<p>NCCA participated 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 through the T-REX platform.</p> <p>Contribution to peer review processes across a range of national and international publications.</p>

		Annual meeting of the International Education Assessment Network attended.
3.3	The outcomes and findings of research are available, accessible and disseminated to those with an interest in education, policy making and evaluation.	<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 Routledge publication edited by Profs Sue Dockett and Bob Perry.</p> <p>See also Appendix 2.</p>
3.4	Research findings and new knowledge are shared and interrogated by NCCA staff as an integral part of their work.	NCCA staff attended online conferences and seminars on a range of curriculum and assessment issues, facilitated by national/international speakers.

		<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 was regularly circulated to all staff.</p> <p>Staff Research Day held online in March 2021 on the topic of ethical issues in research with children, including a workshop on the development of NCCA's Ethical Statement.</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 2021
4.1	<p>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 elements (bilateral meetings, focus groups) 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 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 stations.</p> <p>NCCA newsletter <i>info@ncca</i> shared key messages about our work and highlighted opportunities for engagement in NCCA processes with stakeholders.</p> <p>Articles included in professional publications to raise awareness of and encourage engagement with the Updating <i>Aistear</i> process.</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: <i>ncca.ie</i>, <i>curriculumonline.ie</i> and <i>aistearsiolta.ie</i>.</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>

*Aistear Síolta* Practice Guide (ASPG) website functionality maintained and updated, including an audit of alignment between the Irish and English sides of the website.



## 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 2021
<p>5.1 Organisations 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 and maintained to ensure virtual meetings with external participants we conducted in accordance with control measures recorded in the risk register.</p>

		Due to COVID-19 pandemic, engagement and meetings utilised online meeting technologies to continue with curriculum and assessment work.
5.2	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>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	There is a performance culture focused on positive values, co-operation, support, empowerment and wellbeing of staff across the organisation.	<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>Excellent results emerged from participation in the Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey.</p> <p>A Return to Workplace group met to support the safe return to offices following the lifting of pandemic restrictions.</p>

		Performance Management and Development continued during remote working with an emphasis on supporting staff working from home.
5.4	There is a robust financial management system in place.	<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, 2020 were approved and certified by the C&amp;AG following an external audit that was 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>A new PO system that supports procurement, accounts and fixed assets was further developed.</p> <p>A system to support Commissioned work was developed and implemented.</p>
<p>5.5</p>	<p>There is full compliance with the governance requirements of, and code of practice for state bodies.</p>	<p>A review of internal controls was carried out and its findings were implemented.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Procurement processes were conducted in line with Office of Government Procurement guidelines and the NCCA Corporate Procurement Plan 2018-2021.</p> <p>The Annual Report for 2020 was published.</p> <p>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.</p>

		<p>An updated Protected Disclosures Policy was approved by Council.</p> <p>An updated Fixed Assets Policy was approved by Council as was an updated Procurement policy.</p> <p>An Oversight and Performance Delivery Agreement was signed with the Department of Education.</p>
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. Customer Service policy and Customer Charter were reviewed.
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>

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## 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<sup>1</sup> in terms of its audit work and has rights of access to the Chief Executive and the ARC. It operates within the budget agreed with the ARC, which in turn forms part of the budget of the NCCA. The ARC sets the budget for Internal Audit, having regard to the scale and resources of the NCCA.

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

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

The Council has considered the financial statements for 2021 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 2021.

## COUNCIL STRUCTURE

The Council consists of a Chairperson, two Deputy Chairpersons and 22<sup>2</sup> 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.

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

<sup>2</sup> 23 members with effect from 26<sup>th</sup> April 2022.

On 10th April, 2019 The Minister for Education and Skills Joe McHugh T.D. announced the appointment of Council for a three year term until 28th February 2022. A new Council has been appointed by Minister for Education, Norma Foley T.D. with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> March 2022. The Council usually meets seven times per annum. Seven meetings in total were held in 2021.

The table below details the appointment period for members as at 31 December 2021:

***Members of Council 2021***

<b>Name</b>	<b>Nominating Organisation <i>(where applicable)</i></b>	<b>Date First Appointed</b>	<b>Date(s) Re- appointed</b>
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 to 1 December, 2021	
Ms Meadhbh Costello	Ibec	1 December, 2021	
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 to January, 2021	
Dr Sheila Garrity	Nominee of the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability , Integration and Youth	2021	
Ms Elaine Sheridan	State Examinations Commission	1 December 2021	
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 2021, 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.

#### GREEN PROCUREMENT AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY

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

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

In this context, the NCCA undertook several initiatives in 2021 to improve energy efficiency:

- Commissioned an SI426 Energy Audit carried out by an SEAI approved consultant.
- Reported energy consumption data via the online SEAI Monitoring and Reporting system. The required data was submitted by the target deadlines.
- Specific maintenance of heating and air conditioning systems was undertaken to improve air quality and maximise efficiency.
- Commenced phased replacement of older light fittings with energy efficient models.
- Reduced printing and postage through provision of electronic media.

#### EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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

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

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

#### 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 7 meetings of the ARC in 2021 and 1 additional joint meeting of the ARC and Governance Committee. These were all 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 4 meetings of the Governance Committee in 2021 and 1 additional joint meeting of the ARC and Governance Committee. These were all 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 2021 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:

<b>Name</b>	<b>No. of Council meetings</b>	<b>No. of ARC Meetings</b>	<b>No. of Governance Committee meetings</b>	<b>Expenses (no fees paid to Council members)<sup>3</sup></b>
Prof. Mary O'Sullivan	7			€60.18
Dr Deirbhile Nic Craith	7		5	
Dr Michael Redmond	6			
Ms Áine O Sullivan	7		5	
Mr Ed Byrne	7			
Máire Ní Chiarba. Uas.	6			

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<sup>3</sup> The expenses indicated all relate to domestic travel and do not solely relate to attendance at Council meetings. Council members also participate in other structures of Council such as the overarching Boards for Early Childhood and Primary, Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle. They may also participate on NCCA Interview Boards for new staff. Expenses refer to the totality of these involvements.

Mr Fergal Kelly	6			
Ms Joyce Perdue	7			
Ms Orlaith O'Connor	7			
Ms Anne McHugh	7	7		€287.59*
Edel Ní Chorráin, Uas.	7			
Ms Meadhbh Costello	1			
Ms Claire McGee	5			
Mr Brian Tubbert	7			
Mr Michael Delargey	6		4	
Ms Carmel Browne	7			
Mr. Joe McKeown	6	8		
Ms Patricia Gordon	7			
Dr. Finn Ó Murchú	6			
Ms Áine Lynch	7			
Mr Geoff Browne	4	5		
Dr Teresa Hagan	6	6		
Dr Sheila Garrity	2			
Ms Elaine Sheridan	1			



Mr David Duffy	7			
Ms Liz Farrell	7			
Ms Joan O'Connor (ARC)	N/a	5		
Mr Dermot O'Riordan (Governance Committee)	N/a		5	
<b>Total</b>				<b>€347.77</b>

\*Relates to official travel undertaken pre Covid 19 lockdown

#### KEY PERSONNEL CHANGES

Changes to the Executive included the appointment on 8<sup>th</sup> June of Dr. Patrick Sullivan to the post of Deputy Chief Executive. Other changes in seconded/contracted staff included the appointment of three Education Officers on 1<sup>st</sup> September:

- Donna Carolan (Primary Developments)
- Deirdre Ní Fhearghail (Primary Language – Gaeilge)
- Maria Kelly (Primary - SPHE/RSE).

A change also occurred on the Corporate Services team on 5<sup>th</sup> February as Bernard Plunkett was appointed to the post of HR officer (vacated following Aine Armstrong Farrell's promotion to Head of Corporate Services in 2020).

### 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	2021	2020
€60,000	€69,999	8	8
€70,000	€79,999	3	3
€80,000	€89,999	13	19
€90,000	€99,999	10	3
€100,000	€109,999	0	1
€110,000	€119,999	0	0
€120,000	€129,999	0	0
€130,000	€139,999	0	0
€140,000	€149,000	0	1
€150,000	€159,999	1	0

## 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 2021, work was completed on updated Procurement, Fixed assets, Hospitality and

Travel and updated Protected Disclosures policies. A Business Continuity Plan was drafted, approved and implemented.

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 assessments of its effectiveness, including a self-assessment survey facilitated by an independent organisation in early 2021 and an external review of its effectiveness carried out by an independent body in late 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 €11,544 (2020: €13,268.15) were incurred for general advice in relation to a policy review.

#### CONSULTANCY COSTS

Consultancy costs include the cost of external advice to management and exclude outsourced 'business- as-usual' functions in 2021 and were incurred for general advice.

## PROFESSIONAL FEES AND CONSULTANCY

	2021	2020
	€	€
Accountancy and other professional fees	39,939	59,278
Audit fee	14,000	14,000
Internal audit fee	7,841	9,031
Consultancy (commissioned research for curriculum and assessment work)	516,356	663,851
<b>Totals</b>	<b>578,136</b>	<b>737,129</b>

## 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.).

	2021	2020
	€	€
Internal	3,014	4865
External	1,600	8152
<b>Totals</b>	<b>4,614</b>	<b>13,017</b>

## Child Protection

The NCCA has developed procedures and guidelines for staff on child protection and welfare matters as part of the requirements enacted in 2017 under the Children First Act, 2015. The

NCCA Child Safeguarding Statement, available on our website at [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie), was reviewed and updated in December 2021. Staff training was completed.

## Staff

The NCCA has a full-time executive staff led by the Chief Executive Arlene Forster. The staff in 2021 was as follows:

### **Chief Executive:**

Arlene Forster

### **Deputy Chief Executives:**

Barry Slattery

Patrick Sullivan (from 8<sup>th</sup> June 2021)

### **Directors, Curriculum and Assessment:**

Jacqueline Fallon

Derek Grant

Ben Murray

Elaine Ní Neachtain

Evelyn O'Connor (Acting)

Aoife Rush

Patrick Sullivan (to the 7<sup>th</sup> June 2021)

**Corporate Services:**

Aine Armstrong-Farrell, Assistant Principal

Maura Dee, Higher Executive Officer

Bernard Plunkett, Higher Executive Officer (from 5<sup>th</sup> February 2021)

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

Fred Boss

Donna Carolan (from 1st September 2021)

Tracy Curran

Lara Dabbagh

Mary Daly

Margaret Flood

Annette Honan

Maria Kelly (from 1st September 2021)

David King

Paul Knox (to 21<sup>st</sup> February 2021)

Rachel Linney

Hannagh McGinley

Diarmuid Mooney

John Moriarty

Susan Nic Réamoinn (to 13<sup>th</sup> August 2021)

Deirdre Ní Fhearghail (from 1st September 2021)

Dónal Ó Buachalla

Gillian O'Connor

Louise O'Reilly

Ger O'Sullivan

Jacinta Regan

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 2021, the Council convened 90 meetings of these groups with most of these meetings held online due to public health guidelines in response to the pandemic . A list of the meetings held in 2021 is in Appendix One.

## Finance

The Council's total income for 2021 was €5,926,589. Core funding of €5,815,389 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 2021 will be published on completion of the annual audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

## Appendix 1: NCCA meetings 2021

Group	Total Number of Meetings <i>(No. of virtual meetings in brackets)</i>
<b>Early Childhood and Primary</b>	
Board for Early Childhood and Primary	5 (5)
An Mheitheal Forbartha do Theanga sa Bhunscolaíocht/Primary Language Development Group	1 (1)
Primary Mathematics Development Group	1 (1)
SPHE/RSE Development Group, Primary	6 (6)
Primary Advisory Group	8 (8)
<b>Post-primary</b>	
Board for Junior Cycle	5 (5)
Board for Senior Cycle	6 (6)
Biology Development Group	7 (7)
Physics Development Group	6 (6)
Chemistry Development Group	6 (6)
Agricultural Science in Practice Group	1 (1)

Junior Cycle Physical Education Development Group	5 (5)
Leaving Certificate Classical Languages Development Group	7 (7)
Leaving Certificate Arabic Development Group	6 (6)
SPHE/RSE Development Group, Post-primary	7 (7)
<b>Cross Sectoral</b>	
Traveller Culture and History Expert Group	3 (3)
Children in Detention and Children in Care Advisory Group	2 (2)
<b>Total number of Groups</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Total Number of Meetings</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>Of which total number of Virtual Meetings</b>	<b>82</b>

## Appendix 2: NCCA presentations (selection) 2021

A selection of the presentations and papers delivered, and workshops facilitated by NCCA staff in 2021 are presented in the table below.

Event/Organisation	Theme/Title
CNS Principals Network – Education and Training Boards of Ireland	Findings from the 'Review of RSE in primary and post-primary schools' and an introduction to the SPHE toolkit
Presentation to Minister and officials in the Department of Education	Presentation on the <i>Senior Cycle Review: Advisory Report</i>
Practice of Looking online course	The potential use of Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) in education
Postgraduate Studies in Middle Leadership and Mentoring, MIC Thurles	NCCA and its curriculum and assessment work
SEF Summer School (on-line)	The transition from preschool to primary school
Early Years Inspectorate	Primary Curriculum Review and Redevelopment
Hibernia	Primary Curriculum Review and Redevelopment
Irish Primary Principals' Network	Children's School Lives and Primary Curriculum Review and Redevelopment
Centre for School Leadership	Curriculum and Pedagogical Leadership by Middle leaders in Primary schools
Consortium of Institutions for Development and Research in Education in Europe (CIDREE)	Digital literacy in Irish curriculum – an expanding presence

Mathematics Education Ireland (MEI) conference	Developing an equitable, accessible and inclusive Primary Mathematics Curriculum
Creative Youth Conference	Creativity and the Connection to our Future
Slovakian Delegation	Curriculum and assessment developments in Ireland at upper primary and lower secondary

## 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 2021

Relevant year for Disclosures	Disclosures or Nil Disclosures
2021	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 Business Advisors and are subject to external audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General. The Council undertakes an effectiveness review on a regular basis.

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

The system of internal control, which accords with guidance issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, has been in place in the NCCA for the year ended 31 December 2021 and up to the date of approval of the financial statements.

#### AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE

NCCA has an Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) comprising four Council members and one external member, with financial and audit expertise. The ARC is independent of the management of the organisation. In particular, the Committee seeks to ensure that the internal control systems including audit activities are monitored actively and independently. The ARC met 8 times in 2021.

#### INTERNAL CONTROL

The NCCA has also established an internal audit function which conducts a programme of work agreed with the ARC. The work on internal audit is outsourced and conducted by Crowleys DFK, who conducted a review of internal controls in 2021 and reported to the ARC.

The Review of the System of Internal Control, 2021 by Crowleys DFK drew attention to many positive features and key strengths of NCCA's internal control environment. The review reported one high-risk finding in relation to an intra community acquisitions VAT issue that had been resolved prior to audit during 2021 with the assistance of and full cooperation with the Revenue Commissioners.

An underpayment of VAT on some intra community acquisitions was identified during the year and two periods' returns were resubmitted to Revenue with additional VAT of €7,018 in total being paid to Revenue in 2021.

In addition, interest (€1,009) and penalties (€351) totalling €1,360 was also paid. The penalties reflected that full cooperation was given by NCCA.

VAT was being self-declared in respect of these intra community acquisitions, however a misinterpretation in relation to the calculation of one aspect resulted in an underpayment on some transactions.

The NCCA has taken the following steps to address this area of non-compliance identified during review

- Expert advice has been sought to clarify NCCA's responsibility in relation to intra community acquisitions.
- A self-review of transactions and processes is underway to ensure full compliance.
- Training has been identified for staff and additional support sought from NCCA accountants Harney Nolan in relation to this area.

NCCA remains committed to compliance with taxation laws and full cooperation with Revenue in relation to same.

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 following 3 medium and 3 low findings 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 2022, in some cases once public health guidelines permit.

It was noted some actions agreed in 2020 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.

However, the review previously carried out by Crowleys DFK in 2020 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 their 2020 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.”*

Following on from this Crowleys DFK specifically included in the scope of their 2021 review compliance with Financial Policies and Procedures during Covid 19 Restrictions. As previously mentioned, the ability to conclude a fixed asset inventory was the only control identified as being affected.

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.

## RISK AND CONTROL FRAMEWORK

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

## SALARIES AND WAGES

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

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

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

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

#### PROCUREMENT

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

I confirm that the NCCA has procedures in place to ensure compliance with current procurement rules and guidelines. 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 2021. 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 2021 on (28 February, 2022). This review was informed by the review undertaken by the ARC.

#### INTERNAL CONTROL ISSUES

No weaknesses in internal control were identified in relation to 2021 that require disclosure in the financial statements.

Prof Mary O'Sullivan

Chairperson