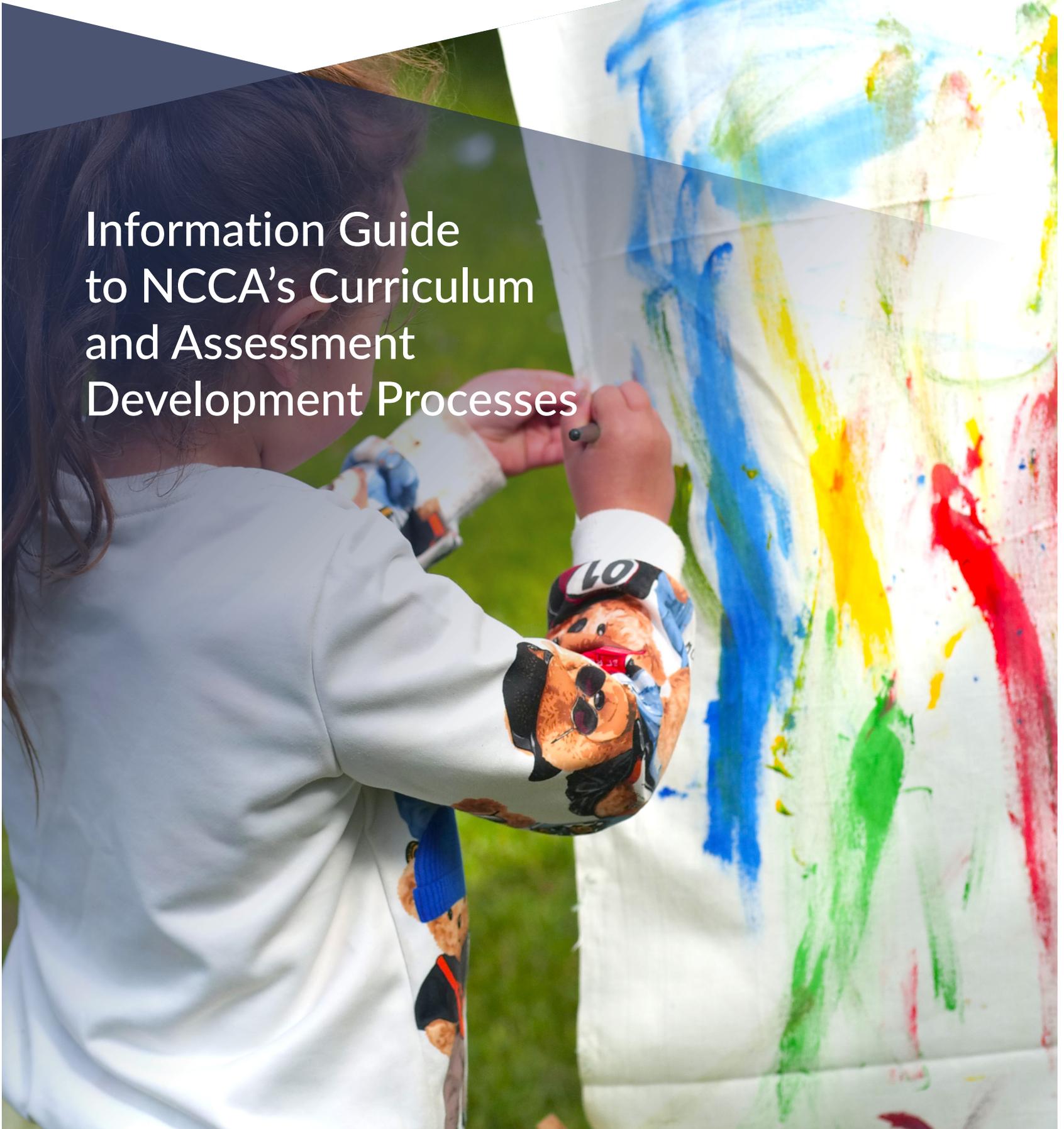




NCCA

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

Information Guide to NCCA's Curriculum and Assessment Development Processes





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About NCCA

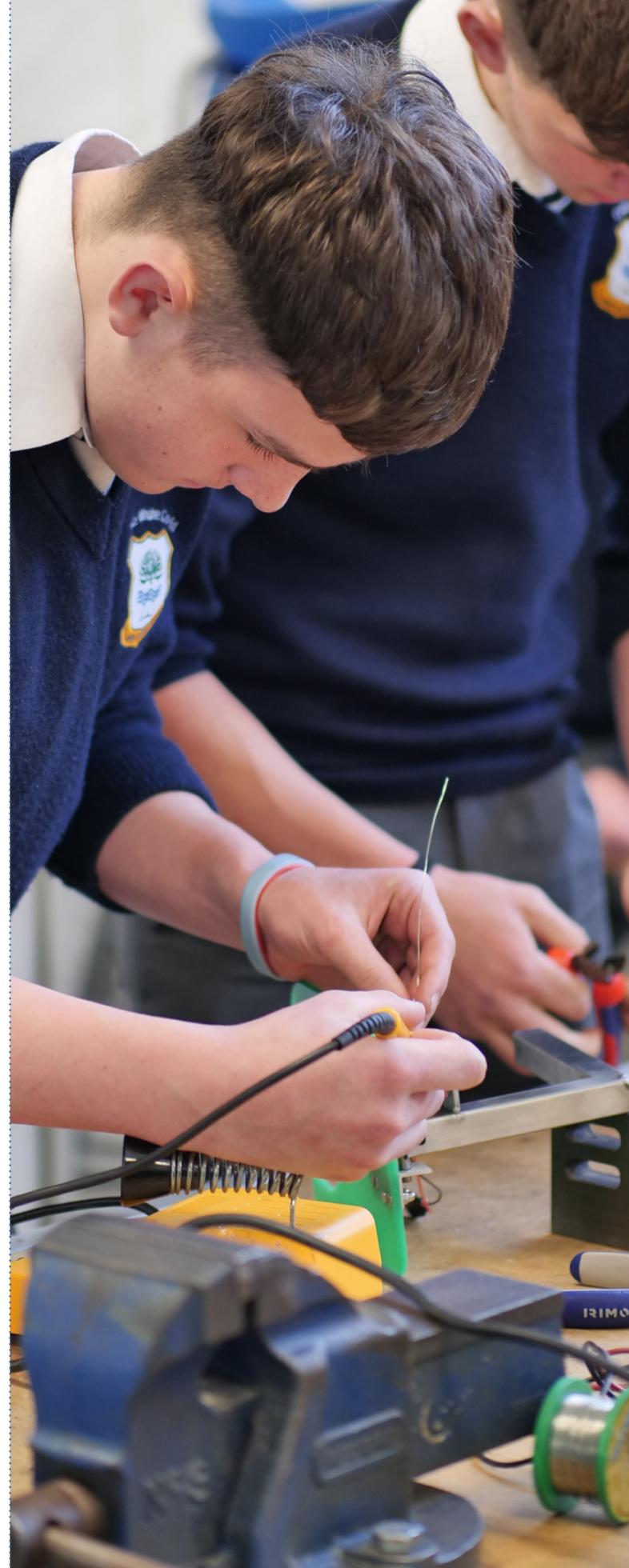
The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, more commonly known as the NCCA, works with education stakeholders to shape the curriculum for babies, toddlers, children, and students in Ireland. NCCA does this by advising the Minister for Education on curriculum and assessment for:

- early childhood education
- primary schools
- post-primary schools.

We also advise the Minister on assessment procedures used in schools, including examinations as part of the curriculum. Through this wide remit, NCCA plays a central role in shaping policy decisions in education.

NCCA was established in 1987 as a successor to the Curriculum and Examinations Board and was reconstituted fourteen years later, in July 2001, as a statutory body. The Council's vision is to lead and sustain developments in curriculum and assessment that are sufficiently far-reaching so that all young people can experience and benefit from enjoyable, engaging, relevant, and appropriately challenging experiences to support learning, living in, contributing to, caring for, and working in a changing world.

The curriculum we develop reflects the educational, cultural, social, and economic aspirations and concerns of Irish society.



How we develop curriculum and assessment advice

Our approach to curriculum development places a strong emphasis on Research, Deliberation, Networking activity, and Consultation. These four pillars support our work in developing advice on curriculum and assessment that is aimed at contributing to sustained improvement in the education system. That advice emerges through the participation of a wide range of stakeholders. It is informed by research evidence, good practice, public consultation, and emerges through the discussions and deliberations that take place within Development Groups, Boards and the NCCA Council.

1. Research

Our approach involves significant work with research. We generate, use and share diverse forms of research as a basis for discussion and debate on learning, teaching and assessment. We engage with a diversity of stakeholders in the system, including babies, toddlers, children, students, parents, teachers, early childhood educators, and school leaders in authentic, collaborative, and meaningful ways. We aim to capture their perspectives and experiences. We also collaborate with national and international researchers to develop papers on aspects of curriculum and assessment. This work includes research reviews, longitudinal studies, and literature audits all of which help to inform and advance our work. Our research activity is published on the NCCA website (see [Publications and Research | NCCA](#)).

2. Networking activity

Increasingly, our approach to developing advice for the Minister involves working with schools and early childhood settings. We employ a variety of approaches to interact and collaborate with early childhood educators, teachers, young people, setting/school leaders, and parents in reviewing, discussing and shaping curriculum and assessment developments. Working directly with schools and early childhood settings recognises and draws on the perspectives of teachers and early years educators, and the lived experiences of children and students. Their innovations in relation to curriculum and assessment help inform our work. We also participate in curriculum and assessment initiatives through collaboration with agencies, organisations, and networks. This aspect of NCCA's activity promotes the exchange of information and expertise among education professionals. This adds to our knowledge, efficiency, and effectiveness in undertaking curriculum developments.

3. Consultation

Consultation is a cornerstone of our work, and our approach draws heavily on feedback from the education sector and wider public. We consult at all stages of curriculum development, incorporating strategic and systematic opportunities for hearing directly from early years educators, teachers, school leaders, parents / guardians, young people, management bodies, professional bodies, and teacher unions. In doing so, we use a range of approaches and formats including, but not limited to, online and in-person seminars, webinars, symposia, bilateral meetings, focus groups, online surveys and other fora.

4. Deliberation (Discussion)

We arrive at our advice through deliberations that take place at meetings of Development Groups, Boards and the Council. The research, learning from our work with schools and early childhood settings, and consultation feedback shape discussions within these structures. The representative membership of the Development Groups and Boards brings together diverse views and perspectives, and a range of expertise and experience to challenge and advance thinking on learning, teaching, and assessment. Working in this collaborative way enables the Council to develop advice through consensus, and advice which is research-informed, takes account of experience within schools and early childhood settings, and which has young people at its core.

The Role of Young People

Young people play a key role in shaping NCCA's work across Research, Networking activity, Consultation and Deliberation. This work respects and actively promotes the right of young people to have their voices heard and their views included in shaping the curriculum and assessment advice we develop. Young people from birth to 18 years of age have much to tell us about what they enjoy and deem important in their learning experiences, and what they consider the purposes of these experiences to be. In updating *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*, we consulted with babies, toddlers, and young children. At primary and post-primary levels, consultations with children/students are helping to shape the redevelopment of the primary curriculum and senior cycle, as well as shaping our early enactment reviews of junior cycle subjects.

The development of NCCA advice is also underpinned by eight principles as set out in our Strategic Plan. Threaded through these principles are the values of respect, equality, professionalism, and integrity that are central to our work on curriculum and assessment. The eight principles are outlined in the table below.

Principle	How the principle is reflected in our work
Inclusion and diversity	Our work enables the development of curriculum and assessment that recognises the uniqueness and rights of each young person and the importance of supporting all children/students to reach their potential.
Partnership and collaboration	Using a variety of communication formats, we work in partnership with early childhood settings and schools, and with the wider education sector, national and international, to shape curriculum and assessment developments.
Consultation	We consult widely and use a variety of tools and processes to ensure that the rich diversity of voices, perspectives and views that makes up Irish society, informs our work.
Child/student voice	Our work respects and actively promotes the right of children and students to have their voices heard and included in shaping the curriculum and assessment advice we develop. Our engagement with young people is age- and stage-appropriate and takes account of how they communicate.
Research-informed	We draw heavily on a wide range of research, national and international, to inform our thinking on curriculum and assessment.
Innovation and responsiveness	We value inquiry and are open to new ideas and thinking as we build on the education system's strengths and develop curriculum and assessment advice that is responsive and relevant while being appropriately innovative and ambitious.
Coherence, continuity and progression	We pay attention to curriculum and assessment coherence within and across sectors to support appropriate continuity and progression in a young person's educational journey while respecting the distinct nature and identity of each stage and sector.
Learning organisation	We are committed to improving the educational experience of young people. In support of this, we promote and nurture a culture of learning amongst our staff and within the structures of NCCA.

The process for developing specifications

Taking a closer look at the processes we use to develop curriculum and assessment advice for the Minister, it is helpful to distinguish between broader curriculum review and the development of a subject / module / curriculum area specification and guidelines.

Broader curriculum review usually focuses on a particular stage of education, such as Primary Education or Senior Cycle Education, and is aimed at looking at the overall purpose, structure and content of the curriculum and assessment arrangements for that stage. The curriculum specification for a particular subject / module / curriculum area is usually developed in the context of, and in response to, that wider curriculum review.

Our curriculum design process for developing a subject / module / curriculum area specification involves several interrelated stages, each with associated activities. There are three main stages which can overlap with each other.

- **Curriculum shaping:** The ideas that will inform the development of the specification are shaped and discussed. Principally, this involves the generation of a background paper and / or commissioned research on the subject / module / curriculum area in question. The paper is published for public consultation, with the paper and the consultation feedback on it informing the work of the relevant Development Group and Board charged with overseeing work on that curriculum specification. In some cases, a research paper is generated rather than a background paper.

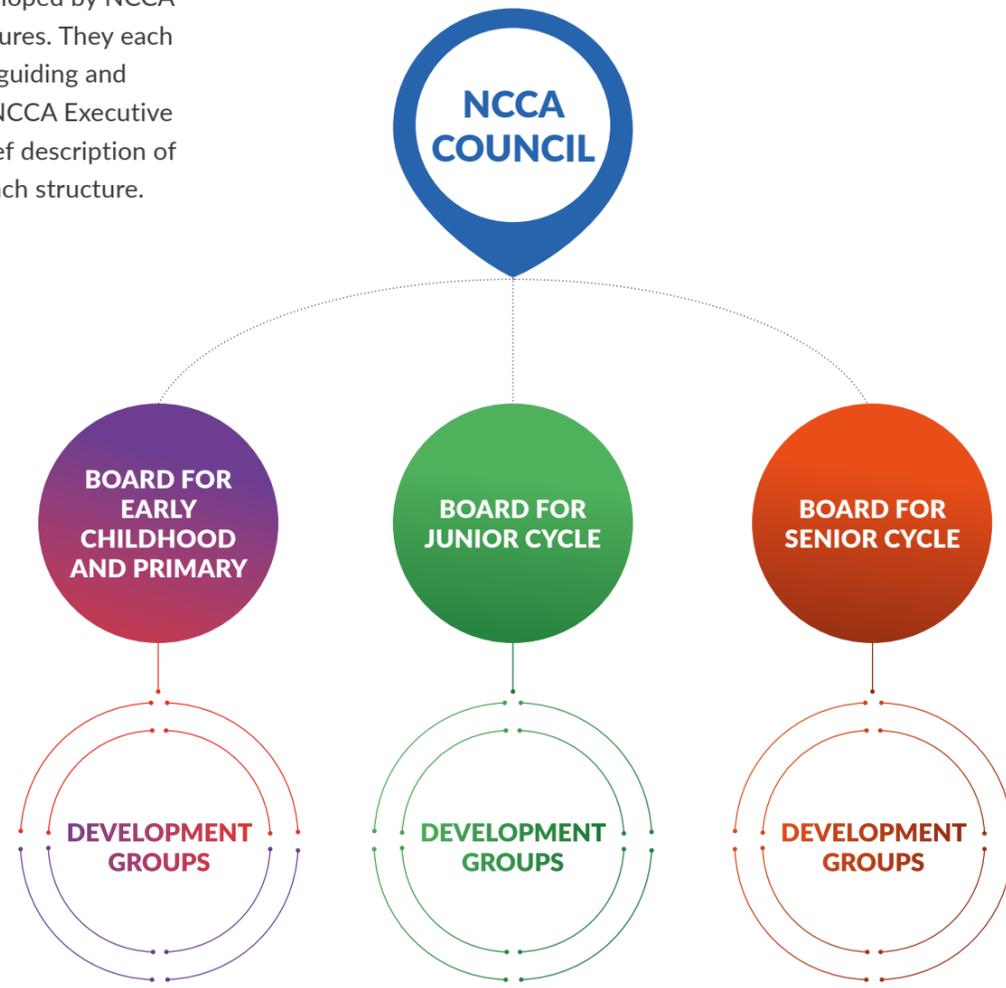
- **Curriculum development:** The Development Group oversees the generation of the draft curriculum specification. This draft is published for public consultation.
- **Curriculum approval and publication:** Informed by the consultation feedback, the specification is finalised by the Development Group, overseen by the relevant Board and approved by the Council. The specification is then sent to the Minister for Education for consideration. Once approved by the Minister the specification is published online at www.curriculumonline.ie. A 12-month lead-in time is often provided ahead of introduction in primary, post-primary, and special schools. This is to facilitate provision of continuing professional development, schools and teachers' own preparations for the curriculum change, and the development of teaching and learning resources.

While NCCA is not responsible for implementing curriculum change, we support educational change in early childhood settings and in schools by developing a range of support materials such as examples of practice, examples of student work, online toolkits and planning resources, and by working with the support services as they introduce curriculum and assessment changes to early years educators and teachers.



Our structures

The curriculum advice developed by NCCA involves a number of structures. They each undertake specific tasks in guiding and informing the work of the NCCA Executive team. What follows is a brief description of the role and functions of each structure.



Council

NCCA Council comprises twenty-six members. These members include nominees of teacher unions, school management bodies, students, parents, business, other organisations in education, and a nominee of the Minister for Education and one of the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. [See Council 2022–2026 | NCCA](#) for the membership of the Council. The Minister for Education appoints our Council and its chairperson. The Council meets at least seven times a year, and at other times as required.

The Council sets out its work priorities in a four-year strategic plan. Current work priorities centre on three strategic goals in the areas of *Curriculum and Assessment*, *Engagement and Collaboration*, and *Knowledge and Research*. Four strategic enablers – *People and organisational culture*, *Governance*, *Information and Communications Technology*, and *Communication* – provide critical support for achieving the strategic goals. Each enabler requires significant investment and plays a central role in fulfilling NCCA's vision and mission.

Boards

Oversight of curriculum and assessment work in early childhood and primary, junior cycle and senior cycle is carried out by Boards. This oversight ensures that the various areas of work, underway at any given time, contribute to a coherent and manageable approach for early childhood settings and schools and, ultimately, contribute to a broad and balanced educational experience for young people.

There are three Boards – the Board for Early Childhood and Primary, the Board for Junior Cycle, and the Board for Senior Cycle. Boards are responsible for ensuring that curriculum and assessment development is carried out in accordance with the terms of the agreed briefs for Development Groups. Boards review each area of work in the context of wider work in that sector. Boards also discuss significant issues as they emerge within each area of work and, where appropriate, make connections with developments across other areas and sectors. These activities improve the quality of our developmental work and inform education debate within the organisation, within the agencies represented, and in the education community in general. The names of members of Boards are available at [Boards and Development Groups | NCCA](#). While the Council is responsible for the approval of all curriculum and assessment advice, its decision-making is informed by deliberations at Board level.

Development Groups

Development Groups undertake specific tasks in curriculum areas, subjects, modules or programmes. The work of Development Groups

is agreed by the Council in the form of a brief for each new area of work. The brief sets out the scope of the curriculum and assessment work, including an indicative timescale. Once approved by the Council, the brief guides the work of the relevant Development Group.

Guided by the brief, Development Group members bring their knowledge, expertise and experience to the deliberations, while at the same time reporting to and engaging with their nominating agencies and organisations. In fulfilling the brief, Development Groups have access to expertise in the relevant area and provide an effective interface with the teaching profession, the realities of early childhood settings and schools and the views of the education partners generally.

In carrying out their work, Development Group members:

- comment on and contribute to the development of draft curriculum documents
- ensure that the views / policy of the nominating body are brought to the discussion
- support consultation processes at key stages in the development process.
- update their nominating organisations on the ongoing work of the Development Groups

Brief reports on the work and deliberations of Development Groups are published on www.ncca.ie to support wider engagement with the work and to help members in communicating with their nominating organisations. This also contributes to greater transparency and accountability in the curriculum development process.

Each Development Group includes representatives from teacher unions, management bodies and the Department of Education. In some cases, parent representatives may be nominated to Development Groups. In the case of post-primary education, the State Examinations Commission is represented whilst further and higher education interests are represented on Development Groups supporting senior cycle developments. Where they exist, TGAs (Teacher Groups and Associations) recognised under the TPN Scheme (Teacher Professional Network) are also invited to nominate a representative to the relevant Development Group. A number of members are also co-opted to each Group. These members are identified through an open, public call for individuals to express an interest in joining a particular group. The co-opted members bring further expertise, knowledge, and skills to the work complementing that of the representatives from the nominating bodies. As with Council and the Boards, the names of Development Group members are published online at www.ncca.ie.

Our executive staff

The day-to-day work of our Council is led by the Chief Executive Officer and the full-time staff of NCCA. The staff includes two Deputy Chief Executives (one overseeing Primary and Early Childhood Education and another overseeing work at the Post-Primary level), Directors and Education Officers. Many of these staff have worked as early years educators, teachers, and school leaders in educational settings around the country, and hold postgraduate qualifications. They bring this experience and expertise to their work alongside creativity and innovation. Our curriculum and assessment activity is supported by our Corporate Services Team which oversees all NCCA's work on governance and corporate affairs. Further information on our executive staff is published at [Our structures | NCCA](#).





How to get in touch

You can keep up to date with our work here in NCCA by following NCCA on our various social media platforms (X, Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn).

 Visit the NCCA websites [ncca.ie](https://www.ncca.ie) • [curriculumonline.ie](https://www.curriculumonline.ie)

 Email us at info@ncca.ie

 Call us on 01 661 7177

    Social media platforms



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