

# NCCA: 20 years a-growing

## That was the year that was

In 1987 affluent techies watched *The Untouchables* on Betamax home video systems and cared little that the market had turned to VHS format. Amstrad, BBC Master and Commodore computers continued to make their way slowly into business places and even more slowly into homes and schools. TV soaps *Dynasty* and *Dallas* dictated that power dressing and shoulder pads were high fashion for women. New Romantics, epitomised by Adam Ant, counteracted the anarchic statement that was punk. U2 released *The Joshua Tree*, the fastest selling album in UK chart history. The inaugural Rugby World Cup was hosted by New Zealand and Australia and the Irish Soccer team, under the guidance of Jack Charlton, qualified for Euro 88. Kilkenny won the All-Ireland Senior Camogie Championship and Johnny Logan became the first person to win the Eurovision Song Contest twice.

Early in 1987, the Irish electorate had returned a minority Fianna Fáil Government. Following an austere budget, the first social partnership agreement, the Programme for National Recovery, was negotiated between the government, trades unions, employers, farming organisations and industrialists. The Single European Act was endorsed by Irish voters in May. Teachers at their conferences at Easter that year discussed staffing and class size, salary especially the low level of substitute pay, job sharing, career breaks, funding for schools and the possible amalgamation of the three teacher unions.

*The evolution of our language policy must be conditioned more by hard facts and reality than by emotion.*

Dr. Edward Walsh, Chairperson, NCCA, December 8, 1987

## Launch of the NCCA

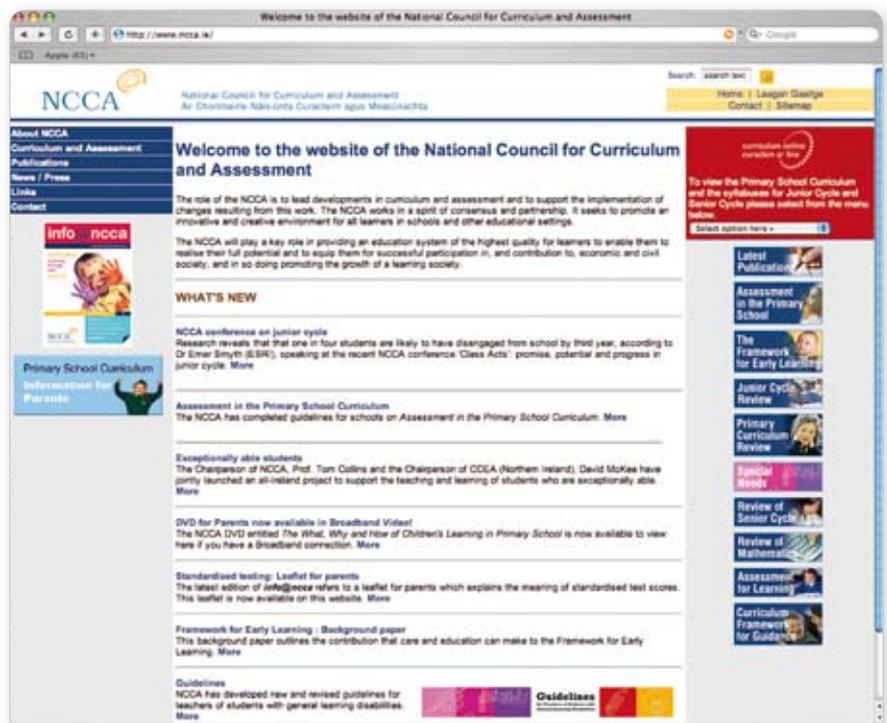
For those of us involved in education, 1987 was momentous as the year in which Mary O'Rourke, Minister for Education, launched the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) to replace the interim Curriculum and Examinations Board (CEB), originally set up in 1984. The Council would report directly to the Minister and advise on curriculum and assessment at first and second level. Responsibility for public examinations was, however, to remain with the Department of Education Inspectorate.

## Structure

Dr. Edward Walsh, President of the National Institute for Higher Education, Limerick, had been chairperson of the CEB, Sr. Eileen Doyle its vice-chairperson and Albert Ó Ceallaigh its Chief Executive. All were to fill the same roles in the fledgling NCCA thereby ensuring continuity. The chairperson and vice-chairperson were appointed directly by the Minister for Education. There were two representatives from the Department of Education and other members were appointed by the Minister on the nomination of representative organisations including the National Parents' Council, the Irish Federation of University Teachers, the Confederation of Irish Industry and the Joint Managerial Body.

Though the proposed level of teacher representation on the Council was opposed initially by the teacher unions, ASTI, INTO and TUI, their concerns were eventually resolved and they took their seats on the NCCA, which was appointed for a three-year term of office.

The Minister for Education also laid down the composition of course committees at junior and senior cycle levels. Membership of these committees was also on a representative basis. The committees were charged with devising syllabuses, defining assessment objectives, advising on appropriate modes of assessment and reviewing standards attained in public examinations. They would be served by education officers who, it has been said, were 'almost



subversive' in their commitment to reform! These were seconded from their schools on a part-time basis.

The permanent executive consisted initially of Ó'Ceallaigh and Gary Granville, Assistant Chief Executive (now Head of Faculty of Education, National College of Art and Design) with a small administrative support team.

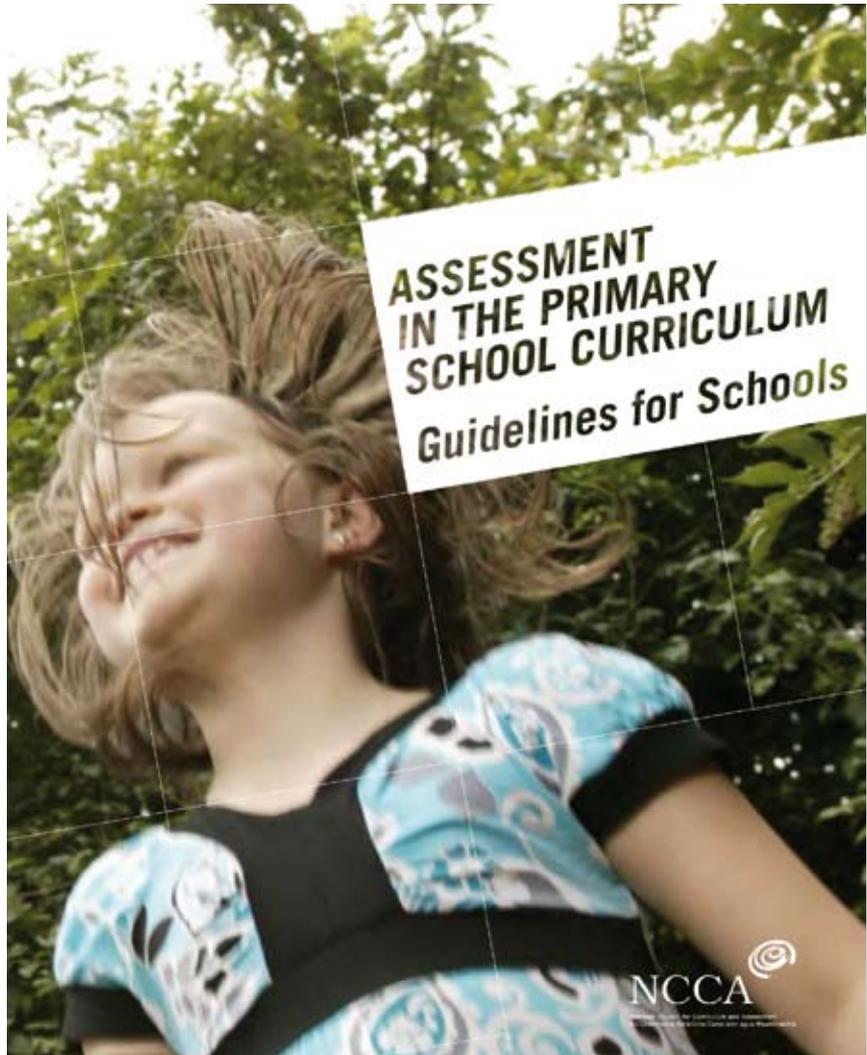
### It was the Inter. Cert. before that...

In launching the NCCA, the Minister asked that it plan the introduction of the Junior Certificate - a new system of assessment and certification to replace the Day Vocational (Group) and Intermediate Certificates at the end of second-level Junior Cycle. It was envisaged that the Junior Certificate would include new and revised syllabuses of interest and relevance to students and would be offered at two levels to cater for differing ability. There would be scope too for local variation within the national syllabuses. Information sessions would be held throughout the country in the following months to allow the NCCA to brief principals, teachers and parents on the proposed changes.

The Junior Certificate was duly launched by Mary O'Rourke, Minister for Education, in 1988. From the beginning of the next academic year, all students entering post-primary schools would follow the new Junior Certificate programme. In 1992, they would, for the first time, sit the examination for the award of this new certificate.

*The new certificate is a response to the changing needs of education and society. It will also put an end to unnecessary and outdated divisions in our school courses. It helps to ensure social equity, by allowing all students follow a common programme.*

**Mary O'Rourke, Minister for Education, speaking at the launch of the Junior Certificate, September 20, 1988.**



### Primary Curriculum

The Minister also charged the NCCA with overseeing the completion of the review of the primary school curriculum. The Review Body on the Primary Curriculum had commenced its work during 1987 under the chairpersonship of Moya Quinlan.

### Ten years on

In *Comhairle*, the NCCA's Information Bulletin, December 1996, Albert Ó'Ceallaigh, Chief Executive, outlined his perception of the achievements of the NCCA during its first ten years. He wrote that in responding to the recommendations of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum, the NCCA had undertaken work that required specific skills and expertise, new structures and a new approach to curriculum reform. He looked forward to systematic and structured statements for each aspect of the primary school curriculum and drafts of teacher guidelines to support the further development of teacher skills in implementing the revised curriculum.

The Primary School Curriculum would be published in 1999.

### Statutory Body

The NCCA became a statutory body in 2001. The Minister for Education and Science, Michael Woods, began consultation regarding the membership of the new statutory Council. Thereafter began the recruitment of staff including a new Chief Executive. Anne Looney, who had been a full-time education officer since 1997, took over from Albert Ó'Ceallaigh as Chief Executive on his retirement in September 2001.

The brief of the statutory Council as outlined in the Education Act, 1998 is to advise the Minister for Education and Science on matters relating to *the curriculum for early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools and the assessment procedures employed in schools and examinations on subjects which are part of the curriculum.*

The twenty-five members of the statutory Council, appointed by the Minister for a three-year term,

*The composition of the Council's course committees recognises the key professional role of teachers both in defining syllabuses and in implementing them in the classroom.*

**Mary O'Rourke, Minister for Education,**  
speaking at the launch of the NCCA, December 8, 1987.

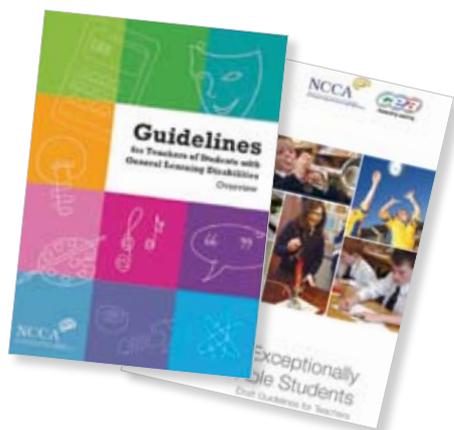
represent teachers, school managers, parents, business, trades unions and other educational interests. Other members include representatives of the Department of Education and Science, the State Examinations Commission and one nominee of the Minister. The Minister appoints the Chairperson.

In 2003 the NCCA began the Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 1. In 2004, we published *Towards a Framework for Early Learning*, our first involvement with education at this level. The same year saw the launch of **info@ncca**, a newsletter for teachers, and the NCCA's new website, **www.ncca.ie**.

Since 2005 the NCCA has participated in planning and development in curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning - key areas of the senior cycle. We produced a DVD for parents, *The What, Why and How of children's learning in primary school*, in 2006 and in the same year began Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 2. We continued work on report card templates and won a Metro Éireann Media and Multicultural Award (MAMA). These awards celebrate the contributions of people who promote cross-cultural understanding in Ireland. The National Action Plan against

Racism Award was presented to the NCCA for *Intercultural Guidelines for Primary Schools*, which provides advice on creating an inclusive atmosphere in primary schools. *Intercultural Education in the Post-Primary School* was published later in 2006.

2007 was also a busy year for the NCCA. We published revised *Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities*, *Guidelines for Teachers of Exceptionally Able Students* and *Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum: Guidelines for Teachers*.



And, somehow, we managed to find time to celebrate our 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary!

## Council Chairpersons

### 1987-1991

Dr. Ed Walsh,  
President of NIHE, Limerick .

### 1991-1995

Dr. Tom Murphy (deceased),  
former President, UCD, and  
Chairperson of the Primary Education  
Review Body

### 1995-2000

Dr. Caroline Hussey,  
former Registrar, UCD.

### 2000-2006

Dr. Catherine O'Brien,  
Professor of Italian, NUIG

### 2006 -

Dr. Tom Collins,  
Professor of Education,  
NUI, Maynooth

## Role Call

Over the past 20 years, the NCCA full and part-time staff has included the following people, now moved on to apply their curriculum development experience in new settings.

### Gary Granville

Professor of Education, NCAD

### Breda Naughton

Principal Officer, Department of  
Education & Science

### Lucy Fallon Byrne

Director, National Centre for  
Partnership & Performance

### Steven McCarthy

Education Officer, City of Dublin VEC

### Valerie O'Dowd

Lecturer, Marino Institute of Education

### James Mulcahy

Director,  
Cork Teacher Education Centre

### Regina Murphy

Head of Professional Development,  
St Patrick's College, Drumcondra

### Helen Guinan

Principal, St. Paul's Special School,  
Montenotte, Cork

### John Fitzgibbon

Education Officer, Cork City VEC

### Marion Palmer

Head of Learning Sciences, IADT,  
Dun Laoghaire

### Harold Hislop

Assistant Chief Inspector,  
Department of Education &  
Science.

