

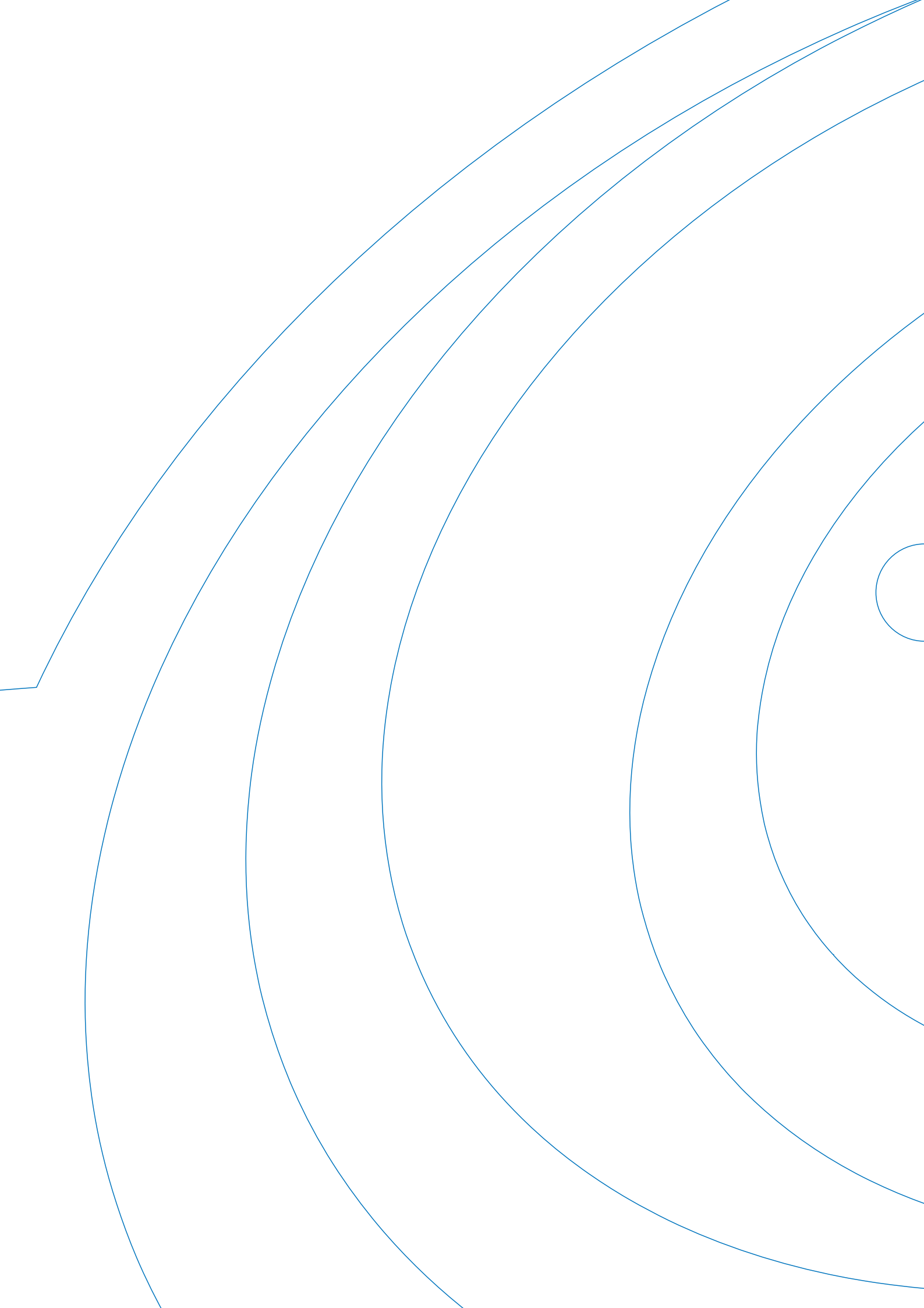


NCCA

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

2004-2006

CUSTOMER SERVICE ACTION PLAN



The background of the page is composed of several thin, light blue lines that form abstract, organic shapes. These lines curve and swirl around the central text, creating a sense of movement and depth. The overall effect is clean and modern.

**CUSTOMER SERVICE
ACTION PLAN**
2004-2006



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National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
Customer Service Action Plan: 2004 - 2006

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1. Introduction

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), as part of its commitment to quality customer service, has published this action plan to give effect to the Principles of Quality Customer Service approved by the Government in July, 2000. The plan contains detailed proposals aimed at improving the quality of the services delivered by the NCCA over the period 2004 to 2006.

2. The work of the NCCA

The NCCA was established in November 1987 as a successor to the Curriculum and Examinations Board and was reconstituted as a statutory body in July 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. (41.1 a, b)

The Council is responsible for the development and determination of its advice to the Minister for Education and Science.

The Council is a representative structure, the membership of which is determined by the Minister. It has a total of twenty-five members, all of whom are appointed for a three-year term. The members represent teachers, school managers, parents, business, trade 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; the current Chairperson is Dr. Catherine O'Brien.

A list of the bodies represented on Council is shown in the Appendix.

The NCCA has a full-time executive staff, led by its Chief Executive, Dr. Anne Looney. The full-time staff members are assisted by a number of part-time Education Officers, who are appointed on a secondment or commission basis to the NCCA. Funding for the NCCA is by way of a grant from the Department of Education and Science. Additional project-specific funding is sourced from a range of organisations and agencies.

Functions and Guiding Principles

The work of the NCCA involves five types of activity:

- **planning** curriculum and assessment initiatives ranging from broad learning frameworks for early childhood to detailed subject specifications for Leaving Certificate syllabuses
- **consulting** with all key partner organisations, through the representative nature of the Council itself, and through consultative documents, discussion papers, seminars and meetings
- **supporting** the change process in schools, through the development of guidelines for teachers, through liaising with the providers of professional development for teachers, and through working directly with schools and other educational settings
- **reviewing** the experiences of the implementation of curriculum and assessment change, together with relevant research, to support the process of curriculum and assessment review and development
- **informing** school authorities, teachers, parents, employers, and the general public about developments in curriculum and assessment through publications, public meetings, briefings and the media.

In conducting its work, the NCCA is committed to

- pursuing quality and ongoing improvement of the educational experiences of children and young people
- continually and actively promoting equality in the educational system
- operating in a consultative and inclusive manner
- engaging with those working in schools and other educational settings
- evaluating the quality and effectiveness of its work
- ongoing engagement with and analysis of the social, cultural and economic changes that impact on the educational experiences of children and young people
- the education of children and young people for full participation in the knowledge society
- ensuring that the education system remains a key factor in Ireland's social and economic development
- developing research-informed policy and disseminating research
- developing its organisational capacity in order to ensure quality service delivery.

The work of the NCCA is carried out by a number of specialist committees, comprising teachers, representatives of the DES and State Examinations Commission, teacher unions and school managerial bodies, parent and subject associations and higher education interests including universities and other colleges. These committees draw up the syllabus or course for each subject or part of the curriculum.

The Council produced the Primary School Curriculum: 1999 and developed the Junior Cycle Curriculum in the late eighties and early nineties. A process of reviewing and revising the syllabuses of Leaving Certificate (Established) subjects has been ongoing since the mid nineties and, during this period, the NCCA has also been instrumental in the introduction of a range of senior cycle options – Transition Year, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, and the Leaving Certificate Applied.

The NCCA is currently engaged in the development of a curriculum framework for early childhood education and the production of curriculum guidelines for teachers of students with general learning disabilities at primary and post-primary levels. The Council is also engaged in reviews of the primary curriculum, junior and senior-cycle education and languages at post-primary level. The revision of a number of subjects in the Leaving Certificate (Established) is ongoing. Further information can be found on our website at www.ncca.ie

The NCCA's mission and high-level goals

The mission of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment is to provide the Minister for Education and Science with advice on curriculum and assessment that promotes the development of Ireland's education system in the interest of continually improving the educational experiences and lives of learners.

In pursuit of this mission the NCCA has the following high-level objectives:

- 1 To conduct ongoing review of curriculum and assessment that will contribute to improved educational experiences for learners and the continued development of the education system.
- 2 To engage with and provide support and guidance for ongoing change and development in curriculum and assessment in schools and other educational settings.
3. To advance equality in education through developments and processes that contribute to improved equality of access, participation and outcomes for all learners.
4. To engage in, commission and review relevant research so that our work is informed by best practice in relation to curriculum, assessment and learning, and by emerging understandings and experiences of educational change.
5. To develop structures and processes to enhance corporate capacity and effectiveness of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

3. Customers of the NCCA

Our customers may be described under the following broad groupings.

Schools, teachers, learners and parents

Our curriculum documents and guidelines have a direct bearing on what is taught in the classroom and the NCCA works closely with schools teachers, learners and parents as part of its ongoing review of curriculum and assessment initiatives.

Internal customers

Our internal customers include staff members, and members of the NCCA council and sub-committees and the organisations they represent.

The legislature, Government departments and the wider public service

Under this broad heading we can include members of the Houses of the Oireachtas and Government departments and agencies.

Researchers

From time to time the NCCA commissions research from organisations and individuals and has also conducted research on behalf of third parties. The Council is often contacted as a source of information by those conducting research.

Publishers

The NCCA regularly briefs educational publishers to inform their work in relation to the production of textbooks and other resource material.

Suppliers

These include all who supply goods and services to the Council.

The general public and interest groups in education

These refer to the myriad of individuals and groups, including the social partners, who have an interest in Irish education.

The Minister for Education and Science and officials of the Department of Education and Science

As the statutory remit of the NCCA is to advise the Minister for Education and Science on matters relating to curriculum and assessment, the Minister and officials of the Department Education and Science can be regarded as our main customer.

4. Adoption of Principles of Quality Customer Service

This part of the plan sets out how the NCCA is adopting the Principles of Quality Customer Service adopted by the Government. For each principle we outline what the Council intends to achieve over the period of the plan.

Principle

Quality Service Standards

Publish a statement that outlines the nature and quality of service which customers can expect, and display it prominently at the point of service delivery.

The NCCA is committed to providing a high quality service to its customers.

To this end we will

- ensure that this Action Plan is available in both the Irish and English languages at the reception desk in our main office, offices where NCCA personnel are based, and on our website
- ensure that posters outlining our service delivery targets are placed at appropriate locations throughout the NCCA main offices
- obtain accreditation through Excellence Through People, Ireland's national standard for human resource development which is designed to encourage the development of our employees to their full potential so as to maximise their contribution to the specific needs of the organisation and to its customers
- implement and continually improve upon procedures and processes necessary for the achievement and retention of Excellence Through People
- put in place a range of new web-based services and explore the possibility of establishing an intranet to improve services offered to staff members.

Principle

Equality/Diversity

Ensure the rights to equal treatment established by equality legislation, and accommodate diversity, so as to contribute to equality for the groups covered by the equality legislation (under the grounds of gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller Community).

Identify and work to eliminate barriers to access to services for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, and for those facing geographic barriers to services.

It is a high-level objective of the NCCA to advance equality in education. In meeting this challenge we will

- raise awareness of equality/diversity issues among NCCA staff members through the provision of continuing professional development and training
- continue to take account of equality and diversity issues in all advice offered to the Minister for Education and Science
- introduce policies to ensure that all publications issued by the NCCA take account of equality and diversity issues in their content, design and dissemination
- ensure that the NCCA's website conforms to the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) guidelines for public websites
- where the need is identified, make provision for sign language at NCCA public events
- make every effort to take account of the particular needs identified in the provision of services to minority ethnic groups
- ensure that our workplace policies take account of the Employment Equality Act (1998) and the Equal Status Act (2000) which outlaw discrimination on grounds of gender, marital status, family status, age, disability, race, sexual orientation, religious belief and membership of the Traveller Community.

Principle

Physical Access

Provide clean, accessible public offices that ensure privacy, comply with occupational and safety standards and, as part of this, facilitate access for people with disabilities and others with specific needs.

Over the period of the plan we will

- ensure that all our premises and facilities are made accessible for people with disabilities
- ensure that all offices are kept clean and tidy and comply with occupational safety standards
- provide suitable visitor facilities to ensure that their privacy is respected.

Principle

Information

Take a proactive approach in providing information that is clear, timely and accurate, is available at all points of contact, and meets the requirements of people with specific needs. Ensure that the potential offered by Information Technology is fully availed of and that the information available on public service websites follows the guidelines on web publication.

Continue the drive for simplification of rules, regulations, forms, information leaflets and procedures.

The NCCA is committed to providing information on its activities and services. This is currently achieved through a range of media – print and electronic publications, information leaflets and flyers, press releases, research reports and surveys. Over the period of the plan we will

- continue to produce printed material which is well designed, readable and accessible

- upgrade the NCCA website and ensure that the information available is clear, up to date and accurate
- explore the possibility of establishing an NCCA Intranet to improve the sharing of information within the organisation
- ensure that information is available in a format appropriate to the customer
- develop procedures to comply with our obligations under the Official Languages Act (2003), the objective of which is to ensure better availability and a higher standard of public services through Irish
- review information leaflets, forms and consultation material to ensure that all material is user-friendly and easily understood
- ensure that the NCCA continues to adhere to its obligations under the Freedom of Information Act (1997) and the Data Protection Act, (2003).

Principle

Timeliness and Courtesy

Deliver quality services with courtesy, sensitivity and the minimum delay, fostering a climate of mutual respect between provider and customer. Give contact names in all communications to ensure ease of ongoing transactions.

The NCCA is committed to providing a quality service to all its customers by ensuring that queries are dealt with in a timely fashion and that customers are treated with courtesy.

For customers who telephone the NCCA we will ensure that

- all calls are answered promptly
- staff members give their full name when answering the telephone
- a helpful and courteous service is provided to callers
- staff are available to answer the calls at all times during office hours
- all staff members update their voicemail greetings if absent from the office
- messages left on the central and individual voice-mail systems are attended to in a timely manner
- front line staff have available to them up-to-date contact details and information relating to the responsibilities of all NCCA staff members to enable them to handle and transfer calls in the most efficient and effective manner
- if a query cannot be dealt with immediately, contact details will be taken and the call will be returned or the information issued in writing to the caller as soon as possible
- when it is necessary to transfer a call to another person, that the caller will be told the name of the person to whom the call is being transferred
- if the information required by a caller is not available, the NCCA will endeavour to advise on a possible alternative source for that information.

For customers who visit the NCCA office we will ensure that all personal callers are treated with courtesy and sensitivity and that waiting time is kept to a minimum.

For customers who correspond with the NCCA by letter or e-mail we will

- acknowledge all correspondence within five working days
- issue a definitive reply to routine queries within ten working days and within 20 working days to complex queries involving research or further consultation

- if a reply cannot issue within these time-frames, an interim reply will issue informing the correspondent of progress
- ensure that replies are clear, using technical terms only where this is absolutely necessary
- ensure that all replies carry a contact name, telephone number and e-mail address.

For customers who submit invoices or travel and subsistence (T&S) claims we will ensure that

- payment for goods and services provided in accordance with contact or agreement is issued within the 30 days as mandated under the Prompt Payment of Accounts Act (1997)
- payment of correctly completed T&S claims is issued within 30 days and that every assistance is offered to customers in relation to the completion of the claim forms
- customers are notified of any query in relation to claim for payment within 10 working days of receipt.

Principle Complaints

Maintain a well-publicised, accessible, transparent and simple-to-use system of dealing with complaints about the quality of service provided.

The NCCA is committed to dealing with complaints about the quality of service provided. Over the period of the plan we will

- develop and maintain a well-publicised, accessible, transparent and simple-to-use system of dealing with complaints
- provide training to staff on handling customer complaints
- ensure that feedback from the operation of the customer complaints procedures is kept under review.

Principle

Appeals

Maintain a formalised, well-publicised, accessible, transparent and simple-to-use system of appeal/review for customers who are dissatisfied with decisions in relation to services.

The NCCA is committed to introducing a formal appeals system for customers dissatisfied with decisions made in relation to our services.

Over the period of the plan we will

- develop and maintain a well-publicised, accessible, transparent and simple-to-use system of dealing with appeals
- provide training for staff on handling customer appeals
- ensure that feedback from the operation of the customer appeals procedures is kept under review.

Principle

Consultation and Evaluation

Provide a structured approach to meaningful consultation with, and participation by, the customer in relation to the development, delivery and review of services. Ensure meaningful evaluation of service delivery.

The NCCA has a strong track record in relation to consulting with the partners and interest groups in education, through the representative nature of the Council itself and through consultative documents, discussion papers, surveys, seminars and meetings. We are committed to building on the consultation processes already established and to the continuing evaluation of all our services, to ensure the provision of a relevant, quality service to all our customers.

Over the period of the plan we will

- continue to consult with relevant interests prior to offering advice to the Minister for Education and Science
- examine measures to include other voices in our consultation processes
- review and evaluate our consultation processes to ensure the widest possible input in advice offered to the Minister for Education and Science
- provide opportunities to seek the views of staff members on the development, delivery and review of our services
- identify measures for obtaining feedback on the services provided by the NCCA.

Principle

Choice

Provide choice, where feasible, in service delivery including payment methods, location of contact points, opening hours and delivery times. Use available and emerging technologies to ensure maximum access and choice, and quality of delivery.

Over the period of the plan we will

- continue to develop Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to improve the delivery of services
- continue to offer choice in relation to the dissemination of documentation in various formats
- provide greater choice in relation to payment methods for creditors, e.g. cheque, credit card and direct transfer to bank accounts.

Principle

Official Languages Equality

Provide quality services through Irish and/or bilingually and inform customers of their right to choose to be dealt with through one or other of the official languages.

The NCCA is committed to providing a quality service in both Irish and English. Over the period of the plan we will

- ensure that Irish language versions of all newly published documents are made available
- as far as is practicable, ensure that the name of a member of staff able to provide the service required through Irish will be given to callers and that calls will be returned in Irish
- ensure that signage in all our offices is displayed in both Irish and English
- ensure that all NCCA forms are available in both Irish and English
- adhere to our obligations under the Official Languages Act (2003).

Principle

Better Coordination

Foster a more coordinated and integrated approach to delivery of public services.

The NCCA is committed to fostering a more co-ordinated and integrated approach to the delivery of public services. The NCCA is involved in a range of cross-sectoral committees and task forces which facilitate co-ordination across government departments and agencies to improve the delivery of services. Over the period of this plan we will

- continue to participate and initiate co-operation with other Government Departments and agencies on issues of mutual concern
- continue to foster internal co-ordination of policy advice through the use of cross-sectoral in-house teams and co-ordinated project management.

Principle

Internal Customer

Ensure staff are recognised as internal customers and that they are properly supported and consulted with regard to service delivery issues.

The NCCA will ensure that staff members are also recognised as customers. Over the period of this plan we will

- ensure that standards applied to external customers will apply equally to internal customers
- ensure that all processes and services involving the internal customer comply with the provisions of equality legislation
- promote a culture of respect for diversity among all internal customers
- continue to provide timely briefings to staff members on all aspects of the work of the NCCA
- maximise the use of technology to facilitate simple and prompt access to all internal information
- involve the internal customer in the development, delivery and review of services
- publish a staff manual and guide on internal communications
- provide for and actively encourage continuing professional development and training for staff
- articulate job descriptions, in partnership with individual staff members and their staff representatives, with clear goals and responsibilities and ensure that these are understood by all staff members.

Appendix

List of bodies represented on the Council of the NCCA

Association of Community & Comprehensive Schools

Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland

Catholic Primary Schools Managers Association

The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education

Church of Ireland Board of Education

Department of Education and Science

Foras na Gaeilge

Irish Business and Employers Confederation

Irish Congress of Trade Unions

Irish Federation of University Teachers

Irish National Teachers' Organisation

Irish Vocational Education Association

Joint Managerial Body

National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education

National Parents Council (Primary)

National Parents Council (Post-Primary)

State Examinations Commission

Teachers Union of Ireland

