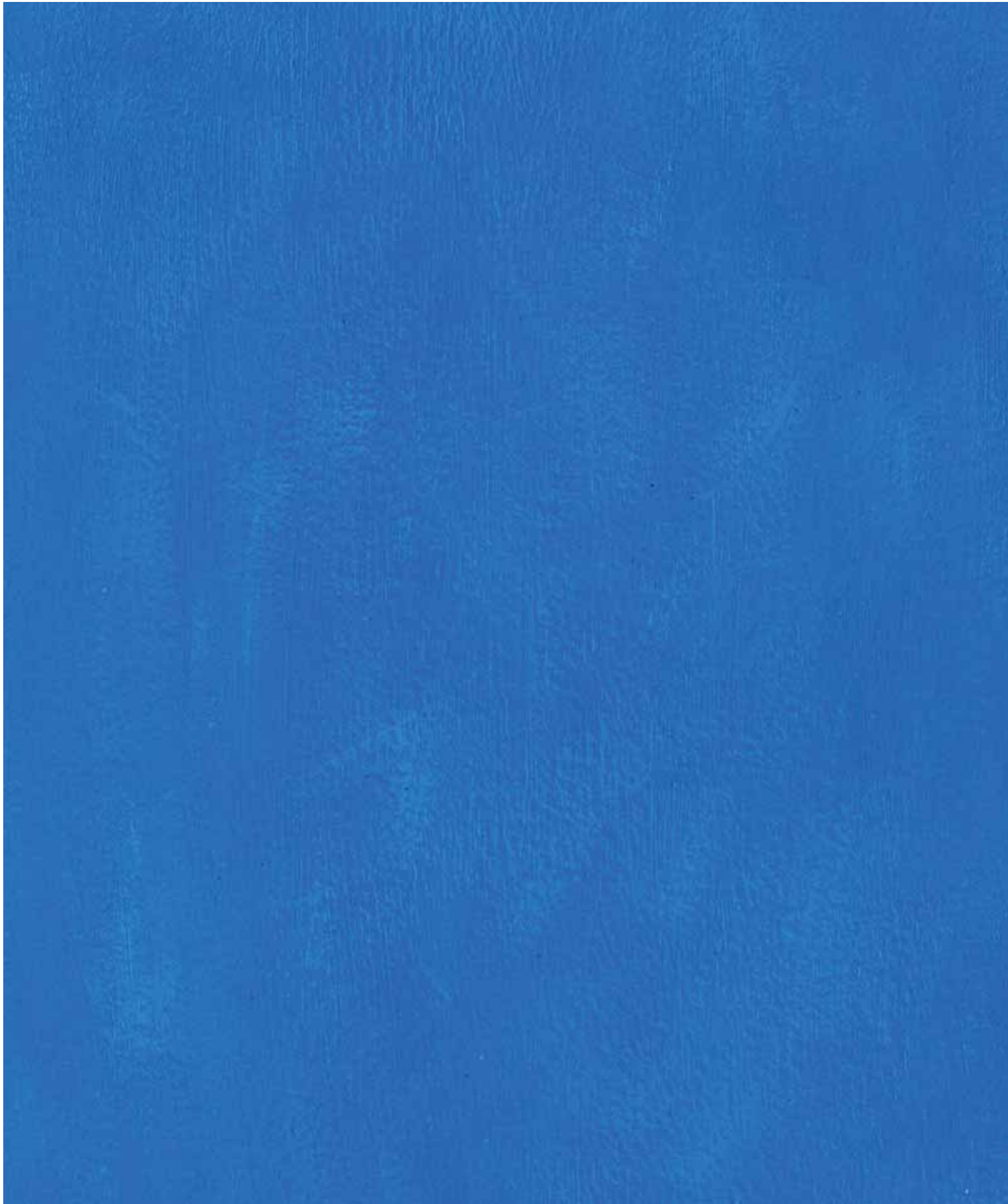


Strategic Plan
2006 - 2008



VISION

The NCCA will play a key role in providing an education system of the highest quality for learners to enable them to realise their full potential and to equip them for successful participation in, and contribution to, economic and civil society, and in so doing promoting the growth of a learning society.

MISSION

The role of the NCCA is to lead developments in curriculum and assessment and to support the implementation of changes resulting from this work. The NCCA works in a spirit of consensus and partnership. It seeks to promote an innovative and creative environment for all learners in schools and other educational settings.

CONTENTS

Vision and mission statements	03
Foreword	06
Introduction	07
The organisation	08
The work of the NCCA	09
Environmental analysis	10
External environment	11
Internal environment	17
Strategic objectives	21
High-level objective 1	24
High-level objective 2	26
High-level objective 3	28
High-level objective 4	30
High-level objective 5	32
High-level objective 6	34
Key Actions	36
Cross-Cutting Work	38
Early Childhood Education	40
Primary Education	41
Post-Primary Education	42
Communications	44

The background is an abstract composition of three main colors: a vibrant yellow, a deep blue, and a light sky blue. The yellow forms the largest, most irregular shape, occupying the top-left and bottom-right areas. The deep blue is a large, curved shape on the left side. The light sky blue is a large, curved shape on the right side, overlapping the yellow. The overall effect is a textured, painterly style with soft, organic boundaries between the colors.

FOREWORD & INTRODUCTION

FOREWORD

Modern Ireland is experiencing unprecedented change. The economic, social and cultural life of the society is being transformed. This transformation impacts on every aspect of the daily life of everybody in this society. Its impact, however, is arguably most profound on the lives of young people.

The NCCA's remit covers the early life education of children from birth to eighteen. As such, the Council is in a pivotal position in mediating the interaction between the generation of young people in the education system and the wider society. This is a major responsibility.

In publishing this Plan, the Council has contextualised and analysed its role with reference to current and future challenges. In this process it has identified a set of strategic objectives. It has prioritised and scheduled a detailed action plan with reference to these objectives and has identified the resources necessary for the realisation of its goals.

I want to thank everybody involved in the preparation of this Plan. In particular, I wish to thank my colleagues on the Council for the commitment, expertise and cooperation which they bring to all aspects of the work of the Council. I also wish to thank the staff of the NCCA for the insight, dedication and ambition which they bring to the challenge of the ongoing development of the Irish education system.



Prof. Tom Collins
Chairperson

INTRODUCTION

This Plan, the second since the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment was established on a statutory basis in 2001, highlights the complexity of the environment in which the NCCA works. This complexity is reflected in the range and scale of work undertaken by the members of the executive team. The variety of projects, the breadth of expertise and the numbers of stakeholders – all of this is evident from even the most cursory glance through the key actions in the final sections of this document.

The Council is fortunate in the calibre of the executive team, and in that team's enthusiastic support for the vision and strategic objectives set out for the next three years. As presented in the environmental analysis, these will be challenging years for all working within the Irish education system. The six high-level objectives point to how the NCCA will meet those challenges, and take a leading role in the system-wide response.

I want to thank Hilary Roche, Director, Curriculum and Assessment who led the development and drafting of the plan and the consultation process. I am extremely grateful to her and to her colleagues who contributed to the development of the Strategic Plan 2006-2008.



Dr. Anne Looney
Chief Executive Officer

THE ORGANISATION

This section presents the statutory remit of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and sets out its functions and guiding principles.

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 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 on matters relating to curriculum and assessment. The Council is a representative structure, the membership of which is determined by the Minister for Education and Science. 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 and 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. Tom Collins.

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.

THE WORK OF THE NCCA

In providing advice to the Minister for Education and Science the work of the NCCA covers 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 and advising the providers of professional development for teachers and principals, and through working directly with school principals and teachers and those working in other educational settings;
- ▶ **Reviewing** the experiences of the implementation of curriculum and assessment change in the context of relevant research, to support the process of curriculum and assessment review and development;
- ▶ **Informing** school authorities, principals, teachers, parents, employers and the general public about developments in curriculum and assessment, through the NCCA website (www.ncca.ie), Curriculum Online (www.curriculumonline.ie), info@ncca, 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
- ▶ supporting teachers in schools as curriculum develops and changes
- ▶ developing strategies which will assist students to make successful transitions from early childhood education to primary school and from primary school to post-primary education
- ▶ international benchmarking of the outcomes of curriculum and assessment review
- ▶ continually and actively leading and promoting equality in the educational system
- ▶ operating in a consultative and inclusive manner
- ▶ engaging with those leading change 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
- ▶ preparing 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
- ▶ engaging in, commissioning and disseminating research to inform policy decisions.



ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

In preparing this Strategic Plan the NCCA has drawn on the experience gained from the development of its first Strategic Plan 2003-2005. The external environment within which the NCCA operates continues to change, and in response, the organisation and the scale and nature of its work has grown and developed. Additional staff members have been recruited and new committees and working groups convened to support new and emerging areas of work. There is a close relationship between the external environment and the internal responses in any organisation. For the NCCA, with its commitment to consultation, public engagement and consensus building, the relationship is particularly strong.

EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

The environmental analysis conducted for the first NCCA Strategic Plan 2003-2005 highlighted the pace of change in Irish society and the consequences for the education system and for learners. It is notable how the pace is no longer the focus of public comment or in analyses of Irish society. Instead, it is the nature and scale of change that have become the principal preoccupations of both casual and expert discussion. Change of itself is established as an accepted facet of the first decade of the 21st century.

This analysis initially identifies three major features of the current environment that have particular implications for the NCCA's work and remit – globalisation, marketisation, and individualisation. These have an impact on all education systems in the developed world. The analysis then moves to look at three further features that may be more particular to an Irish context – equality, accountability and concerns about childhood and young people.

Globalisation

Globalisation concerns the high-speed movement of ideas, of people and of resources. It is not new – indeed most commentators agree that we are experiencing the third wave of globalisation. The first, they suggest, took place during the age of exploration and discovery, and the second in the industrial revolution. This third wave is the fastest, the most 'global' and the first that directly concerns Ireland, recently identified as the most globalised nation on the planet.

The movement of ideas

Globalisation means that people have access to knowledge and ideas at high speed and from multiple sources. Information travels faster than ever before, and communications have speeded up to the degree that instant contact is now an expectation rather than a marvel.

News stories are now broken by bloggers rather than by journalists, and the authority of established sources of information is challenged by these on-line diarists and by the development of on-line knowledge banks such as wikipedia.

This knowledge revolution means that for those who can access these new ideas, there are exciting new opportunities for creativity, imagination and for the forging of different kinds of links and networks. For those at home in the 'new world', they have the opportunities to participate in innovative art forms, new forms of communities, and generate new, and sometimes subversive perspectives.

The challenges are also significant. The skills of critical discernment and information handling become increasingly important. For those without access to the high speed movement of knowledge and ideas, the danger of being excluded from participation in the creation and shaping of new ideas is obvious, and the consequences for the nature of those ideas far reaching. There is an increasing sense, for example, among older generations that the new knowledge and ideas, and the means of their communication are 'for young people', and a sense of bewilderment at new technologies and vocabularies.

In most developed education systems, school leaders and policy-makers are struggling to come to terms with these new ways of accessing and creating knowledge. The successful integration of technology in teaching and learning is certainly a challenge, but ICT as a teaching tool has real potential to transform teaching and put the student at the very core of learning.



The movement of peoples

Another trend associated with globalisation is the movement of people in new patterns of migration. This arises not just from better transport links and the opening of borders in trans-national agreements. It is also associated with the pursuit of the best marketplace, the best deal, the best job and the best wages. It arises too, from the pursuit of sanctuary and a safe haven from unstable countries and economies. For those countries experiencing emigration, the effects are not unlike those experienced in Ireland in the nineteen eighties – families split up, a brain-drain of skilled and educated workers, and a loss of the cultural energy associated with young people. For those countries experiencing immigration – and Ireland is again a good example – the effects range from an encounter with new languages and new cultures, to the challenge of integrating new individuals and families into community and social life.

For Ireland, and for other developed economies predicted to grow in the short to medium term, immigration will fuel and be fuelled by the generation of new wealth and new jobs.

The movement of resources

The world without borders and the high speed exchange of ideas and information means that resources can also move, and be moved, from place to place. The global marketplace offers a new context for entrepreneurship. It also challenges national competitiveness and cost-effectiveness and, despite the many benefits that accrue, can lead to vulnerability in some sectors of employment in those countries – and Ireland is one of them – with high standards of social protection for workers.

Among the benefits for smaller countries afforded by the new global marketplace is access to millions of potential customers and suppliers. This is also a challenge, especially for traditional occupations and for the agriculture sector. In Ireland the Science Technology and Innovation Strategy will be central to future social and economic prosperity.

Most discussions about globalisation and its impact inevitably lead to consideration of sustainable development. As industrial and technological development grow at speed, the demands on finite natural resources, especially fossil fuels, increase beyond previously predicted expectations. The impact of climate change as a consequence of global development and over-development is already noticeable. While the issue of sustainable development is significant for all organisations and their work, it is a particularly important consideration for an organisation which determines what and how children and young people learn at school.

Marketisation

With the demise of centrally controlled economies, such as those in Eastern Europe and China and the acceleration of globalisation, the market has become an increasingly dominant force and its influence is expanding into areas historically associated with public funding. Growing consumerism means that increasingly, civic participation is being shaped by spending power. In the global marketplace people can be viewed as consumers, clients and customers and the identity of the citizen can be displaced by identity as a consumer.

Education is not immune to these forces. Worldwide there are examples of schools being sponsored by commercial concerns, schools being run by companies, the privatisation of support services for schools and the use of commercial consultants to advise on education.

Commentators note the colonisation of education by the language and concepts of the business world. Similarly, there is a growing international trend towards the use of business models in education planning and evaluation. The influence of the market has also been keenly felt in higher education, where individual schools and departments of universities are increasingly viewed as the components of an internal competitive market.

At times, in such a context, the idea of education as a public asset intended for the common good, and to which all are entitled, can come to be displaced by an understanding of education as a private asset for the purpose of advancing the individual. Such ideas are not mutually exclusive, but need to exist in balance. Particular issues arise when the idea of education as a private asset comes to dominate among some sectors, or comes to be associated with purchasing power.

In a more prosperous Ireland there is a growing number of private providers of educational services. In some parts of the country, especially in urban areas, students are attending fee-paying schools, or adding private tuition in addition to their public or private schooling in ever greater numbers, as parents with available resources invest in education to improve the prospects of *their* children.

Education and its social purposes is highly valued in Irish society. Over the years all public policy in Ireland has underscored and restated the principal of education as a public good. From a public policy perspective a high quality education continues to be viewed as an essential vehicle for social and economic development. However, in a country in which historically there has been a relatively low level of public investment in education, some would suggest that a move in the direction of private education becomes inevitable.

Aspiring to the best education money can buy, if it is not perceived as being resourced through public funds, parents may turn to their own resources. Such developments will provide challenges for education and educational provision in Ireland in the future.

Individualisation

Globalisation and the increasing trend towards explicitly viewing education as a commodity are both echoed in the related trend of individualisation: the atomisation of the individual in an increasingly consumerised and consumer-led world. This is linked to a decline in what is often called social capital – the strength of communities and the number and quality of relationships between people. Shrinking time available to people for family and social interaction is viewed as a critical effect here. Changing, ever more demanding working conditions that isolate the individual in their performance is viewed as another. The exponential growth in influence of the mass media is further viewed as eating into time perceived as spent, in the past, on building social capital in communities, and on leisure.

In Ireland, the traditional family and the role of the family within a community are changing. The tradition of individuals volunteering to participate in initiatives for the benefit of the local community appears to be in decline, as this time is increasingly devoted to children and family and activities that directly benefit *my* family and *my* children. Many people, perhaps most significantly those who commute long distances to work each day and those living in large apartment complexes, do not consider themselves as members of a local community. People have less time to spend and they tend to spend it in a narrower environment and range of activity.



Their focus is on their own lives and the lives of their family members, and may not even extend to interaction with neighbours. This set of concerns gave rise to the establishment of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship, whose aims include considering the extent to which people in Ireland play an active role as members of their communities and society, the factors affecting the level and nature of such involvement and exploring ways in which active involvement can be encouraged and supported.

In these contexts, schooling and education is often viewed as having an important role to play by contributing, in significant ways, to sustaining the store of social capital while also providing the educational foundations for economic development in the knowledge society. Education and schools, while on the one hand being viewed as helpless casualties of the worst effects of many of the trends cited above, are at the same time expected to act as counterpoints to the change, sustaining and abiding by values, practices and beliefs that society would claim to hold dear, but which may not always be those to which the student is exposed outside the school. It proves a difficult role to fill with, for example, the curriculum becoming a site of contestation as to what children should learn about and engage with in these broader contexts.

When it comes to education, individualisation can be perceived in different ways. On the one hand, realising the full potential of the individual learner has always, and continues to be a principal aspiration of education systems and schools. In recent years, in the context of inclusive education, this emphasis on meeting the needs of learners on an individual basis has become even more important. Internationally, many education systems subscribe to the view that, in this sense, education should become more 'personalised' – that the resources of

education systems, and the range of state services and supports related to participation in education, should be more flexibly applied on a personalised basis to meet the particular learning needs of individuals. In an Irish context, the inclusion of learners with special educational needs in mainstream schools is a good example of this.

However, a different view of individualisation in learning can be taken when this kind of personalised learning is linked to the idea of education as a commodity for individual use, regardless of the needs of others or of the common good. The imperative of inclusion and the accessing of limited resources on an individualised basis in a competitive, marketised context are not easy companions.

Globalisation, marketisation and individualisation are shaping the social, cultural, economic and political context in Ireland and, consequently, the environment in which the NCCA works.

Three further environmental features emerge in any analysis of the educational environment, more local than global, but not unconnected to the macro trends identified above.

Equality

Education, especially schooling, has long been recognised as a means by which social inequalities can be reproduced for the next generation, and at the same time, as a means of challenging those inequalities and contributing to a more equitable society. In Ireland, the complex relationships between education and equality have been the focus of considerable debate and policy initiatives for the past decade and into this century. As a result, more students with special educational needs are now educated in mainstream settings.

There has been increased investment in schools serving poorer communities to support children, young people and their families in accessing and benefiting from school. In schools, there is more learning support available than ever before. New programmes to support students in moving to further and higher education have also been established and continue to expand.

The enrolment in schools of a growing number of students who have neither English nor Irish as their first language, and whose parents and families may also have limited English or Irish, is a new challenge for teachers and schools and for the education system as a whole. Enhanced language support to schools will offer these students a chance to develop their language skills in support of their integration with their peers and community.

Despite these initiatives, there is a growing concern that education, especially schooling, is not succeeding in improving the life-chances of all, or in challenging traditional social inequalities. Some of these concerns are focused on the unintended consequences of policies and initiatives designed to promote equality. For example, the allocation of language support to schools on the basis of a quota system, coupled with housing supply issues, has resulted in children and young people with language needs being enrolled in some schools, but not in all. Similarly, providing welcomed resources to a school to support the learning needs of students with, for example, moderate general learning disabilities, can lead to a situation in a town or area where that school becomes the only school in a position to support such students. All schools in a community should receive assistance to avoid, perhaps because of the greater individualisation in society generally, the development of a situation where there may be a polarisation between schools for all, and schools for some.

Accountability

While the public funding of education has always generated demands for accountability for monies allocated, individualisation in education has led to the demand among parents and the general public for greater scrutiny of the performance of education systems, for more public information about educational institutions and for improved accountability of those working in education.

As countries continue to place education systems on a secure legislative basis, measures of accountability are put in place aimed at ensuring that these legal requirements are met. As countries recognise the major contribution that education makes to social cohesion and economic development and, as a result, increase investment in education the demand for value-for-money, target-setting and performance management give rise to a concerted focus on the question of accountability.

All these trends are evident in an Irish context, so it follows that the focus on accountability will continue. In recent years a new legislative basis for education has been established; legislation that places new demands on schools and those who work in them.

The role of the media, notably the print media, in the creation of so called 'league-tables' of schools highlights the challenge of providing appropriate information on the complex processes and outcomes of schooling. While the generation of information on achievement is legitimate, there is a danger that the use of narrow indicators of achievement, such as progression to higher education to generate league tables, can oversimplify and distort the reality of schooling where the aspiration and focus is the holistic development of the student.



In the continuing quest for improved quality and increased investment in education, forms of accountability based on partnership, localised decision making and responsibility will continue to grow. So too will those accountability processes driven by international comparisons, and by the setting of ambitious trans-national goals and targets such as the Lisbon Agenda.

Children and young people

While many of the themes identified in this analysis were also flagged in the analysis conducted for the last strategic plan, this theme – the experiences of children and young people – is new. Four different issues can be grouped under this heading, and, as with the case of equality, some of them are the local consequences of more global issues.

Early childhood care and education

Childcare and its provision, quality and cost, is probably the most talked about issue among parents of young children in Ireland today. Recently identified as a significant political priority and challenge, it is also likely to feature as a major policy area in the short to medium term. These concerns coincide with the development of the NCCA's Framework for Early Learning and the work of the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE), as well as growing public awareness of the significance of the early years for children's learning and long term well being. This convergence of developments ensures that in the years ahead, the years from birth to six years will be of increasing significance for policy-makers and those who advise them.

The well being of children and young people

Increasing consumerism has not confined itself to the adult population – children are viewed by marketers and advertisers as potential customers. Increasing prosperity has meant that many young children have disposable income, and the blurring of the work/learning boundaries has meant that many second-level students now earn significant amounts of money. For children and young people experiencing poverty, their inability to purchase can result in an inability to participate, leading to disaffection and disengagement. Even for those who can pay, the relentless tide of consumerism can lead to disenchantment in the pursuit of the next new gadget or trend. Given that schools and classrooms bring children and young people together, and propose a shared value system, ethos and rules, new challenges emerge in the education of the child-consumer.

Anxieties about the lives of children extend beyond consumerism. Given the range of choices young people now face, the variety of messages that bombard them, the range and speed of information to which they have access, many adults are concerned about how choices are and will be made, on what basis, and informed by what values. As noted in the analysis for the last strategic plan, the shift away from organised religion towards a more secular society requires the development of an ethical system based on civic rather than religious values. There is considerable debate in Ireland as to how effectively that development is progressing, especially as young people look for moral leadership and good role models.

Finally, there are concerns about the threats to the security and health of children and young people in contemporary society. Changes in the way communities are organised means that children may be more vulnerable than they were in the past, and changes in how families organise meal and leisure time mean that young people are now experiencing health problems previously associated with sedentary adults.

Including the voice of children and young people in the policy-making process

Participation in education has resulted in children and young people having greater awareness of their own role in, and contribution to, the framing and making of decisions that affect them. From participation in school councils, to contributing to Dáil na nÓg, to engaging with the NCCA on the future of curriculum and assessment – increasingly, children and young people are making their voices heard in the policy-making process. Organisations with a remit relating to the lives of children and young people now have to ensure that they include this group of stakeholders in consultations and deliberations. It makes sense that in times of great change, the next and future generations are actively involved in decisions, the consequences of which will be theirs.

The challenge for education in these contexts is to contribute in significant ways to ensuring the personal well-being of children and young people, to ensuring that they are robust enough to handle the many external challenges they face and make good choices, and to ensuring that they are capable of making decisions and judgements autonomously and with confidence.

The care and professionalism of teachers are pivotal to meeting this challenge. The demands placed on principals and teachers by the changing environment outside schools, and by increasing legislative requirements placed on schools, cannot be underestimated. These find expression in the teaching and learning challenges encountered by teachers on a daily basis. The emerging focus on the continuum of the teaching career, including its pre-service and in-service dimensions, is welcome in that it serves to highlight the complex interactions between the changing environment and the professional lives of teachers.

INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

In considering an internal analysis of the NCCA it is important to note that the revised organisational structures introduced following its establishment as a statutory body have now become firmly embedded. There is a greater sense of individuals having a sense of belonging and of commitment to the organisation since the introduction of the permanent positions of Deputy Chief Executive (2) and Director, Curriculum and Assessment (6) and five-year secondment/contract arrangements for Education Officers (6). Education officers have also been recruited on yearly secondments/contracts and on a short-term and occasional basis. There are eight full-time education officers working on this basis.

Partnership

The analysis identifies that the strengths of the NCCA include its nature as a partnership organisation, the quality of the representatives of the agencies and organisations that comprise the Council and its sub-committees, the high calibre of executive staff and the commitment to continuing professional development for all members of staff.

Engagement with a range of other stakeholders such as the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD), a designated body for the NCCA under the terms of the Education Act, and An Chomhairle um Oideach Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG), which has responsibility for advising on Irish-medium education, is becoming an increasingly evident component of the NCCA's work. The NCCA continues to engage with, for example, those representing children and students with special educational needs, the variety of early childhood education providers, those working in the area of cultural diversity, agencies working with socio-economically disadvantaged communities, the support services working in the primary and post-primary sectors, and others not represented on Council but for whom our work is of particular significance. Working with children and young people is playing an increasingly important part of the NCCA's work and will continue to do so into the future.

The work of the NCCA continues to expand and this may provide challenges for the organisations represented on Council and its sub-committees to support ongoing participation in and engagement with the work of the NCCA. As work progresses, responding to documents and working papers, liaising with nominating organisations and participating in committee meetings places considerable demands on committee members, especially those in full-time employment.

Culture

The NCCA has introduced a project management approach to organising and conducting its work. Members of staff multi-task and contribute through dedicated project teams to a wide variety of projects.

The introduction of a programme of induction has ensured that all new members of staff are provided with information on the work of the organisation, the organisational structures, and the ways in which the NCCA fulfils its remit.

When new committees are established in the NCCA the members are also provided with a comprehensive overview of the organisation and its work, including how committee business is organised and where the work of the committee is situated within the overall work of Council. Increasingly, committees have remits that span the period from early childhood to post-primary education. Current examples include work in the areas of ICT and Special Educational Needs.

Continuing professional development is actively promoted to support staff members at all levels in their work. The outlay on professional development exceeds the recommended minimum of 4% of budget and is used to equip individual members or groups of staff with the skills necessary to enable them to fulfil their role to the highest possible standards, and thereby contribute towards the successful achievement of the strategic goals of the organisation. The NCCA is committed to achieving Excellence Through People (ETP) accreditation for the organisation.

The NCCA's workplace policies support flexible working arrangements for staff and assistance is provided to staff pursuing further studies. NCCA staff now work from a variety of settings in addition to the site of the main office in Merrion Square.

A number of staff members work in education centres local to their home, some work in dedicated office space while some working arrangements involve a combination of office based and home based work practices. Staff members who work from education centres have opportunities to promote an increased awareness of the work of the NCCA for principals and teachers working within the catchment area of the education centre.

Corporate governance procedures impact upon and influence the way in which the organisation uses its resources, and the NCCA is subject to close scrutiny on how its budget is spent. The NCCA has and will continue to introduce measures necessary to ensure full compliance.

The composition of the NCCA staff is characterised by a high degree of homogeneity, as many have worked previously as primary or post-primary teachers. As the work of the organisation expands and diversifies, it is likely that staff with a wider range of experience in a variety of educational settings and contexts will be recruited. Such recruitment and the emergence of new areas of work will give rise to greater opportunities to build connections between early childhood, primary and post-primary education and to forge greater links between traditionally disparate areas of work.

The gap between those working, whether as members of committees or as members of the NCCA executive, on projects traditionally seen as 'primary' and those seen as 'post-primary' is narrowing.

- ▶ Recent work on interculturalism and special educational needs and ongoing work on ICT is being or has been supported by committees from across different sectors of the education system, including informal education.

- ▶ The NCCA's own work on junior cycle is showing that the continuity between primary and post-primary education requires particular focus.
- ▶ The growing importance of work on early childhood education has implications not just for primary education but for the school sector as a whole.
- ▶ Forthcoming work on student transition from primary to post-primary education will need to be supported by committees and working groups drawn from agencies and organisations working in both sectors.

The pressure for connections is growing and is likely to lead to a re-configuring of how some committees are organised in the future and how work is progressed in NCCA.

Leading and responding to change

The NCCA draws its credibility from a range of sources, including:

- ▶ its legislative basis
- ▶ its partnership approach
- ▶ its commitment to consultation and engagement
- ▶ its achievements over the last 20 years
- ▶ its public profile
- ▶ engaging in and drawing on national and international research
- ▶ participation in a number of strategic networks.

In the past three years the NCCA's research work has grown in significance. More resources have been allocated to research and staff members draw increasingly on their research and analytical skills.



This is in line with trends in public bodies generally, which increasingly find themselves working within the framework of evidence based and evidence informed policy making.

A further noteworthy characteristic of the NCCA's recent and current work is an emphasis on working with teachers and schools. This focus arises from an emerging realisation in policy and in research that sustainable curriculum and assessment change is both school led and school driven. The work includes focusing on the role of the principal and teaching staff in leading and implementing curriculum change within the school. It also involves advising on the professional development needs of teachers and principals and supporting teachers in exploring a wider range of approaches and methodologies in implementing the curriculum within the classroom.

The NCCA has devoted considerable resources to linking with the stakeholders and making sure it has a visible presence in the world of education on a national and an international basis. The corporate website of the NCCA (www.ncca.ie) has been redeveloped to enable members of the public to access information on work that has been developed and on work in progress. The website is available in both Irish and English. The work on the development of the curriculum online website www.curriculumonline.ie involves the presentation, for the first time, of curriculum and syllabus documents and teacher guidelines in one place, in a searchable format.

The development of an intranet-type interface to facilitate the more efficient access to organisational resources is also planned.

Information on providing members of staff with the appropriate skills for preparing material for the NCCA websites is included in the Strategic Objectives which are presented later.

Challenges

The NCCA is continuously seeking to develop its information management systems in order to provide the internal user or customer with the most up-to-date information relative to her/his specific area of responsibility or interest.

The NCCA must be cognisant of relevant legislation in addition to the Education Act. Among such legislation is the Official Languages Act (2003). As the various sections of the Act are enacted the NCCA must be in a position to comply with the demands of such sections. This places considerable demands on the resources of the organisation as it endeavours to respond to requests and queries, to produce policy documents, translated as appropriate in both languages, and maintain the suite of NCCA websites in both official languages.

Decentralisation

The NCCA is due to move to Portlarcourt under the government's decentralisation plan. It will be important to plan for this move to ensure there is a smooth transition and that any disruption to the business of the organisation is kept to a minimum. The organisation has established a decentralisation action group to develop a strategy to facilitate this and to ensure that members of staff are kept informed of issues as they emerge.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES



The strategic objectives which will provide a framework for the work of the NCCA during the period of the Strategic Plan (2006-2008) are presented as six High Level Objectives on the pages that follow.

HIGH-LEVEL OBJECTIVE 1

To develop, monitor and review curriculum and assessment to improve the educational experiences of learners of all abilities including learners with special needs, exceptionally able learners, learners who experience socio-economic disadvantage, and learners whose first language is neither English nor Irish, and provide for their educational needs in the 21st century.

HIGH-LEVEL OBJECTIVE 2

To continue to work towards the development of assessment strategies that draw on national and international research and take account of individual learning needs, and thereby assist in planning educational experiences for all learners.

HIGH-LEVEL OBJECTIVE 3

To support and improve change and development in curriculum and assessment in schools and other educational settings, and to take a leading role in advising on the professional development needs of teachers.

HIGH-LEVEL OBJECTIVE 4

To continue to provide for the education of all learners to enhance quality of access and participation, and attainment of outcomes for all.

HIGH-LEVEL OBJECTIVE 5

To engage in, commission and review relevant research so that the NCCA's work is informed by best practice in relation to curriculum, assessment and learning, and by emerging understandings and experiences of educational change.

HIGH-LEVEL OBJECTIVE 6

To develop structures and processes to improve NCCA's corporate capacity, effectiveness and communications, and to strengthen relationships between the NCCA and its stakeholders.



HIGH LEVEL OBJECTIVE 1

To develop, monitor and review curriculum and assessment to improve the educational experiences of learners of all abilities including learners with special needs, exceptionally able learners, learners who experience socio-economic disadvantage, and learners whose first language is neither English nor Irish, and provide for their educational needs in the 21st century.

IN SUPPORT OF THIS OBJECTIVE THE NCCA WILL PURSUE THE FOLLOWING STRATEGIES:

1.1 Develop a framework to support Early Childhood Education

1.2 Continue rolling review of the Primary School Curriculum to identify and meet the needs of teachers and children using the Primary School Curriculum

1.3 Initiate and develop projects which are aligned with the Primary School Curriculum and informed by the findings of the Primary Curriculum Review

1.4 Ensure direction and coherence in specific junior cycle developments by positioning these developments in the wider educational context

1.5 Complete a programme of curriculum and assessment development arising from the review of senior cycle education

1.6 Undertake the actions recommended in major reviews of the curriculum areas of guidance, mathematics, the classical subjects and languages (Irish, English and modern languages), aligned with the reviews of junior and senior cycle

1.7 Review the position of the Leaving Certificate Applied and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme in light of the broader senior cycle developments

1.8 Demonstrate responsiveness to change by undertaking reviews in curriculum areas as appropriate

1.9 Complete an ICT Framework for compulsory education.

HIGH LEVEL OBJECTIVE 2

To continue to work towards the development of assessment strategies that draw on national and international research and take account of individual learning needs, and thereby assist in planning educational experiences for all learners.

IN SUPPORT OF THIS OBJECTIVE THE NCCA PROPOSES TO PURSUE THE FOLLOWING STRATEGIES:

2.1 Progress the development of assessment in the Primary School Curriculum

2.2 Support assessment practice in early childhood settings

2.3 Develop national report card templates for primary schools to support reporting to parents on their children's progress

2.4 Disseminate the outcomes of the Assessment for Learning Initiative as part of the review of junior cycle

2.5 Develop assessment tools to support the ICT framework

2.6 Progress the proposals to widen the range of assessment approaches and methods used in senior cycle education as part of senior cycle developments.

HIGH LEVEL OBJECTIVE 3

To support and improve change and development in curriculum and assessment in schools and other educational settings, and to take a leading role in advising on the professional development needs of teachers

IN SUPPORT OF THIS OBJECTIVE THE NCCA PROPOSES TO PURSUE THE FOLLOWING STRATEGIES:

3.1 Liaise closely with the support services working with primary and post-primary schools and teachers, with agencies in the early childhood sector, and with providers of pre-service and professional development for the education sector

3.3 Liaise with the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science and the State Examinations Commission, as important sources of information for curriculum and assessment review and development

3.2 Continue the recently established practice of engaging directly with schools and other educational settings in the process of curriculum and assessment review and development

3.4 Contribute to the management and work of relevant support services

3.5 Develop and publish guidelines, including web-based guidelines, in support of the implementation of curriculum and assessment change.

HIGH LEVEL OBJECTIVE 4

To continue to provide for the education of all learners to enhance quality of access and participation, and attainment of outcomes for all.

IN SUPPORT OF THIS OBJECTIVE THE NCCA PROPOSES TO PURSUE THE FOLLOWING STRATEGIES:

4.1	Develop curriculum, assessment and certification to meet the needs of students with special educational needs	4.5	Promote and support the embedding of intercultural education in the curriculum for primary and post-primary schools
4.2	Support primary and post-primary schools in addressing the needs of students with special educational needs	4.6	Support the needs of teachers and schools working with students for whom English is an additional language
4.3	Provide materials for parents of primary school children which provide information about the curriculum, and demonstrate how parents can support the work of the school in implementing the Primary School Curriculum	4.7	Support the effective transfer of students at all points from early childhood education to primary school, from primary school to post-primary school, from junior cycle to senior cycle and from post-primary education to further and higher education
4.4	Contribute to improved access to, participation in, and outcomes of post-primary education through work on curriculum and assessment for students who disengage from the education system, and who experience educational disadvantage	4.8	Contribute to improved access, transfer and progression for all learners in gaining school-based qualifications.

HIGH LEVEL OBJECTIVE 5

To engage in, commission, and review relevant research so that the NCCA's work is informed by best practice in relation to curriculum, assessment and learning, and by emerging understandings and experiences of educational change.

IN SUPPORT OF THIS OBJECTIVE THE NCCA PROPOSES TO PURSUE THE FOLLOWING STRATEGIES:

5.1 Commission research to support prioritised strategies and actions, and integrate the findings of such research into the work of curriculum review and development

5.3 Provide staff with professional development opportunities to support their engagement with current research and relevant research networks

5.2 Participate in national and international research initiatives to inform ongoing curriculum review and development

5.4 Ensure that research reports and other relevant resource materials are available and accessible.



HIGH LEVEL OBJECTIVE 6

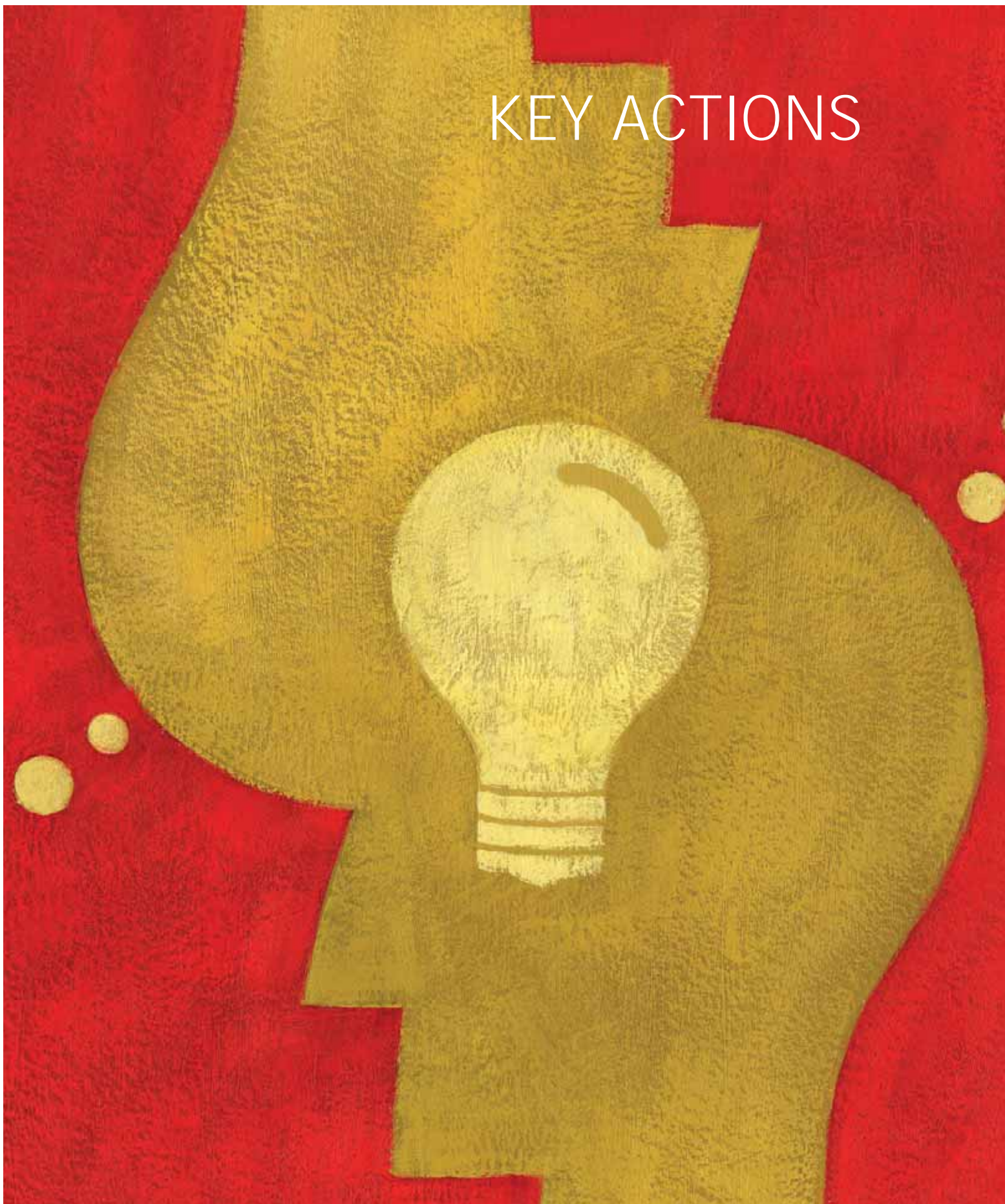
To develop structures and processes to improve NCCA's corporate capacity, effectiveness and communications, and to strengthen relationships between the NCCA and its stakeholders.

IN SUPPORT OF THIS OBJECTIVE THE NCCA PROPOSES TO PURSUE THE FOLLOWING STRATEGIES:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 6.1 Continue to promote a culture of continuing professional learning and development across the organisation | 6.6 Prepare for decentralisation to Portarlington |
| 6.2 Implement workplace policies that value the contribution of all staff to the running and development of the organisation | 6.7 Plan for and report annually on NCCA progress |
| 6.3 Continue to improve the quality of NCCA enabling committee structures and its consultation processes | 6.8 Develop and implement a comprehensive NCCA corporate communications strategy |
| 6.4 Further develop the NCCA IT environment in line with emerging technologies | 6.9 Develop info@ncca to inform primary and post-primary teachers and early childhood practitioners of the ongoing work of the NCCA, and to support teachers in curriculum implementation. |
| 6.5 Maximise the use of financial and human resources and meet legislative requirements in relation to corporate governance | |

The Key Actions in which the NCCA will engage in order to achieve the High-Level Objectives are categorised as follows: Cross Cutting Work, Early Childhood Education, Primary Education, Post-Primary Education and Communications.

KEY ACTIONS



CROSS-CUTTING WORK

Recognise overarching issues relating to assessment as being common to all levels and areas of work

Support pre-service and professional development in enabling education professionals, teachers and principals to respond to and lead change

Maintain effective liaison between NCCA and agencies working in support of educational change and development resulting in greater coherence for schools and early childhood settings

Ensure that the work of the NCCA in designing curriculum and assessment is informed by the challenges of curriculum and assessment as experienced by learners

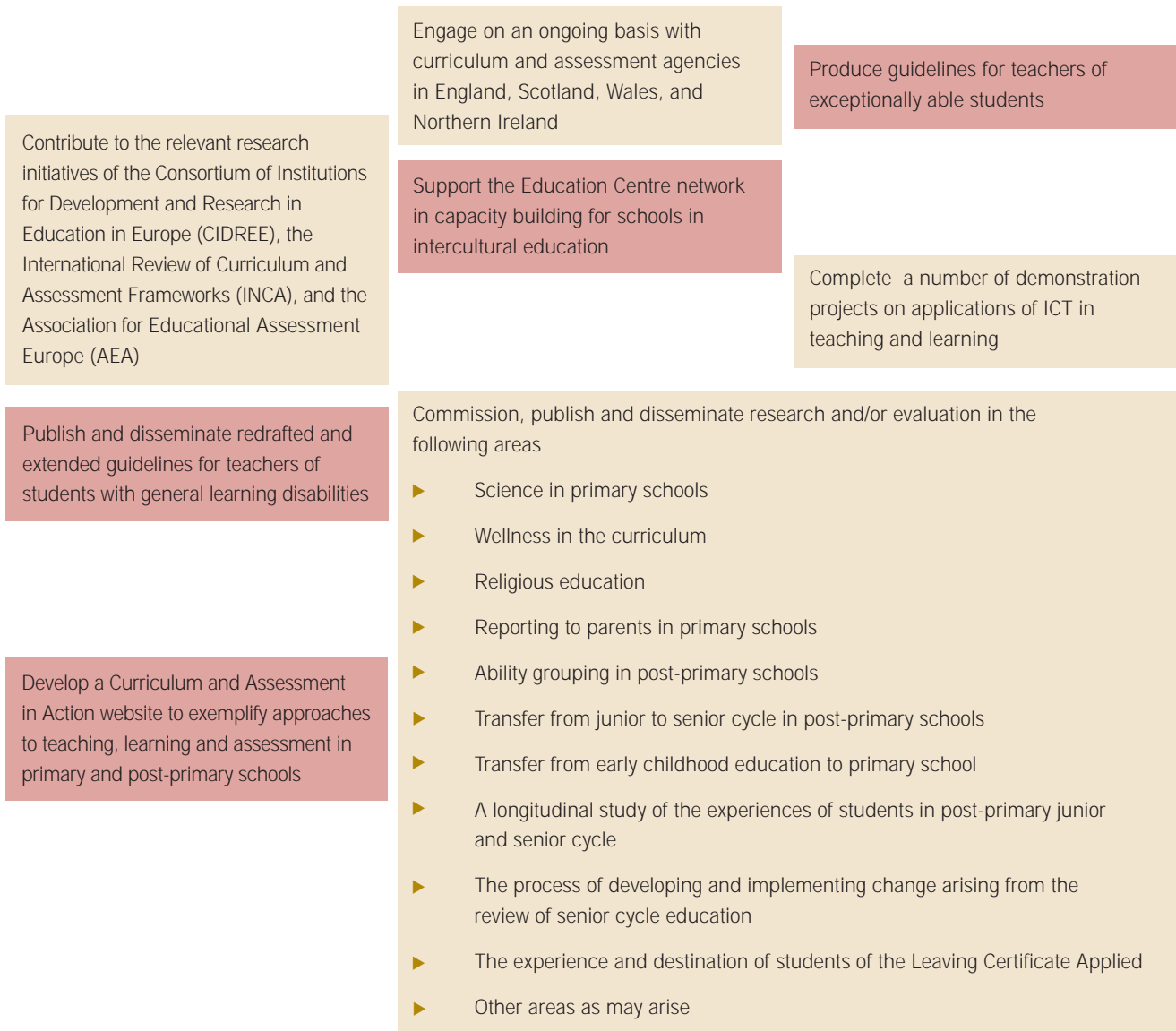
Identify and provide opportunities for approaching issues related to assessment and examinations generally

Ensure that outcomes of early childhood/primary and primary/post-primary transition projects inform all NCCA curriculum and assessment review work

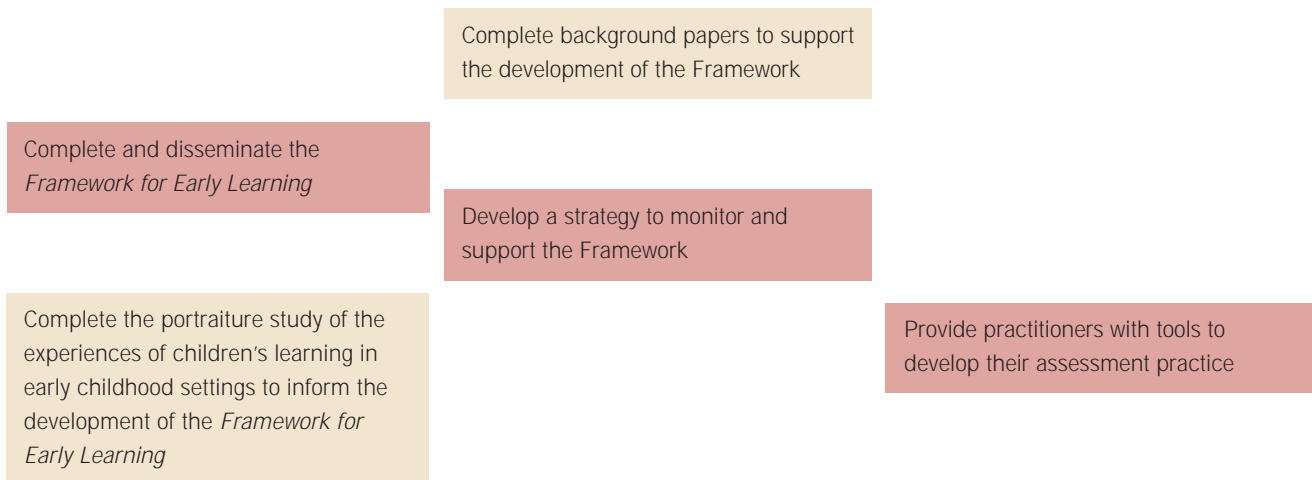
Use feedback from education professionals to inform the ongoing review of curriculum and assessment

Communicate key messages about change and development in curriculum and assessment to ensure that they are embedded in pre-service training and and in-career support

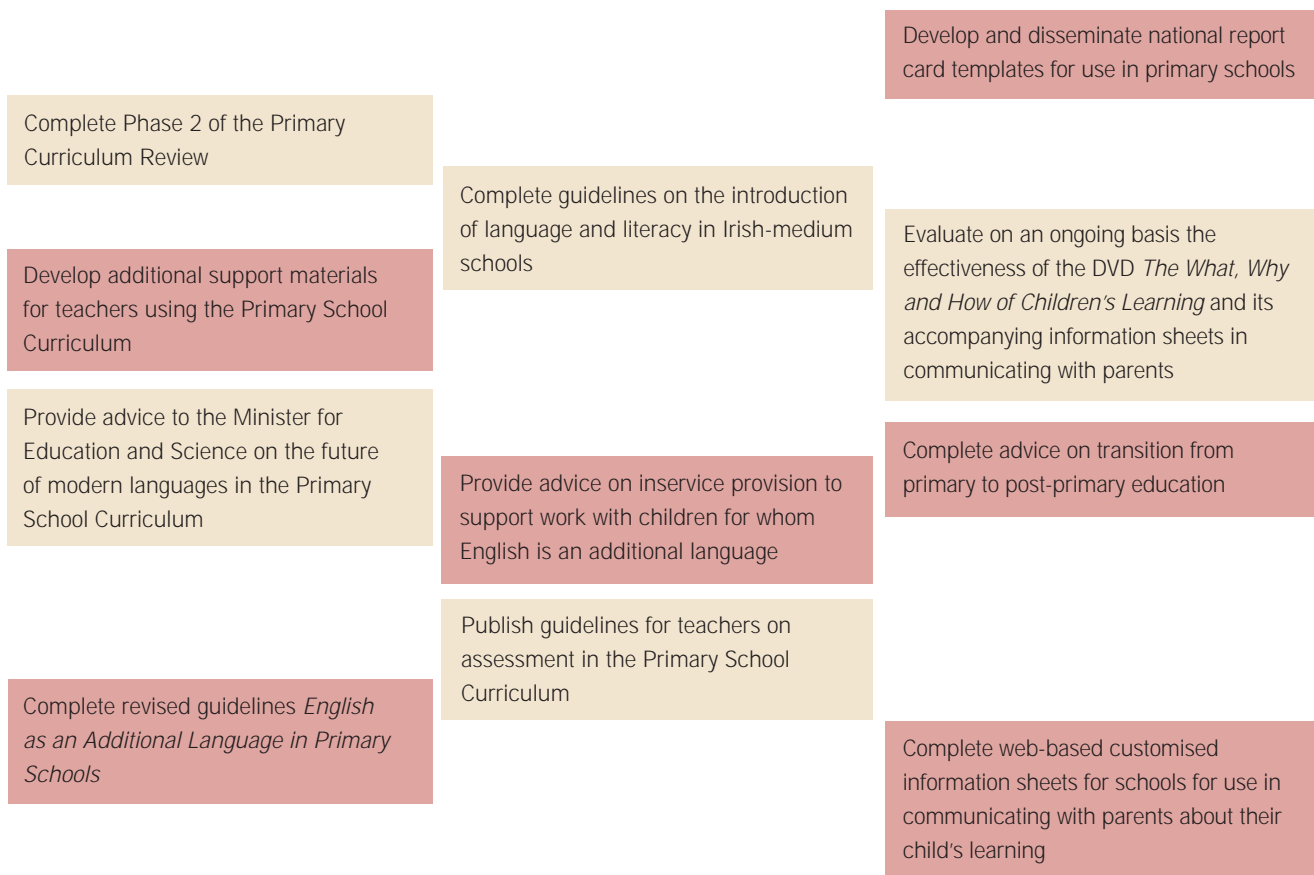
Ensure that the review process is responsive to issues identified through relevant research and in the course of evaluation



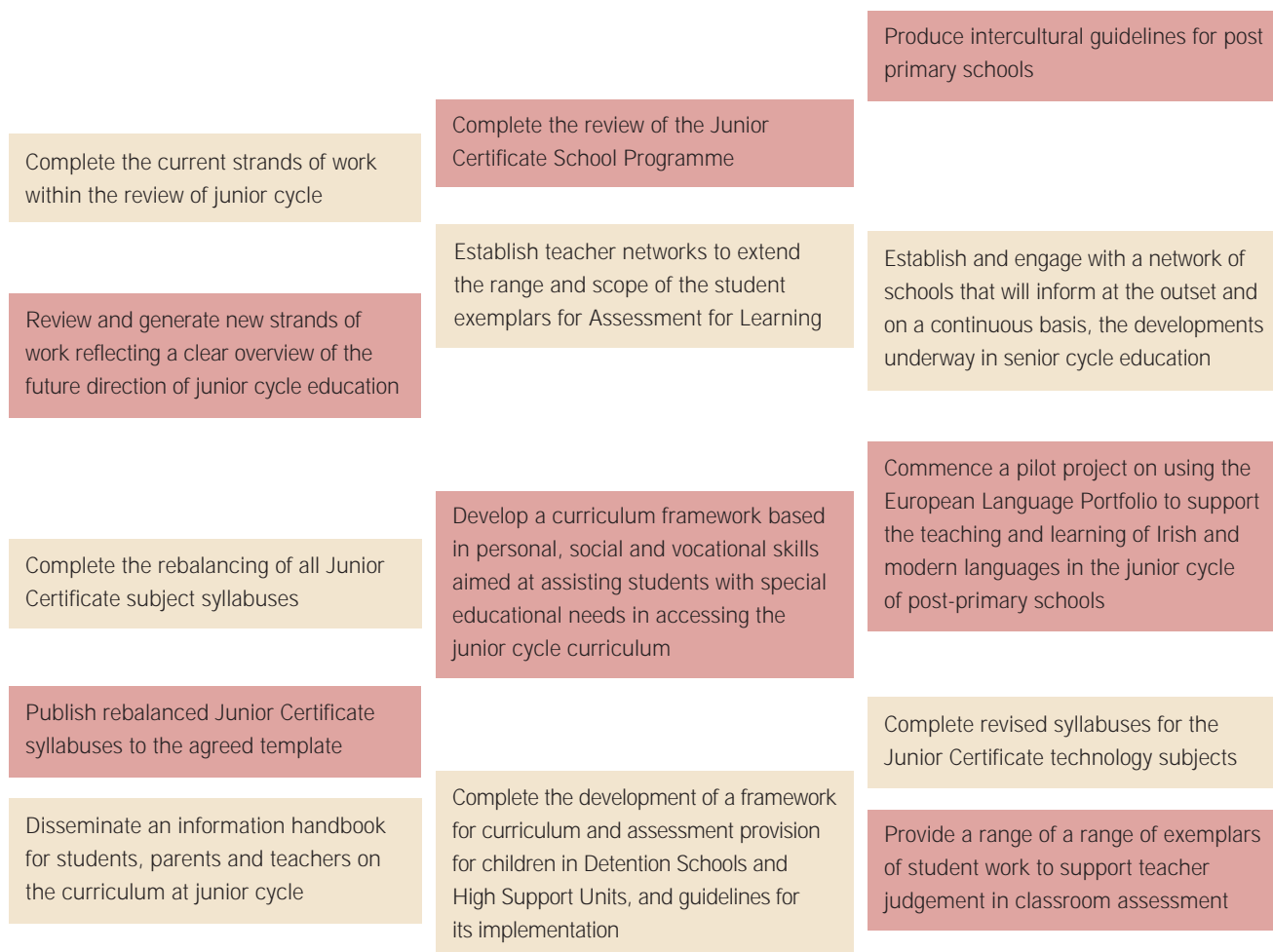
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION



PRIMARY EDUCATION



POST-PRIMARY EDUCATION



Complete revised Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate syllabuses in Mathematics

Complete revised Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate syllabuses in Irish

Complete a new curriculum framework for guidance in post-primary education

Complete a review of curriculum provision for the classical subjects and develop revised syllabuses and other units of study as appropriate

Publish syllabuses and curriculum frameworks for the subjects reviewed, including the Phase 1 subjects of Mathematics, English, Gaeilge, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, French, Italian, Spanish, German, Social and Political Education, Social, Personal and Health Education and Physical Education

Develop a sample short course in the area of Enterprise and a number of other areas including Psychology, Art Technology and Music Technology

Develop and pilot sample transition units in partnership with schools

Complete guidelines for schools on the development of transition units and on programmes of study in transition year

Provide advice on the future of the LCVP in the context of the senior cycle developments

Complete a number of course reviews in the Leaving Certificate Applied in alignment with the broader senior cycle developments

Provide advice on the placing of school qualifications on the National Framework of Qualifications, and review on an ongoing basis

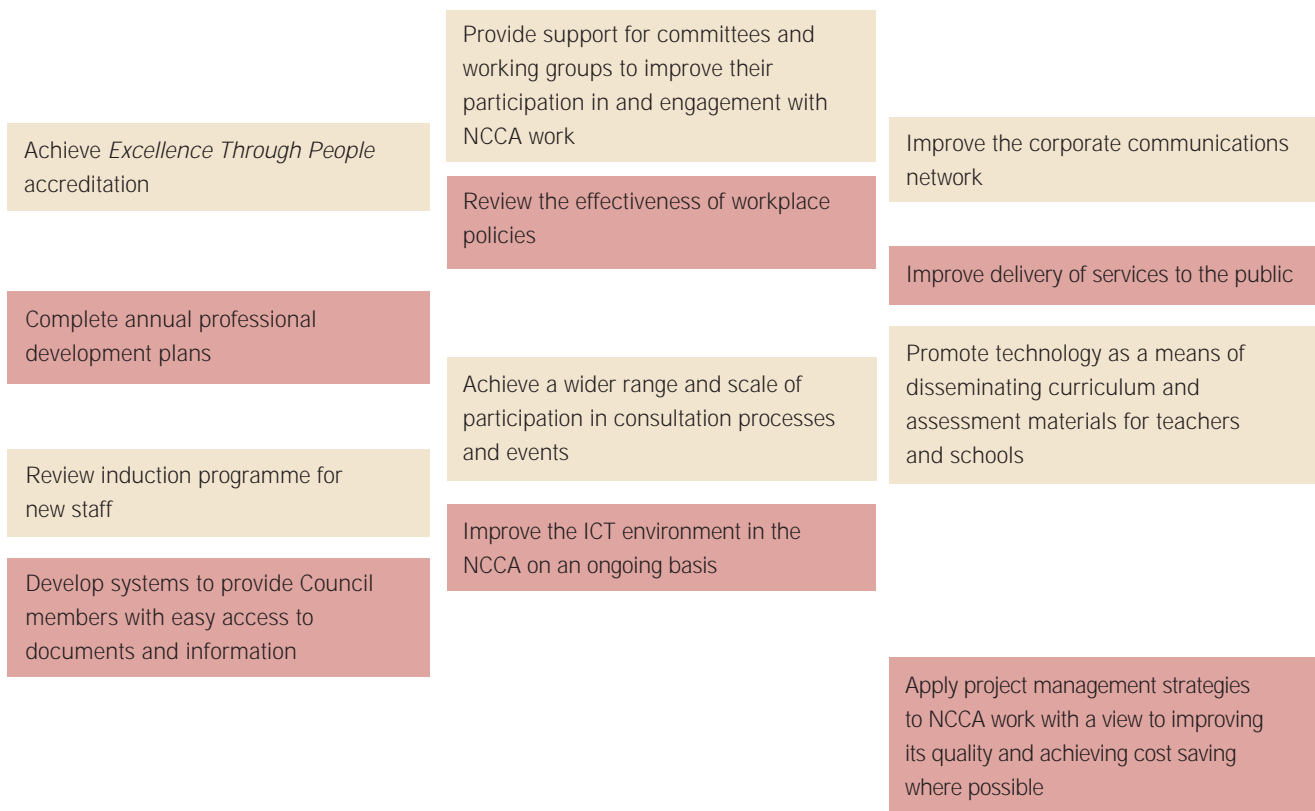
Liaise with initiatives involving relevant agencies to ensure improved access, transfer, and progression to school qualifications

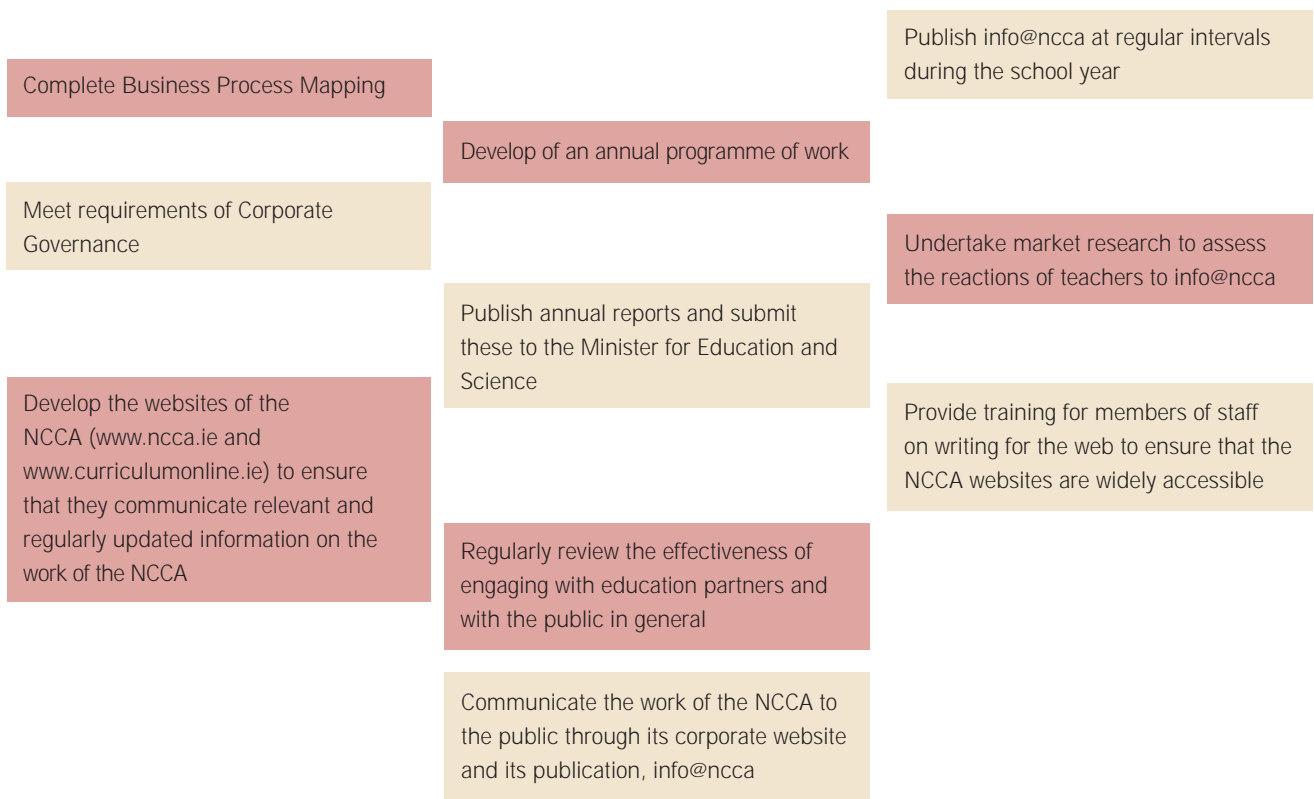
Work with a number of schools designated disadvantaged to develop and implement relevant, flexible programmes of study for senior cycle students

Develop and publish guidelines for teachers, as appropriate, in support of the implementation of curriculum change



COMMUNICATIONS







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

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