

NCCA Draft Strategic Plan Consultation

Feedback template

Introduction

NCCA is developing a strategic plan for 2022-2025. This plan builds on curriculum developments across sectors in Council's work to date and supports the further development and articulation of a shared vision for young people's learning and development.

This strategic plan was developed through extensive engagement across:

- Our internal structures – NCCA Executive, Management, and Corporate Services.
- Our Council – a representative structure comprising 25 nominees of the partners in education, including industry and trade union interests, parents' organisations and one nominee each of the Minister for Education and the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. The members of the Council, who were appointed by the Minister to 28 February, 2022, are listed [here](#).

More information on NCCA structures is available [here](#).

The NCCA would greatly appreciate your feedback. Please take some time to consider the draft strategic plan which can be accessed [here](#), and the areas for consideration outlined below. The consultation runs from 24th of January to 5pm on 14th of February. Based on the feedback, Council will amend and finalise its strategic plan and will then develop annual plans of work to enact it.

Providing a response to the areas set out below is optional – none of the questions are 'mandatory'.

Please send your completed feedback to strategicplan@ncca.ie.

Data Protection Statement

The NCCA is committed to protecting your privacy and does not collect any personal information about you through this document, other than information that you provide by your own consent. Any personal information you volunteer to the NCCA will be respected in accordance with the highest standards of security and confidentiality in accordance with GDPR (2016) and the Data Protection Acts (1998 - 2018). Further information on the NCCA's Data Protection Policy can be found [here](#).

NCCA, as a public body operating under the Open Data and Public Service Information Directive (2021), is required to publish publicly funded research. Data from this consultation may be published for open data purposes and if so will be further anonymized and aggregated.

Thank you for taking the time to provide your feedback. Your views will help to inform the finalisation of the NCCA Strategic Plan 2022-2025.

Respondent details

Please indicate which of the following best describes you

I am responding:	Place an 'X' in the appropriate box
As an individual	
On behalf of an organisation	X

Your name/your organisation (as appropriate):

Geraldine D'Arcy, Advocacy & Communications Manager at the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN)

Your email address:

geraldine.darcy@ippn.ie

Context for the work of NCCA

The context for our work in the period 2022-2025 is outlined on [pp. 5-7](#) of the draft strategic plan. A set of external and internal factors influencing the work of NCCA during this period are considered, including:

External:

- Commitments to sustainability
- Increased importance of wellbeing
- Importance of relationships and communities
- Respecting diversity in its broadest sense and contributing to equality in education
- The legislative context
- The wider policy context
- Pace of change and its impact on and relevance for education

Internal:

- People and culture
- Requirements
- Structures
- Systems
- Growing while nurturing stability and sustainability

Please offer your feedback on what is set out in this section of the draft plan. You might like to consider the following:

- To what extent does the draft strategic plan capture the opportunities presented by the contexts influencing the work of NCCA?
- To what extent does the draft strategic plan acknowledge the challenges presented by these contexts?

Space for comment (please expand as necessary)

As an organisation supporting and advocating for primary school leadership, IPPN is concerned with a similar set of factors to those presented above, particularly the sustainability of school leadership and the impact of their work environment on the health and wellbeing of school leaders, which includes the legislative and policy context and its impact on their workload.

All stakeholders in the education sector include wellbeing in their plans, and most say they are concerned for the wellbeing of children *and* staff in schools. Yet there is little to suggest that the wellbeing of those tasked with implementing and leading change in schools – principals and deputy principals - is taken into account in any meaningful sense. While there has been a notable, and very welcome, pause in the introduction of new initiatives and programmes during the past two years,

while schools try to cope during the pandemic, IPPN would be very concerned if there was an expectation among stakeholders that things should go back to 'normal' once restrictions are eased, as so many initiatives in multiple organisations and sections of the Department have been paused or held back.

Schools and, in particular, school leaders, who have shouldered the burden of keeping schools open and pupils and staff safe, need time and space to regroup, to rebuild relationships, and to learn from all the change they have led and managed in the past two years. There are clear opportunities for schools to reflect on

- their increased capacity for integrating ICT in teaching and learning, given the skills and experience all schools have developed through periods of remote learning;
- communication with the parent body and
- reviewing the supports provided to children with additional needs, such as the impact of the pandemic on their learning.

These are just a few examples. Schools must be allowed the time and space to consider their *own* strategic priorities, relevant to their own contexts, and not be expected to grapple with and implement multiple new initiatives from the Department and its agencies over the next few years. The Primary Education Forum has a clear responsibility to lead and manage the pace of change across the sector, as a whole, in this regard.

NCCA's aim to '*move forward, with appropriate care and sensitivity, with developments in curriculum and assessment*' certainly shows a welcome understanding of the need for such an approach. Yet, while the aims and the actions themselves are absolutely clear and laudable, the question remains – are schools ready or do they have the capacity to embrace them?

The strategic importance of the role of the principal, in effecting and implementing change and reform, has been widely recognised, and perhaps exploited, by the system with every piece of legislation in education, every statutory instrument and Departmental circular identifying the school principal as the key person to understand, oversee, implement, plan, supervise, support and otherwise manage policy change in schools. As part of our Sustainable Leadership project, IPPN is undertaking a mapping of all the responsibilities that fall to the principal as detailed in those pieces of legislation, statutory instruments and circulars. This will, we believe, clearly demonstrate the cumulative impact and level of overload this has had on the role of principal. This is even more pronounced for the 55% of principals who have full-time teaching duties. All the stakeholders have a role and a responsibility in reviewing how their work contributes to this overload, and to the unreasonable expectations of school leaders.

IPPN urges that the NCCA will reflect these concerns in its final strategic plan, and particularly in relation to the timing of the work plans.

Strategic Goals

Council's work over the next four years centres on three strategic goals in the areas of *Curriculum and Assessment*, *Engagement and Collaboration*, and *Knowledge and Research*. These goals, and the actions to achieve them, are set out on pp. 13-15 of the draft Strategic Plan.

Please offer your feedback on what is set out in this section of the draft strategic plan. You might like to consider the following:

- To what extent do the goals and subsequent actions take advantage of the opportunities presented by the external contexts in which the NCCA does its work?
- To what extent do the goals and subsequent actions acknowledge the challenges presented by the external contexts in which the NCCA does its work?

Space for comment (please expand as necessary)

The strategic goals and actions are clear, and in some cases align with IPPN's own strategic priorities. We look forward to hearing more about strategic action SG2.1 – *'Support partners in education, support services, and early childhood and initial teacher education in building capacity for curriculum change across the education system'*, and SG2.5 – *'Support the capacity of schools and settings to develop, introduce and enact change in curriculum and assessment'*, as building capacity is at the heart of our work on sustainable leadership.

We also fully support the aims and action relating to SG3.5 – *'Advocate for and support research capacity-building in early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools, furthering the potential for an evidence-based culture for curriculum and assessment innovation and development.'* Having a formal approach to gathering input from practitioners and school leaders – including by ensuring that there is representation from the wide range of differing school contexts, and, crucially, that there is sufficient time to engage with it - might alleviate the pressure put on *individuals*, as is currently the case, to contribute to policy development, which can, as outlined above, undermine levels of engagement.

The consultation process set out by the Council in respect of the Draft Primary Curriculum was inclusive, and the Council is to be commended for the flexibility it has demonstrated in allowing sufficient time for stakeholders to engage. However, we are aware that the level of engagement has been quite low, which is to be expected and very much in keeping with our own experience of consultation during this period. We have fed back in this regard to the Primary Education Forum and to every stakeholder organisation that has reached out seeking feedback on their work or formal submissions over the past year or so. We believe this is because school leaders are simply overwhelmed and are taking the decision to prioritise what has to be done in and for their own schools over the priorities of others. School leaders have always shown a remarkable professional generosity in contributing to the development of policy and feeding back on proposals. However, the experience of recent years, pre-dating the pandemic, has taken a serious toll, as evidenced by the Maynooth University research on school leaders' wellbeing, in 2020.

This poses quite a challenge for stakeholders intending to introduce complex and multi-faceted change in the sector. If practitioners and school leaders have not been in a position to contribute to the proposals, how likely is there to be sufficient buy-in to ensure their effective implementation?

IPPN's own work on sustainable leadership, and specifically the PIEW Framework (See Appendix I), looks at the importance of allowing time for change to be embedded in schools - rather than merely implemented – before moving to a new area of focus. If change isn't embedded, the opportunity to benefit from it is lost and its potential impact is unlikely to be sustained.

Strategic Enablers

Four strategic enablers—*People and organisational culture, Governance, Information and Communications Technology, and Communication*—provide critical support for achieving the three strategic goals over the next four years. These are outlined on pp. 16-18 of the draft Strategic Plan.

Please offer your feedback on what is set out in this section of the draft plan. You might like to consider the following:

- Given the external contexts in which the NCCA does its work, to what extent are the strategic enablers likely to support the achievement of the strategic goals in the plan?
- Taking account of the goals and associated actions in the draft plan, do you see any other strategic enablers which should be considered?

Space for comment (please expand as necessary)

IPPN has only positive feedback in terms of NCCA's staff, culture and communications processes. Indeed, we acknowledge and thank the Council for the approach it takes to keeping school leaders informed of what's happening, inviting them to participate in consultation processes, and ensuring all channels of communication are availed of in doing so. IPPN has supported these efforts through offering opportunities to present at our Professional Briefing Days and conferences, as well as including content in our weekly E-scéal and our member publication *Leadership+*. We are happy to continue to do so, as it is also incumbent on us to share key information from the sector with our members. We have found the Council to be responsive to IPPN's views and feedback, and very much appreciate the collaborative approach and the engagement we have had over the years.

IPPN has begun to embrace the power of social media (LinkedIn and Twitter in particular) over the past few years and believe the investment in time and resources has helped us engage our audience further. We are happy to continue to share relevant NCCA content on our social media channels and would appreciate reciprocation, as appropriate. Similarly, we have worked more proactively and in a more planned way with the media over the past year or so and have found it to be beneficial in getting across the key messages of importance to school leaders. We believe that this can avoid misinformation and can help to amplify a positive, logical and considered response to key issues. This may be something the NCCA would consider doing more of, to ensure clarity and consistency in relation to its key messaging.

As we have scant knowledge of NCCA's governance and ICT, we are not in a position to comment on these, other than to say that the aims and actions seem comprehensive and coherent, in supporting the strategic objectives.

There might be an opportunity in the Strategy to highlight some issues that impact on schools' ability to successfully implement change, including in relation to the goals set out in the NCCA draft strategic plan. For example, there is little doubt that most schools have upskilled in relation to the integration of ICT in teaching and learning in recent years, and particularly when they were very abruptly required to switch to remote teaching and learning, when schools were forced to close. Yet many consider this to have been an 'exceptional imperative' and it was hardly done in a coherent, planned way, whereby all teachers had an opportunity to engage with relevant and high quality CPD before embarking on a whole new method of engaging with their students. Thus, while ICT is absolutely a key enabler, practitioners must be afforded time and resources to upskill, and the resources required in schools to implement integrated ICT – as outlined in the Digital Strategy – need to be put in place equitably in all schools, if it is to succeed.

Similarly, governance is another key enabler for any organisation – for NCCA, IPPN and every school. As you may be aware, IPPN has advocated strongly for greater supports to be provided to schools in this regard. Principals are very often left to carry the burden in relation to governance due to the entirely voluntary nature of Boards of Management and the skill gaps prevalent on many Boards. Indeed, Boards of Management have a responsibility to provide oversight in relation to the quality of teaching and learning in schools, both in terms of implementation and assessment of curricula, yet they are ill-placed to discharge this responsibility. Could the Strategy highlight these issues, so as to ensure more attention is paid to a level playing field for all schools in relation to governance?

Final comments

Please use this space to provide any other feedback you may have on the draft NCCA Strategic Plan 2022-2025.

We note that milestones are not (yet) set for any of the strategic goals or actions, and hope that this means there will be flexibility in the timescales for implementation of aspects of the plan, for the reasons outlined above. Again, we believe that the Primary Education Forum is the appropriate place for the strategic priorities across all the stakeholders in the education sector – particularly the Department of Education and related agencies - to be agreed, and for this to inform the work plans of each of the stakeholders. In this regard, it would be appropriate that an assessment of impact be undertaken prior to the implementation of any planned reform, to better ensure its effective implementation and the system's capacity to deliver it.

We hope that our input is useful in your deliberations. We appreciate the opportunity to review the draft plan and to provide feedback. IPPN would be happy to discuss our feedback with the NCCA if that would be helpful.

We wish the Council well in finalising the plan. Having signed off on our own Strategic Priorities for the period 2021-2025, in recent months, we can appreciate the challenge that this presents.

Thank you for taking the time to engage with the work of NCCA. Your views will help to inform the finalisation of the NCCA Strategic Plan 2022-2025.

Appendix I - The IPPN PIEW Framework: Prioritise – Implement – Embed - Wait for SSE

The 'PIEW Framework' has been designed and shared by IPPN. It aims to help school leaders and staff members decide on and work to agreed priorities, and is used in an increasing number of schools nationwide. It is proving very successful at creating the necessary time and space to lead when implemented properly. It is based on the idea that system change takes time and goes through phases before the change is embedded.

P stands for Prioritise, the agreed area(s) to be looked at, updated, changed if necessary, and often includes a 'Pilot' stage. The amount of work to be prioritised in any school is, crucially, based on the capacity of the school and how much work is still in the 'IEW' stages outlined below.

This is a 2-year phase, after which the area moves to the '**I, or Implement**' stage, over the following 2 years.

In years 5 and 6, the agreed changes or updates have become '**Embedded**', represented by the letter E. This phase can include a review stage, to ensure the learning has been embedded, and to agree what needs to change if this is not the case.

The 'W' stands for '**Wait for SSE**', or the priorities which have been put on hold while the agreed priorities are worked through the 'PIE' elements. Every year, priorities are added and go through the phases as outlined. A school may, for example, decide to prioritise a specific curriculum subject, or aspect of a subject, as well as a key operational policy or the attainment of a 'flag' for environmental awareness, fitness or enterprise. Those are the priorities and should not be added to until they are at the implement stage. The exception is Departmental imperatives, such as Child Protection or Data Protection, where changes in the law require a realigning of priorities for schools. In such case, the imperative will replace a previously identified priority until it is completed.

PIEW represents a genuine opportunity to give schools a mechanism by which leadership is sustainable and time and space to lead is possible.