



**IPPN Submission to the Department of the Taoiseach and the  
Department of Education**

**Citizens' Assembly on the Future of Education (CAFE)**

**February 2024**

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## 2 INTRODUCTION

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As the officially recognised professional body for the leaders of Irish primary schools, IPPN is delighted to make a submission on the establishment of and the processes relating to the Citizens' Assembly on the Future of Education (CAFE), a *'once -in-a-lifetime opportunity to reimagine education and to consider Ireland's education needs'*, as Minister Foley described it.

The importance of school leadership as an influence on, and key determinant of, pupil learning has been clearly established. The equation is simple – effective school leadership leads to school effectiveness, which in turn leads to better outcomes for children. IPPN's mission is to enhance leadership capacity, effectiveness and sustainability in order to better ensure effective schools that deliver those better outcomes for children.

IPPN's 93-member National Council comprises school leaders from each of the 31 IPPN city and county networks around the country. At its meeting in December, the Council considered the purpose and aims of the Assembly and discussed several aspects that could have a bearing on the make-up of the Assembly and its deliberations, including:

- Vision and purpose
- Skills and values
- Voices that need to be heard.

The fruits of that discussion have informed our submission, which also includes input from the IPPN senior leadership team.

### 3 IPPN PROPOSALS

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#### 3.1 CHAIRPERSON AND ADVISORY GROUP

The person appointed to chair and facilitate the Assembly will be integral to its effectiveness. Similarly, those chosen to provide advice and expertise to the Assembly and its chair will have key roles in ensuring balanced, informed and considered engagement.

IPPN proposes the following criteria for the selection of chairperson(s)

1. Expertise
  - a. Expert facilitator in multiple contexts
  - b. Acknowledged as an expert in their field
2. Skills and abilities
  - a. Clarity of thought / articulate
  - b. Strong in process and procedure
  - c. Active listening skills
  - d. Analytical
3. Personal traits
  - a. Integrity
  - b. Gravitas
  - c. Objectivity
  - d. Personable

IPPN believes the following meet these criteria, and would be an asset to the CAFE.

1. Olivia O’Leary – Broadcaster & Journalist
2. Fergus Finlay – Former CEO of Barnardos
3. Bryan Dobson – Broadcaster & Journalist
4. Dr Mary McAleese – Former President of Ireland, Chancellor of TCD
5. Kieran Mulvey – Former Director General of the Workplace Relations Commission, Chairman of Sport Ireland.

With regard to the Advisory Group, to ensure that all likely topics are supported by the appropriate evidence and expertise, IPPN proposes that experts in the following fields be appointed to support the work of the Assembly:

1. Curriculum development – NCCA, Oide
2. Special educational needs – NCSE, NABMSE
3. Education psychology - NEPS
4. Children’s rights - OCO
5. Parental rights and responsibilities – NPC
6. School leadership – IPPN, NAPD, Oide
7. School governance – Patron/Management bodies
8. School funding – DE, FSSU, Management bodies
9. Teacher Education/Pedagogy – INTO, NCCA, Oide
  - a. Early years education
  - b. Primary education
  - c. Post-primary education
  - d. Third level education, including further and higher education
10. Education-related legislation e.g. Mason Hayes Curran (MHC), Eversheds

### 3.2 VISION AND PURPOSE – KEY THEMES AND QUESTIONS

The broad consensus arising from the discussion that took place at our National Council meeting was that the primary objective of the Citizens’ Assembly should be to achieve consensus, across all stakeholders, as to what constitutes the purpose of education. If there is clarity about what we want our children to experience and what will be of greatest benefit to them and to society in general, then questions around how our education system is designed and resourced will be more easily addressed.

Prompt questions might include

- What is the purpose of an education?
- To what do we aspire for our children in Ireland?
- Are schools about more than teaching and learning?
- How can we ensure that children develop the skills, competencies and dispositions that will equip them to become active citizens in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Ireland?

- How should schools be organised and structured - by location/gender/ideology/faith?
- How should children with additional needs be supported to fully engage with their education to achieve their full potential?
- How should learning environments look and feel?
- How can the quality of education best be ascertained and assured?
- How can we better prepare professionals to deliver on these expectations?
- How should transitions between sectors work to ensure the focus is on the child from end to end?
- Who is responsible for agreeing the change agenda?
- Who is responsible for implementing the change agenda and allocating resources?
- How will resource implications be dealt with – managing expectations re. vision vs implementation?
- What is working well currently, so that we can ensure it's not lost?

### 3.3 SKILLS AND VALUES

- What skills and values do we want to promote through the education system?
- How can that be achieved alongside parental expectations, rights and responsibilities?
- How can trust, respect and professionalism be manifested within education?

### 3.4 VOICES THAT NEED TO BE HEARD

- Children and young adults. In that regard, learnings from organisations that have consulted and engaged with children would be an important input to the Assembly, given the age range is from age 2-3 years at early years to 18 years at post-primary level.
- Parents and guardians
- Teachers and other staff at all levels of the education system
- School leaders
- School management
- Those from the margins – migrant community including those in Direct Provision, socio-economic disadvantage, special needs, Traveller/Roma, the homeless, young offenders, children in dysfunctional families
- Community development groups including those involved in the Arts, sports, hobbies
- Explore good models of engagement e.g. BEACONS, 1916 commemorations, NCCA, the use of focus groups, story-telling, video and oral inputs as well as text-based.

- Facilitation and translation support where needed to reach all stakeholder groups.

### 3.5 HOW THE ASSEMBLY WILL OPERATE

- How will themes and questions be agreed?
- How will evidence be chosen and presented to the Assembly?
- Where will the Assembly meet and how often?
- What will the outputs of the Assembly be, and to whom will they be directed?

## 4 CONCLUSION

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IPPN welcomes the opportunity to feed into the deliberations regarding the establishment of the Citizens' Assembly and remains at the disposal of the Department of the Taoiseach, the Department of Education and the organisers of the CAFÉ, should you require any clarification or further assistance.

### 4.1 KEY CONTACTS

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