

# Report of National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) 2019

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 Council's work spans Early Childhood Education, the Primary Curriculum Framework and Junior and Senior Cycle Developments in Post Primary Curriculum and Assessment. It is a great privilege to represent ACCS for a second term on the Council and to work with the NCCA personnel, all of whom are deeply committed to the work which they do in the area of curriculum and assessment development in Irish education. In addition, this year, I am serving as Chair of Board for Junior Cycle and as a member of the NCCA Governance Committee.

## Council 2019-2022

The Council is a representative structure. The membership is determined by the Minister for Education and Skills. The 25-member council comprises nominees of the partners in education, industry and trade union interests, parents' organisations and one nominee each of the Minister for Education and Skills and the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. The current Council commenced its work in September 2019 and will complete its term on 28th February 2022.

## Chairperson

The Chairperson, Professor Mary O'Sullivan, teacher educator at University of Limerick, has previously served on the Executive of the Teaching Council and on their Education Committee, and currently serves on the Medical Council with a focus on Education and Training. A former Post-Primary teacher in Cork, Professor O'Sullivan has among her many roles, served as Inaugural Dean of Education and Health Sciences at UL and Associate Dean of Education at Ohio State University.

## Board for Early Childhood and Primary, Board for Junior Cycle and Board for Senior Cycle

In the NCCA's existing structure, oversight of the curriculum and assessment work in early childhood and primary, junior cycle and senior cycle is carried out by Boards. This oversight is important in ensuring that strands of development contribute to a coherent and manageable whole for schools and early childhood settings. Boards have responsibility to ensure that curriculum and assessment development is carried out in accordance with the terms of the agreed briefs, to review each strand of work within the sector in the context of each of the other strands. Boards can discuss significant issues as they emerge within each sector and make connections with developments in other sectors.

## Development Groups

To provide a strong, representative and responsive basis for its curriculum and development work, the NCCA has established Development Groups to undertake specific tasks in curriculum areas or subjects.

**The NCCA 2019-2021 Strategic Plan** sets out important actions in Council's work across five strategic goals:

- **Curriculum and Assessment** To develop innovative curriculum and assessment for engagement, progression, quality, inclusion and continuity across sectors and across educational transitions.
- **Engagement and Collaboration** To work with and support all teachers, practitioners, learners and our partners in education to build capacity for change, model ways of working, and inform curriculum and assessment development and implementation.
- **Knowledge and Research** To generate, use and share knowledge & research to support the development of curriculum and assessment advice and practice in all educational settings.
- **Communications** To communicate, present and share the work and achievements of the NCCA effectively, to improve its capacity to engage with others in leading and supporting educational change.
- **Governance and Corporate Affairs** To develop NCCA governance & organisational structures, processes, skills & competences effectively to achieve the vision of the organisation.

## Cross-cutting themes in the work of the NCCA

In the NCCA's work in recent years, six themes, as set out below, have been identified which cut across the five goals of the organisation and the four sectors within the Council's remit - early childhood, primary, junior cycle and senior cycle.

- Focusing on dispositions, competencies and skills when developing curricula
- Including the voice of learners in the process of curriculum development
- Contributing to greater autonomy and support for practitioners and teachers
- Establishing the focus on the impact of teaching on learning as the focal point of educational change
- Designing and developing curricula to include ALL Learners
- Paying attention to questions of continuity/progression across sectors and times of transition

These six themes overlap and intersect and are both informed and shaped by the emphasis NCCA places on research in education.

## Early Childhood and Primary Developments Update:

**The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework.** This framework builds on the 1999 Primary Curriculum, is based on the key competencies and addresses the issue of curriculum overload. It provides teachers with greater autonomy in the classroom and places assessment central to teaching and learning. The framework promotes the importance of Student Voice, Wellbeing, playful pedagogy, inquiry-based learning and integration throughout the eight years of primary school. At the time of writing this report the draft Framework has been approved by Council for consultation.

**Current Research: Parental involvement, engagement and partnership in their children's learning during the primary school years.** In November 2017, Marino Institute of Education successfully tendered for a grant award jointly funded by NCCA and the National Parents Council (NPC) to study the process of parental involvement, engagement and partnership in their children's learning in the primary school years. The first part of this research which consists of a review of relevant national and international literature was published in March 2019. The second part of the research which explores the development of case studies of parental engagement in five primary schools in Ireland is ongoing. Part 1 of the research is available to download at [www.npc.ie](http://www.npc.ie)

**Children's School Lives (CSL)** is an exciting new national longitudinal cohort study of primary schooling in Ireland being carried out by University College Dublin. Launched on October 25th, 2019 the study will follow approximately 4,300 children through their primary school years. Using surveys and interviews with children, teachers and parents, as well as classroom observations, this ground-breaking study will provide rich and insightful pictures of children's experiences in primary schools in Ireland. The study will also show how these experiences both shape and are shaped by schools as communities, institutions, and as a system. Aptly titled, *Children's School Lives*, the study will inform the NCCA's work in reviewing and updating the primary curriculum to ensure it continues to provide a strong foundation for teaching and learning. The findings will likely also be useful to schools in reviewing and further developing their own policies and practices.

## Junior Cycle Update:

The *Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015) is currently being introduced on a phased basis in all post-primary schools. The introduction of subjects in the final phase of implementation commenced in 2019 (for examination in 2022).

**Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE).** At the request of the Minister of Education, the NCCA undertook a major review of RSE in primary and post-primary schools. The review began in June 2018 and included an examination of the RSE curriculum, the approach to teaching and learning, supports needed, and ways to improve the experience of RSE for students. Participation in the review was considerable, and involved students, parents, teachers, school leaders, researchers and organisations, with a view to gaining a full appreciation of the nature of young peoples' needs and experience of RSE. On foot of the consultation from June 2018 to March 2019, the NCCA produced a *Draft Report on the Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in Primary and Post-Primary Schools*. A second phase of consultation was open from July to October 2019. This consultation was based on proposals in the draft Report which included; the proposed advice for the future approach to RSE, suggestions regarding future curriculum developments, the conditions needed for effective RSE and other considerations. Feedback was facilitated through an online survey, written submissions and a consultative symposium. Following this review, the NCCA will be undertaking significant work in this area in 2020.

**Junior Cycle Business Studies & Science Specifications & the continuing review of English.** The NCCA carried out a consultation on the early enactment of the Junior Cycle Business Studies and Science Specifications and the continuing review of Junior Cycle English which commenced in late December 2019. A report on the findings of the review will be published in Spring 2020. The consultation report will be based on the feedback from a range of sources including consultation events, written submissions and school visits.

**Special core status for Junior Cycle History.** In January 2020, the NCCA responded to the Minister's request for advice on how the awarding of special core status to Junior Cycle History in the Framework for Junior Cycle can be realised in practical terms in schools. Any proposed change will require further, more detailed investigation which will need to be worked on in early 2020 in collaboration with DES officials and those of other agencies.

## Senior Cycle Update:

**Leaving Certificate Polish, Lithuanian, Portuguese and Mandarin Chinese** Consultations on the draft specification for Leaving Certificate Polish, Lithuanian and Portuguese and on the draft specification for Leaving Certificate Mandarin Chinese were open from mid November 2019 until 6th January 2020. These included focus group events and online surveys.

## Senior Cycle Review. The timeline:

- Phase one of senior cycle review began in 2016 at the NCCA Board for Senior Cycle, which identified priority areas for exploration in a review of senior cycle education.
- In February of 2018, NCCA publicly launched the Review of Senior Cycle with the publication of this research Upper Secondary Education in Nine Jurisdictions: Overview report.
- In May 2018, phase two of senior cycle review commenced when NCCA began working with 41 collaborating schools to generate a shared vision for senior cycle and a strong base from which to shape a senior cycle curriculum that meets the needs of all learners.
- Phase three of senior cycle review commenced in July 2019 with the publication of the Interim report of the review of senior cycle education and the Senior Cycle Review: Consultation Document which marked the beginning of a wider public consultation on ideas emerging from the review to date. The feedback from this phase of the review is now available in the Public Consultation Report 2019.

**Senior Cycle Review: National Consultation Forum:** On Wednesday 16th October 2019 the NCCA hosted a national consultation forum in Croke Park, Dublin. The forum engaged delegates in discussion and debate about how senior cycle education in Ireland might evolve in the years ahead. Minister for Education and Skills Joe McHugh TD, addressed the forum which included teachers and school leaders, teacher union colleagues, representatives from management bodies, the National Parents Council Post-Primary, Higher Education, Further Education and Training, the State Examinations Commission and the Department of Education and Skills, amongst others. Forum participants listened to a range of perspectives on the emerging ideas, from teacher union colleagues, teachers and school leaders, and from the organisations with responsibility for the national framework of qualifications (QQI), the further education and training sector (SOLAS) and state examinations (SEC). Representatives of the OECD have been conducting a policy assessment of senior cycle education in Ireland for the past eighteen months. They have looked closely at the work of the review, participated in national seminars, visited schools to listen to the perspectives of teachers, students and school leaders, and engaged in formal bilateral meetings with stakeholders on senior cycle development. Beatriz Pont, Senior Analyst, presented some of the OECD's preliminary findings based on this work at the forum. The final OECD report will be available in Spring 2020.

*Ms. Áine O'Sullivan,  
Assistant General Secretary, ACCS,  
February 2020.*