

ACCS Strategic Plan 2013 – 2016

The ACCS Executive has commissioned Newmarket Consulting Ltd to conduct a Strategic Review of ACCS and develop, in consultation with ACCS, a Strategic Plan for the next three years of ACCS. This Strategic Plan will formalise the strategic direction of the organisation and will aim to build on the work carried out by the ACCS in the last 30 years of operation by looking at how the effectiveness of services can be optimised, as well as researching any other quality services that may be introduced to ensure the continuing success of the ACCS as a truly representative organisation.

The Strategic Plan will also take stock of how the ACCS operates as an organisation, from Executive to operational level, to maximise its strategic and operational efficiency and the impact that it has on Boards of Management in our schools.

As part of the Strategic Review we will be conducting research in the form of an online survey to all of our members. We would urge you to participate in this survey. This will be your opportunity to influence the way ACCS will operate into the future.

Convention 2013

The ACCS Convention will take place in The Slieve Russell Hotel Golf and Country Club, Ballyconnell, Co. Cavan on the 7th, 8th and 9th March, 2013.

Dates to remember

7th December, 2012	Nominations for Presidency and motions for Convention to be submitted.
7th January, 2013	Draft agenda of business and nominations for Presidency – including motions to be issued to Member Boards and Executive Members. Member Boards will be invited to submit amendments to the motions.
7th February, 2013	Latest date for receipt of amendments to the motions.
21st February, 2013	A final agenda will be issued to Member Boards.

Anti-Bullying Campaign

The psychologist David Coleman has a new three part series starting on RTE television on Tuesday, October 30, at 10.15pm. David will be dealing with both bullying students and targeted students to rehabilitate them and deal with the bullying issue in schools. It should give us a greater insight into this very real problem in our schools.

A reminder that there are excellent resources for teachers on www.antibullyingcampaign.ie



Carndonagh Community School 'Dún na nGall 4 Sam'



ACCS

Newsletter Nuachtiris

Cumann na Scoileanna Pobail is Cuimsitheacha Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools

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Changing Education

The ACCS Conference will take place in early March 2013 in the Slieve Russell Hotel in Cavan. The theme of the conference is Changing Education. We interpret this theme in two ways. Firstly, education is changing and we can only react to those changes. The other interpretation is that we can play an active part in changing education. The reality is probably somewhere in between. However, we certainly need to be active in the change process if we want to have some control over educational change. It is vitally important that we as practitioners in education have the critical conversations about where we are going and how we propose to get there. But this discussion is far too important to be left only to educationalists. A partnership approach will be much more fruitful.

The NCCA has done sterling work in reporting to the Minister with recommendations around reform in the area of Junior Cycle. The Minister has put his own stamp on this reform with far-reaching proposals particularly in the area of assessment and the reduced emphasis on the Junior Certificate as a State examination. The timelines in this development give schools and the education community enough time to work professionally and effectively to ensure that the proposed changes are beneficial to our students as intended. There has been a welcome from many quarters, including ACCS, for the general thrust of the proposals, but resources must be committed to teacher and leader professional development to ensure successful change. The School Self-Evaluation initiatives which have been developed by the Inspectorate with worthwhile consultation will provide a tool supporting such development. Incidental inspections have proceeded in many schools and have received very positive feedback generally. In the manner in which they have been conducted they have positively supported change in schools.

There are also changes at Patronage level which the Minister has spearheaded. Once again as with many things in education we all realise that such change is inevitable. The difficult piece in all of this is to realistically offer parents a choice which is accessible and understandable. We have had a number of different attempts to do this at both primary and post-primary levels. It is not clear that parents in either sector have had clarity around their choices under the present manner of organising change. There are difficulties ahead for schools in the Community and Comprehensive sector and in the development of new schools in this sector. A Joint Patronage model can be perceived as cumbersome. On the other hand such a partnership is surely one answer to the complex issues of choice and diversity and is certainly one which is working very satisfactorily in our 93 schools. This is what makes the review of the Deed of Trust an urgent matter for us all. There appears to be undue emphasis in the media on this aspect of educational change. At the same time there appears to be little appetite to critically review what is really happening in education at school level and the effects that resource cuts are having on students.

This issue of resources will hardly go away. ACCS is conducting a survey of our schools to quantify the reduced resources in our schools from 2008 until now.

This will feed into our pre-Budget submission. Some of the initial findings make startling reading. In essence we have more pupils with fewer teachers. This had led to some serious changes at school level. We have reduced availability of programmes, particularly at Leaving Certificate Applied level, loss of key subjects and flexibility of subject levels. The latest teacher reduction has made it very difficult for Principals to maintain the one-to-one guidance service provision. This is at a time when mental health problems for our young people have never been more critical. When we have the full results of the survey we will be making our case to the DES in the hope that further budgetary cuts will not be made at the post-primary level. We welcome the work that is being done by the National Procurement Service while recognising that such savings will be at a cost to local businesses and community relationships.

Principals are required to be leaders of learning. There have been many initiatives to support Principals in this role and ACCS has co-operated with all of them, recognising the importance of such work. However, the reduction in middle-management posts has meant that Principals and Deputy Principals have had to take on additional pastoral care and administrative roles which were previously undertaken by post-holders. The small alleviation received by schools from the DES is welcome, but really is insufficient to make a real difference to the work on the ground. Reductions in middle management mean that students are being deprived of a necessary service. Principals have also had a huge additional administrative load over recent years. The advent of new technology has eased the burden somewhat but the pressure of the reductions has been felt most keenly at Principal level. We must support our leaders if they are to carry out their vital leadership of learning role.

We recently held an in-service opportunity for our school secretaries and clerical officers. It was clear from the high attendance that this was an important event for these key members of staff in our schools. Our schools do not have layers of administration or a supportive regional structure. All finance, human resources, industrial relations, administration and personnel functions are conducted entirely at school level. We are a very cost-effective sector but this relies heavily on our Clerical Officers and the Principal as key players in all these operations. The effectiveness of this model relies on sufficient resources at school level. Many of our schools have suffered in this area due to the moratorium. Can a school of 800-1000 students operating all these functions do so with one Clerical Officer? Is it fair that we should have to?

ACCS is committed to working with the DES and the educational partners in the building of a changed educational system which is fair to our students and equally fair to those who work in the system. This Minister has made some very hard decisions. We welcome the OECD study into the governance and funding of second level education. We hope that this will help map a realistic way forward for us all, conscious that we must be both effective and cost-effective.

Ciarán Flynn, General Secretary



Visit our website at
www.accs.ie



This newsletter is a private and confidential document for circulation only to Boards of Management and Principals.
Please circulate to Board Members.



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UPDATES

Assessment in a new Junior Cycle

A Conference on Assessment in a new Junior Cycle was held in the Department of Education and Skills on October 4, 2012. This Conference was the first in a series focused on developments at Junior Cycle.

The Conference was addressed by Professor Paul Black of King's College, London who considered the links between Assessment for Learning and Assessment of Learning and the implications of each for the professional development of teachers and for national policy. He also highlighted the impact of assessment on student learning.

The Minister for Education and Skills addressed the Conference in the afternoon to launch the Junior Cycle Framework. Minister Quinn made the following points in his speech:

- We have to improve the learning experiences of students.
- He welcomed the fact that the syllabus design for each subject at Junior Cycle will set out not only the knowledge to be acquired, but also the skills and attitudes that students should develop.
- How our students actually learn was the concern at the heart of the NCCA vision for reform.
- The Junior Certificate is no longer a high stakes exam.
- Real change only happens when there is real change in assessment.
- The learning experience of students is narrowed if an assessment system is restricted to measuring them through external examinations and testing.
- When the experience is narrowed, both teachers and students focus on learning what is necessary to do well in final examinations.
- We must ensure that assessment becomes a key part of teaching and learning across the three years of Junior Cycle and provides high quality feedback to students and parents.

Changes made by the Minister to the NCCA's proposals published in November 2011 (Towards a Framework for Junior Cycle):

- Over the next eight years the traditional Junior Certificate examination will be phased out.
- There will be a school-based model of assessment only.
- In the first few years of implementation, examination papers will be set by the State Examinations Commission (SEC) but administered and, for the most part, corrected by teachers as part of their assessment of students.
- In the case of English, Irish and Mathematics, the papers will also be corrected by the SEC for an introductory transition period.
- Students will be assessed on a maximum of 10 subjects.

What will the assessment arrangements look like?

The assessment will:

- Include on-going classroom assessment for learning where feedback will be provided to students.
- Include standardised testing in English and Maths from 2014, and Science for all students from 2016. These tests will take place towards the end of Second Year. (Standardised testing in Irish reading for Irish-medium schools from 2014).
- Include a school work component for all subjects completed in Second and Third Year. This will be worth 40% of the overall marks for the subjects (except for Short Courses where it will be worth 100% of marks).
- Include a final assessment in all subjects (except for Short Courses) at the end of Third Year. This will be a single paper examination set by the SEC initially and corrected by the teacher. This will be worth 60% of the overall marks for the subjects.

Phasing-In of revised Subjects:

The revised subjects will be started with First Years in the following years:

Phase 1: 2014	English
Phase 2: 2015	Irish Science Business Studies
Phase 3: 2016	Art, Craft, Design Modern Languages Home Economics Music Geography
Phase 4: 2017	Mathematics Technology subjects Religious Education Jewish Studies Classics History

Students who enter First Year in 2017 will be studying all revised subjects.

Documentation relating to this Conference is up on the ACCS website: www.accs.ie

- A Framework for Junior Cycle.
- Framework Briefing Note.
- Junior Cycle Reform Press Briefing.
- Minister for Education & Skills speech.

Update on School Self-Evaluation

The Inspectorate listened to feedback regarding School Self-Evaluation (SSE) and has made changes to timeframes and documentation. The programme now reads as follows:

- Schools will have **four** years rather than three years in which to evaluate three aspects of the school's work and bring about improvements.
- The process of SSE commenced in September 2012.
- The areas to be evaluated are: Literacy, Numeracy and one other aspect of teaching and learning.
- Whatever area is chosen first in the school will have a two year timeframe for implementation. This is in recognition of the very real changes in School Development Planning that need to happen in order to have effective SSE.
- The Inspectorate recognises that it takes a number of years to build good self-evaluation processes in schools. "In the initial stages, school self-evaluation works best when it focuses on small, discrete aspects of the school's work".
- Once schools get used to the new procedure of SSE, they are expected to follow the process each year for the remaining areas.
- SSE will focus on teaching and learning. "Change must happen in teachers' classrooms if improvement is to happen".

Each year the school will:

- Choose an aspect of teaching and learning as the area of focus for SSE, for example Literacy.

- Adopt a whole-school approach to improving Literacy.

Each subject department will:

- Engage in self-evaluation of the subject with a specific focus on literacy.
- Complete a SSE report that identifies strengths and areas for development in literacy in the subject area.
- Complete a school improvement plan in literacy in the subject area which becomes one element of the school's overall school improvement plan.
- Begin implementation of the school improvement plan.
- Monitor implementation of previous plans.

The questions that the school/subject department should ask themselves in relation to each area of focus are "simple and straightforward":

- How well are we doing?
- How do we know? What evidence do we have?
- How can we find out more? "Asking students is the best way of getting information".
- What are our strengths and areas for development?
- How can we improve?

The following documentation will be distributed to schools for SSE:

- An update for post-primary schools on SSE. Distributed in September 2012.
- A Circular Letter from the DES setting out the Implementation of SSE. Due in November 2012.
- An Introduction to SSE of Teaching & Learning in Post-Primary Schools. This guide will explain in clear detail what SSE is about and who is involved. It will have a 'frequently asked questions' section. Due in November 2012.
- SSE Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools which will be a 'Toolkit' for each school with templates and samples that will be of great practical use to schools. Due in November 2012.

Other support to schools:

- The Inspectorate has committed to sending an Inspector out to each Post-Primary School to inform and support them in their own school context on the SSE process. The Inspector can meet with a Task Group/ Committee formed for SSE or can speak to the whole staff on SSE, whichever suits the school. Originally the Inspectorate expected to visit the schools during this academic year, but due to demands and limited resources, these visits might extend into the academic year 2013/14.
- The PDST will be providing in-service on SSE. Details have not been finalised.

- There will be a dedicated website set up to provide further support for schools containing presentations, guidelines and experiences in SSE. www.schoolself-evaluation.ie

We were very pleased to have had two inspectors speak at our Area Meetings in September about SSE. Maria Lorigan made presentations on SSE to Principals and members of our Boards of Management at both the Dublin and Leinster meetings, while Miriam Horgan presented at the Connacht and Munster meetings. Both inspectors referred to their experiences in working with schools who engaged in the process on a trial basis last year.

The key messages the Inspectorate received from schools who trialled this process last year (half of these trial schools were Community & Comprehensive Schools) were as follows:

- School self-evaluation works.
- Teachers found the process beneficial.
- Principals found it enabled them to engage in a more professionally reflective manner with staff. The Guidelines provided the shared language.
- It enabled all voices to be heard.
- It provided evidence about what was working well and what needed to improve.
- SSE leads to improved outcomes for students.

Issues of Conflict in a School

No matter how well a school manages its environment, issues of conflict can arise from time to time. Disputes may arise between individuals and between individuals and management and may include personal or professional differences, difficulty in adapting to change or inappropriate behaviours.

In such instances, it is important for schools to have clear guidelines in place for handling issues as they arise in the workplace. ACCS, on behalf of the Community and Comprehensive Schools Boards of Management, has entered into agreements/understandings with (i) Trade Unions representing Teaching and Ancillary Staff (ii) PACCS representing Parents/Guardians of Students and (iii) Trustee interests.

The following are the codes currently in place:

- (1) *Code of Practice for Dealing with Complaints of Bullying and Harassment of Staff in Community and Comprehensive Schools* (ACCS, ASTI, IMPACT & TUI).
- (2) *Code of Practice for Dealing with Complaints of Sexual Harassment of Staff in Community and Comprehensive Schools* (ACCS, ASTI, IMPACT and TUI).
- (3) *Grievance, Discipline and Dismissal Procedures for Staff Category: Clerical Officer and/or Caretaker and/or Cleaners (hereafter called the employee) in a Community and Comprehensive School* (ACCS, IMPACT & SIPTU).
- (4) *Code of Practice for Persons with Disabilities* (ACCS & ASTI).
- (5) *Code on Promotion of Equal Treatment for Gay and Lesbian Teachers' in the Workplace* (ACCS & ASTI).
- (6) *Code of Practice for Processing Complaints made by Parents/Guardians or Students (who have reached the age of 18 years) against a Teacher in Community and Comprehensive Schools* (ACCS, ASTI, TUI and PACCS).
- (7) *Code of Practice for Dealing with Complaints of Sexual Harassment of a Teacher by a Student in Community and Comprehensive Schools* (ACCS, ASTI, TUI and PACCS), and
- (8) *Guidelines on the Role of Trustees in Community Schools.*

These Codes of Practice and Policy Guidelines have been adopted by the Boards of Management, as appropriate, in the Community and Comprehensive Schools sector. Copies of these policies/guidelines may be obtained from ACCS or downloaded from the ACCS website: www.accs.ie

The message to Boards of Management, as employers, is to take the right steps in responding to complaints received at the school and to adopt a measured and informed approach, with due diligence.

The ACCS negotiated codes and procedures outline the stages for resolving a complaint/grievance and identify behaviours that are unacceptable in the workplace.

So a Board of Management should:

- Ensure that it adopts the appropriate policy.
- Ensure School management create awareness and inform all respective members of the school community of the policies adopted by the Board that are relevant to them.
- Where appropriate, arrange for the training of staff on policy and procedures.
- Ensure that the codes, relevant policies and procedures are communicated to new staff at induction.
- Arrange to have all employees acknowledge that they have read, and thus are aware of their responsibilities, by signing off on the policies/guidelines, as appropriate, signifying their commitment to compliance.
- Where allegations of bullying and harassment are made and it is deemed necessary to carry out an investigation, ensure impartial investigators are assigned. When allegations are disputed, deemed more complex, or with many witnesses, then an external investigator with appropriate legal and/or industrial relations experience should be appointed by the Board of Management to carry out the investigation.
- Address the well-being of the complainant by assuring them about their well-being and job security etc. Such initiatives will assist in dispelling any misunderstandings of the Board of Management and/or Management intentions where such complaints are lodged.
- Give both parties (the complainant and the subject of the complaint) a copy in writing of the conclusions reached by the Investigating Officer and given an opportunity to comment on the conclusions.
- Depending on the outcome of an investigation and the severity of the offence, the employer will decide on the appropriate course of action. Any recommended disciplinary sanctions must be in accordance with agreed disciplinary procedures.

It is important to remind Board Members, Staff and Parents/Guardians of the existence of these policies/guidelines and the responsibilities that emanate from their publication and adoption.

Boards of Management and Staff must also be aware of the existence of official DES circular letters relating to employment contracts, vetting, industrial relations, disciplinary procedures, child protection matters etc. and how these may impact on their professional roles within the school.

Therefore, the onus is on the Board of Management to ensure that all policies adopted by the Board are communicated, as appropriate, to the respective members of the school community.