An Roinn Oideachais
agus Óige
Department of Education
and Youth

Research, Evidence and Data to Support Policy Development and Implementation: an overview of activity in the Department of Education and Youth

October 2026

Report

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1. Introduction

To facilitate policy development and implementation, the Department of Education and Youth (DEY/the department) and its aegis bodies commission and conduct research and evaluations and draw upon a significant volume of evidence and data.

In this context, this paper aims to provide a summary of the types of research, evidence, and data developed by the department, and how it links to the development and implementation of policy in the department and aegis bodies. The paper is not exhaustive in its scope but does provide an overview and some key examples that illustrate this work.

This includes:

- ✓ Key updates on research networks and capabilities (Part 2)
- ✓ Examples across the department and its aegis bodies of the use of research, evidence and/or data in policy development and/or policy implementation (Part 3)

For further reference, the Department's research team published a paper outlining the research-to-policy and research-to-practice activities of the Department in the journal 'Administration', in its June 2026 Issue. The title of the paper is Developing Evidence for Policy and Practice in the Department of Education and Youth and is available here.

2. DEY Research, Evaluation, Networks and Capacity Building

The department established a dedicated Research, Evaluation and Knowledge Mobilisation section in May 2026. The section comprises departmental Research Officers and the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) team. Among its areas of responsibility are the following, which will be discussed in this section:

- Research, Policy, and Practice Steering Group (RPPSG)
- Annual Education Research Summit
- Fíorú futures-focused research network
- IGEES-supported policy analysis and evaluation work
- Department research repository

The Research, Policy, and Practice Steering Group

Chaired by the Research, Evaluation and Knowledge Mobilisation Unit in the department, the Research, Policy, and Practice Steering Group (RPPSG) meets four times per year. The aim of the RPPSG is to maintain and enhance the integration of research, data, and evidence into the policy cycle of design, implementation, and evaluation. The RPPSG aims to achieve this by reviewing and advising on the model of engagement which would best fulfil the Programme for Government commitments and Statement of Strategy goals and to review and advise on relevant existing departmental subgroups to ensure alignment with strategic goals.

The RPPSG also aims to facilitate collaboration across departmental teams and divisions to support engagement with the work of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation, and Science (D/FHERIS) in embedding an evidence for policy approach. Since last year's iteration of the RED report in May 2025, five RPPSG meetings have been organised which have had a variety of internal and external research projects featured.

An update was provided on systematic literature being carried out by EDU-Relate on high-performing, holistic, and inclusive education systems. Other research input included:

- Horizon Europe
- DFHERIS
- ESAI

The RPPSG also serves as a forum for engagement with Higher Education Institutions and wider stakeholders, including workshop discussions focused on strengthening the link between research and practice in education policy.

Annual Education Research Summit

The department held the first Education Research Summit in Croke Park on 18 November 2025. There were over 180 delegates and over 40 presentations. The keynote was delivered by Professor Selina McCoy from the ESRI and Trinity College Dublin. The Education Research Summit ran parallel sessions with a rich range of presentations and provided key opportunities for networking, discussion, and collaboration. A full database of all 372

abstract submissions from the 2025 Summit has been developed and made available to departmental staff.

The book of abstracts of projects featured at the summit can be found here.

The 2026 Research Summit has been organised as an associate event of Ireland's EU Presidency. It is proposed to select an EU based keynote with the assistance of the International unit and Brussels based colleagues. It will take place on 5 November. The call for abstracts, published on 6 July, focuses on the *Our Schools Our Future* Action Group areas and the education and youth relevant Presidency priorities.

Fíorú

Fíorú, the Futures Oriented Educational Research Network was launched as part of the 2025 Education Research Summit. This 'network of networks' brings together policy makers, researchers in higher education institutions, education practitioners, research funders, think tanks, and policy advisory organisations. The network's future focus will be vital given the multiple challenges facing society and the education system.

The futures oriented educational research network comprises three transdisciplinary themed sub-groups

- Visions of Future Educational Systems.
- Future Schools and Educational Settings.
- Future Educational Outcomes.

Each of these themed sub-groups will bring together policymakers, researchers, and practitioners to conduct activities which have a systemic focus. Each sub-group aims to bring together research from different areas relevant to the theme's holistic focus.

Fíorú mission statement:

> *Our mission is to create a dynamic and inclusive network that brings together researchers, policy makers, and education practitioners in Ireland. Through collaborative inquiry, evidence-informed policy development, sharing of innovative practices and a focus on implementation, we strive to shape a future-focused education system that prepares children and young people for current and future societal*

changes. Our goal is to empower every child and young person to achieve their full potential in an ever-evolving world.

A number of Fíorú activities have been held in collaboration with partner networks, including:

- The T-REX (Teacher Research Evidence Exchange) 'Shared Learning, Shared Island' Conference was held on April 27 in Monaghan Peace Campus. This event was co-organised by T-REX and Fíorú and brought together teachers, principals, researchers and policymakers to explore research-to-practice in education.
- The Educational Studies Association of Ireland (ESAI) 2026 Conference held in Galway from May 28-30 included a joint Fíorú/ESAI symposium 'Learning from the past to inform unknown futures – ESAI and Fíorú'.

Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) – 2025 Delivery and 2026 Work Plan

In 2025, the department's IGEES team supported a range of priority policy areas through economic analysis, appraisal, and evaluation. This included analytical input for departmental business cases and expenditure-related work, including:

- DEIS Plus,
- The DEIS Strategy,
- Establishment of a Commission of Investigation,
- The free schoolbooks scheme,
- Econometric research on absenteeism,
- Primary Teacher Allocation Projections to support Budget 2026,
- Post-Primary Teacher Allocations to support Budget 2026,
- Providing analytical/expertise across a range of departmental working and steering groups.

The development of the IGEES workplan for 2026 reflects the strong and growing role of economic analysis and evaluation in supporting policy across the department. A call for proposals issued to business units in late 2025 resulting in 19 submissions across 10 business units. This high level of engagement demonstrates the value placed on analytical, appraisal,

and evaluation support in informing policy development and decision-making across the department.

Following submission, proposals were subjected to an assessment process, supported by engagement with sponsoring units to refine scope, timelines, and data availability. Each proposal was evaluated against a scoring matrix, including feasibility, strategic alignment with departmental priorities, urgency, and deliverability and the potential to generate robust, policy-relevant evidence. This approach supports a focussed prioritised programme of work, ensuring that IGEES resources are directed towards areas of greatest strategic importance and impact. On this basis, nine projects were identified for progression in 2026, alongside a range of ongoing analytical commitments.

The workplan is shaped by a combination of new project demand and a strong programme of ongoing work. The projects identified for progression in 2026 span a range of priority policy areas and reflect the breadth of analytical support provided by IGEES across the department. This includes conducting two Spending Review papers on current expenditure projections and pension projections. The programme also includes analytical work to support reform, such as analysis of school leadership governance structures, engagement with the data and finance reform project, sector specific research on youth worker retention and recruitment, and analysis related to Post-Primary Languages Ireland.

Ongoing work includes econometric research on school absenteeism using Growing up in Ireland data, costings related to period dignity supports, teacher allocation projections, evaluation of the Community Link Worker Scheme, DEIS, the free schoolbook scheme, and the coordination and development of this Research, Evidence and Data report. In parallel, the IGEES team continues to engage closely with the Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation, contributes to cross-departmental advisory groups, and invests in ongoing skills development and methodological advancement. Taken together, the workplan reflects a balanced portfolio of work, combining expenditure analysis, programme evaluation, and policy-focused research. The work programme is designed to generate robust, policy-relevant evidence to support decision making across a range of areas, while also contributing to effectiveness, value for money, and continuous improvement.

IGEES – Development of Internal Research Methodologies

A key development during 2025 was the introduction of econometric regression analysis to support the building of in-house policy research capacity. The building of capacity to provide analysis using this methodology was driven by a recognition that many education policy challenges are shaped by multiple, interacting factors, and that there was scope to strengthen the department's evidence base through more advanced quantitative methods.

Regression analysis allows multiple factors to be examined simultaneously to understand how each is associated with an outcome, while holding other characteristics constant. For policy, this represents a step beyond descriptive or simple correlation-based analysis. It enables a clearer identification of the factors that are most strongly associated with an issue, helps separate overlapping influences, and supports a more targeted understanding of where policy interventions may be most effective. While not always establishing causation, it provides a more robust and policy-relevant evidence base for decision-making, particularly in complex policy areas where outcomes are influenced by a range of factors.

This approach was applied using Growing Up in Ireland data to examine the factors associated with school absenteeism among 9- and 13-year-olds. This work represents an important expansion of the department's internal analytical capability, supported by the introduction of specialist statistical software (Stata), and establishes a foundation for further application across policy areas. Building on this capability, the IGEES team is progressing further econometric analysis with the Youth Affairs Unit, using data from the youth work workforce survey and employer questionnaire to explore factors relevant to retention and recruitment in the sector.

In parallel, the team has begun scoping the potential application of Social Return on Investment (SROI) methodologies. SROI provides a framework to capture and assign monetary values to social outcomes that are not typically expressed in financial terms. This is particularly relevant in education policy, where many of the most significant impacts, such as improved wellbeing, educational engagement, inclusion, and longer-term life outcomes are not easily monetised within traditional appraisal approaches. By enabling these outcomes to be valued in monetary terms, SROI has the potential to provide a more complete picture of the benefits associated with policy interventions. The IGEES team is exploring the robustness,

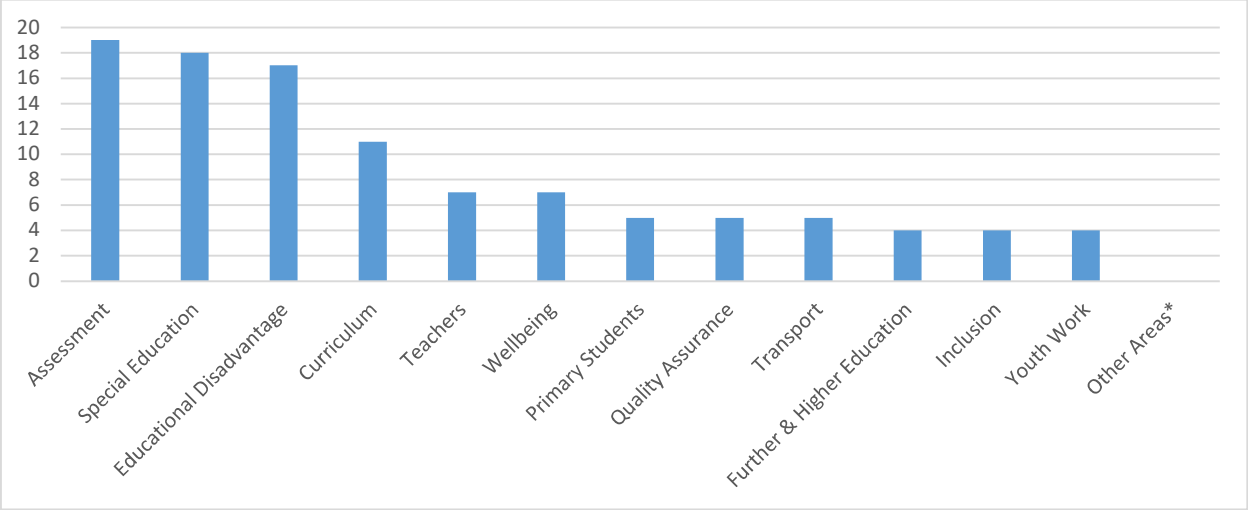
feasibility, and potential application of this approach to strengthen future policy appraisal and evaluation within the department.

Research Inventory

The research officers within the Research, Evaluation and Knowledge Mobilisation Unit maintain an inventory of planned, ongoing and completed research within the department. The inventory brings together projects conducted or commissioned by the DEY and its aegis bodies from 2022 onwards. It captures a substantial body of work across the system and reflects the breadth and depth of evidence being used to inform policy development and implementation. The inventory includes work undertaken by department units, the inspectorate, IGEES, the Educational Research Centre (ERC), the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), the State Examinations Commission (SEC), the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), and other partners.

In total the inventory captures approximately 122 projects spanning across a wide range of defined themes. Figure 1 outlines the number of projects by thematic area. Projects in other areas that are not presented in this table include Irish language, School Buildings, Expenditure Projections, Spending Reviews, Digital Literacy, and Customer Service.

Figure 1: Number of Projects in the Research Repository by Theme



The breadth of subject matter is significant, both within and across categories. Under the 'Assessment' category for example, the relevant research utilises PIRLS, PISA, TIMSS, NAMER results. It also includes research on Leaving Certificate arrangements,. Curriculum-related

work includes primary curriculum review and redevelopment, senior cycle redevelopment, mathematics education, and lifelong guidance. Educational Disadvantage includes DEIS-related analysis, school attendance, schoolbooks, Traveler and Roma education, out-of-school provision, City Connects, P-TECH, and supports for children and young people from Ukraine.

A significant proportion of the inventory comprises Inspectorate-led or Inspectorate-informed work, particularly across Quality Assurance in schools. This includes a substantial work programme of thematic evaluations examining provision and practice across the system. Recent work includes evaluations of Education for Sustainable Development, examining provision and practices in early learning and care settings in primary and post-primary schools, based on a sample of Schools and Early Leaning and Care settings in 2023. In parallel, thematic evaluations of creativity in teaching and learning examine how creativity is supported and enacted across early learning and care contexts and in primary and post-primary schools. These evaluations focus on the quality of provision and practice within the settings, drawing on inspection evidence to assess how policy priorities are implemented in practice across different educational contexts. They provide detailed, practice-based insights, supporting identification of strengths, areas for improvement, and system-level trends.

Overall, the inventory highlights the scale and diversity of research, analysis, and evaluation activity across the department and its aegis bodies. It provides an overview of the evidence base supporting policy development, while also acting as a practical tool for identifying existing work, avoiding duplication and informing the design of new research and evaluation projects. By bringing together all research activity across the system, the inventory supports a more coordinated and strategic approach to the generation and use of evidence, strengthening the department's capacity for evidence-informed policymaking.

Appendix two highlights a selection of recent and notable research publications, grouped by theme, including links to research reports from across the department and its aegis bodies. This provides a snapshot of a broader body of research, evidence and analysis supporting education policy development and implementation.

3. Using Research, Evidence, and Data for Policy

The publication of the Government's Policy Handbook: A Real-World Guide to Policy Development aims to strengthen the consistency, transparency, and quality of policy development across the civil service. The handbook provides a structured, practical framework to support policy makers at all stages of the policy cycle, emphasising the importance of clearly defining problems, drawing on robust evidence, engaging effectively with stakeholders and ensuring that implementation and evaluation are embedded from the outset.

The department has been embedding the principles and approaches set out in the Policy Handbook across policy development processes. This includes the ongoing development of a department-specific template aligned to the handbook, designed to support policy units in structuring policy proposals in a clear and evidence-informed manner.

The handbook outlines the five key stages of policy development, commonly referred to as "the five Ds":

- **Demand** for Policy
- **Deepening** Understanding
- **Design** with Best Advice
- **Decide** Policy Proposals
- **Deliver** Policy

These 5 stages of policy development are underpinned by three core pillars:

- **Data and Evidence** - providing a sound basis for informed decision making.
- **Feasibility and Implementation** - establishing if a goal can be achieved in a reasonable manner, moving from aspiration to reality.
- **Legitimacy -** underpinning goals with political commitment at government level, and/or buy in or acceptance by those affected.



The following examples demonstrate how research, evidence, and data support policy development and implementation across DEY. These examples cover a range of policy areas:

1. Development of a Commission of Investigation
2. Development of a new Literacy, Numeracy, and Digital Literacy Strategy
3. Impact Measurement in the Targeted Youth Employability Support Initiative
4. Redeveloping the Primary School Curriculum

Each example is structured under the following headings:

- **The Challenge** - outlining the policy issue or context
- **The Evidence** - describing the research, data, and analysis used to inform policy development
- **The Policy Action** - setting out the resulting policy response
- **The Link to the Policy Handbook** - highlighting how the example aligns with the stages and pillars of the Government's Policy Handbook.

Example One: Development of a Commission of Investigation

On 7 November 2022, the RTÉ Documentary on One: Blackrock Boys was broadcast on RTÉ Radio 1. The documentary described the accounts of two brothers who were sexually abused in Blackrock College, Dublin. Following the broadcast many survivors came forward from this school and others, outlining similar experiences.
In response to the revelations, the then Minister for Education announced, on 7 March 2023, the establishment of a Scoping Inquiry into Historical Sexual Abuse in Day and Boarding Schools run by Religious Orders.

The Challenge

The Scoping Inquiry was established as a non-statutory inquiry and it was asked to complete a number of tasks, the foremost of which was to set out a potential framework for a government response that, in so far as possible, would best meet the outcomes sought by survivors of historical sexual abuse. Central to this approach was a Survivor Engagement process, to enable consultation with survivors and to learn what was important to survivors and what the next steps should be.

- ✓ The completed Scoping Inquiry report consisted of 26 chapters, spanning five volumes, and over 700 pages.
- ✓ Over 200 people completed initial questionnaires in the Survivor Engagement process.
- ✓ 149 survivors relayed their experiences in over 80 schools and their views on what should happen next, through one-to-one interviews and submissions.
- ✓ The Scoping Inquiry team engaged with 81 religious orders over 13 months - a total of 42 religious orders had recorded 2,395 allegations of sexual abuse in relation to 308 schools, made in respect of 884 alleged abusers. 590 allegations related to special schools. The remit of the Scoping Inquiry was to collect data on allegations from 1927 - 2013.
- ✓ In total, the Scoping Inquiry made 14 recommendations.

The Scoping Inquiry report was published on 3rd September 2024. The Government accepted the principal recommendation of the report to establish a Commission of Investigation, and the then Minister for Education convened a high level Inter-Departmental Group (IDG) to prepare draft Terms of Reference for the Commission of Investigation for consideration and approval; and to consider each of the 14 recommendations of the report and advise on the appropriate response to these. This also prompted a Programme for Government commitment in 2025 to establish a Commission of Investigation.

The Evidence

An Inter-Departmental Group (IDG) was convened, chaired by the Secretary General of the DEY and attended at Assistant Secretary level from a number of departments, supported by advice from the Office of the Attorney General.

The department provided the secretariat for the IDG and produced a work schedule for the IDG to facilitate detailed consideration of all 14 recommendations. The recommendations were grouped thematically or were considered separately. In total, 6 recommendation themes were identified, relating to:

1. The establishment of a Commission of Investigation
2. Consideration of a redress scheme
3. Improvements in the legal system for victims & survivors
4. Commemoration and memorialisation
5. Dedicated supports for survivors
6. Child protection

The department arranged and facilitated the holding of eleven IDG meetings between 17 September 2024 and 3 April 2025 and prepared original material for the IDG including the development of 38 original papers, incorporating research, analysis, data, and evaluation. The Minister, and Government, accepted the Final Report of the IDG and announced the establishment of the Commission of Investigation into the Handling of Historical Child Sexual Abuse in Schools on 8 July 2025.

The department was subsequently tasked with developing the design of the Commission of Investigation and the associated Business Case to be agreed with the Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform, and Digitalisation (DPER). As part of the Business Case, the department completed four phases of work with the assistance, input, and specialist knowledge of the IGEES team.

1. **Key Background Data Analysis**

   A Programme Logic Model (PLM) for the Commission of Investigation outlining the Inputs, Activities, Outputs, and Outcomes of the project was developed. Throughout the process, the views of survivors as expressed in the Survivor Engagement process of the Scoping Inquiry were paramount. An evaluation of the high-level objectives of the Commission was undertaken for the PLM, along with an assessment of historical inquiries, the importance of controlling costs, reporting quickly, system improvements, and providing a trauma informed approach. Research was also conducted on the potential participation rates of survivors. Development of initial estimates for costing the Commission of Investigation staff was undertaken with additional sensitivity analysis based on the potential participation rates of the Survivor Engagement Programme**.**

2. **Scenario Analysis – Development of Options**

   Six potential investigative options for the Commission were developed, examining a range of potential directions the investigation could take from smaller internal investigations to an investigation without a sunset clause. The potential investigative options underwent qualitative analysis, assessing their strengths and limitations, with two options deemed unfeasible. The remaining four potential options were brought forward for further assessment under a Cost-Effectiveness Analysis that utilised a multi-criteria framework (CEA-MCA).

3. **Cost-Effectiveness Analysis**

   A CEA-MCA model was developed which included eight macro performance criteria, 22 sub-criteria, along with a weighting and scoring system. 30% of the weighting was assigned to the cost criterion to ensure that cost received adequate value. With this in

place, an assessment of the four potential investigation options took place with each option being assigned quantitative scores under the weighing and scoring system. The scores for each criterion were summed to produce a robust quantitative figure that holistically scored the merits of each option. The Shadow Price of Public Funds, the Social Discount Rate, and the Shadow Price of Labour were included in the scoring system. During the CEA-MCA, five potential investigative options were fully costed with estimates provided for accommodation, staff, legal team, support for survivors, technical services, administration, incidentals, wind-up, and 3rd party legal fees. Additional cost sensitivity analysis was performed with a weighting of 20% and 40% allocated to the cost criterion to ensure robustness. This did not alter the final placement of the options, thereby strengthening the case for the recommended option.

The result of the CEA–MCA produced the following recommended option for the Commission of Investigation: *Establish an Independent Commission of Investigation, duration up to 5 years with strict sunset clause, and specifying a robust sampling approach in its Terms of Reference. 1 Chair and 3 Commissioners.*

4. **Final Commission of Investigation Design**

Informed by the result of the CEA-MCA, a final Commission of Investigation design was produced by department on the recommended option. In preparing the final design, the department engaged in consultation with personnel who have previously worked on, or chaired statutory inquiries, in relation to structures, essential skill sets, staffing, and resourcing and reporting relationships. The final design included the creation of 60-month Exchequer Cash Flow Analysis and sensitivity analysis across multiple strands.

The Policy Action

Mr Justice Michael MacGrath was appointed as Chair of the Commission of Investigation with effect from 01 October 2025.

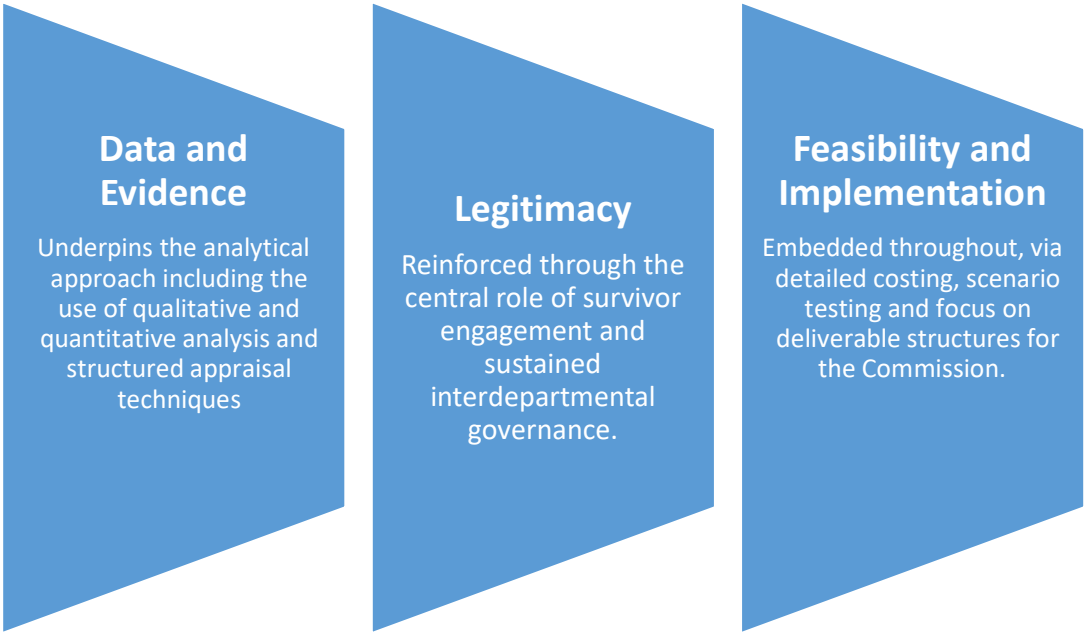
The scope of the Commission has been expanded, as recommended by the Scoping Inquiry, and accepted by Government on foot of the outcome of the IDG considerations, and will investigate the handling of allegations or concerns of historical child sexual abuse in all day

and boarding schools in Ireland, including special schools, which occurred between 1927 and 2013.

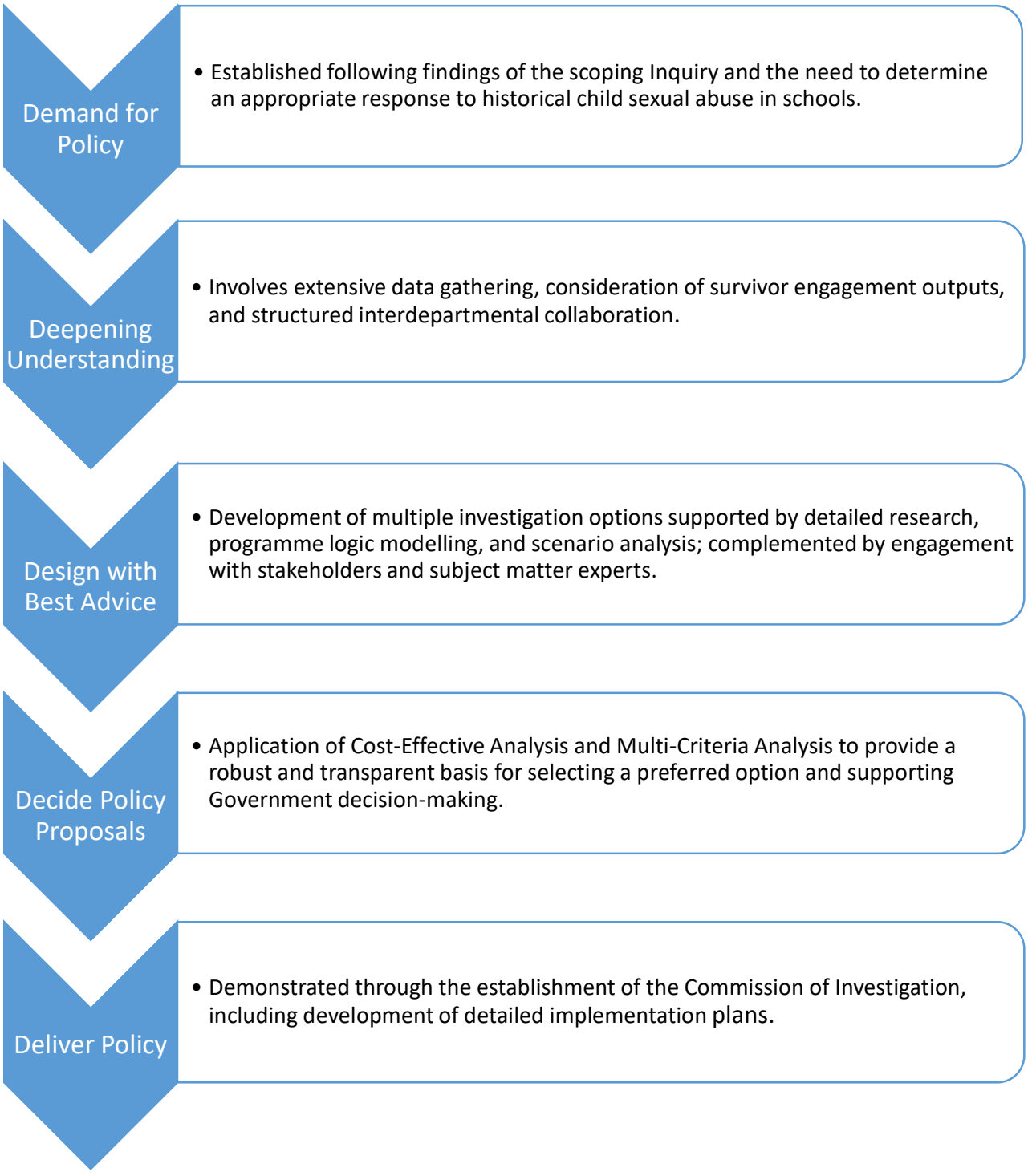
The Commission is now in its establishment phase and completing essential preparatory work to develop its exact processes and ways of working. The Commission will be organised in two workstreams and recruitment of the necessary staff has begun. Workstream one will be a formal investigation of sample cases or instances of the handling of allegations, complaints or concerns of child sexual abuse in schools, while Workstream two is the Survivor Engagement Programme, which will provide an opportunity for those who experienced historical child sexual abuse in schools to give their account in a non-adversarial, informal, and anonymised process.

The Link to the Policy Handbook

The 3 Pillars



The 5 Ds


Demand for Policy
• Established following findings of the scoping Inquiry and the need to determine an appropriate response to historical child sexual abuse in schools.
Deepening Understanding
• Involves extensive data gathering, consideration of survivor engagement outputs, and structured interdepartmental collaboration.
Design with Best Advice
• Development of multiple investigation options supported by detailed research, programme logic modelling, and scenario analysis; complemented by engagement with stakeholders and subject matter experts.
Decide Policy Proposals
• Application of Cost-Effective Analysis and Multi-Criteria Analysis to provide a robust and transparent basis for selecting a preferred option and supporting Government decision-making.
Deliver Policy
• Demonstrated through the establishment of the Commission of Investigation, including development of detailed implementation plans.

Example Two: Development of a new Literacy, Numeracy, and Digital Literacy Strategy

In 2020 the Government committed to develop a new Literacy, Numeracy, and Digital Literacy Strategy to ensure that every learner develops the skills needed to thrive in today's rapidly changing society. Literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy form the foundation for personal and educational achievement, enabling learners to access knowledge, information, and opportunities. A strategy that nurtures and enhances these skills from birth to young adulthood was deemed essential to promote equitable access to education, support lifelong learning, and contribute to social, cultural, and economic development. This new strategy was to build on the successes of the DEY Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2011–2020 and the 2017 interim review.

The subsequent Literacy, Numeracy, and Digital Literacy Strategy 2024–2033: *Every Learner from Birth to Young Adulthood* reflects a commitment to responding to evolving societal demands, the increasing role of technology in learning, and the need for inclusive, evidence-informed approaches to learning, teaching, and assessment. These considerations informed the development of the strategy and highlighted the key challenges it needed to address. The process was underpinned by extensive research and consultation with stakeholders across the early learning and care (ELC) and school sectors.

The Challenge

The education landscape has evolved considerably since the 2011 strategy was developed. Advances in technology, changing societal needs, and developments in pedagogy mean that learners now require a broader and more integrated set of skills.

Key challenges identified included:

- Strengthening numeracy outcomes while building on previous progress
- Supporting learners experiencing educational disadvantage to ensure equitable access
- Strengthening literacy for and through the Irish language
- Developing digital literacy skills to meet the demands of a technology-driven society

- Enhancing coordination and collaboration across stakeholders to reinforce and support literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy

These challenges reflect the need for an education system that is adaptable, inclusive, and forward-looking, enabling all learners to thrive in an increasingly complex world.

The Evidence

Development of the strategy was underpinned by a strong focus on research, evidence, and data. A comprehensive programme of research and consultation ensured that the strategy is informed by what works in practice, both nationally and internationally.

A key priority in developing this ten-year strategy was to ensure it was grounded in robust evidence. This included:

- Reviewing the 2011 Literacy and Numeracy Strategy and the 2017 Interim Review
- Examining relevant national and international research
- Identifying best practice across jurisdictions
- Informing the development of recommendations and actions

To support this work, the department commissioned a comprehensive programme of research. The research which took over 18 months to complete included twenty-eight separate systematic reviews along with the report Outcomes of the National Literacy Strategy in Relation to DEIS in Early Childhood Education, Primary, and Post-Primary (Shiel, French, Kennedy & McCormack, 2023). The reviews explored pedagogical strategies, approaches and methodologies to support literacy and numeracy. The areas covered are:

- Literacy
- Numeracy
- Assessment
- Supporting literacy and numeracy development of diverse learners across the curriculum
- Supporting children with Autism, mathematics difficulties, and Dyslexia and general literacy difficulties
- Needs of children who are deaf or hard of hearing
- Roma and Traveller children
- High achieving learners

- Continuous professional learning
- Engaging parents and communities.

The systematic reviews examined effective pedagogical strategies, approaches, and methodologies to support literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy. They also considered both cognitive and affective dimensions of learning, including learner voice and agency. The findings were synthesised in the report 'Towards a New Literacy, Numeracy, and Digital Literacy Strategy: A Review of Literature' , which provided a strong evidence base for the strategy.

The consultation process was closely informed by the research phase. At this stage, the then Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth (DCEDIY) joined the process to ensure a strong focus on the early learning and care (ELC) sector.

A wide-ranging consultation process took place from December 2022 to June 2023. It sought perspectives on literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy in a modern context and highlighted the importance of alignment with related strategies and policies across government.

Engagement included a broad range of stakeholders including learners at primary and post-primary schools, school leaders and teachers, early years educators and managers, parents, and other stakeholders. The consultation consisted of a public consultation, sixteen targeted focus groups and a stakeholder consultation event. The views gathered were analysed and reported through comprehensive consultation and technical reports, directly informing the development of the strategy and accompanying implementation plan.

The Policy Action

The Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy 2024-2033: *Every Learner from Birth to Young Adulthood* is set across all stages of the learner's journey from early learning and care to post-primary school. It sets out the vision that: *Every learner, from birth to young adulthood, develops the necessary literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy skills to thrive and flourish as an individual, to engage and contribute fully as an ethical, active member of society, and to live a satisfying and rewarding life.*

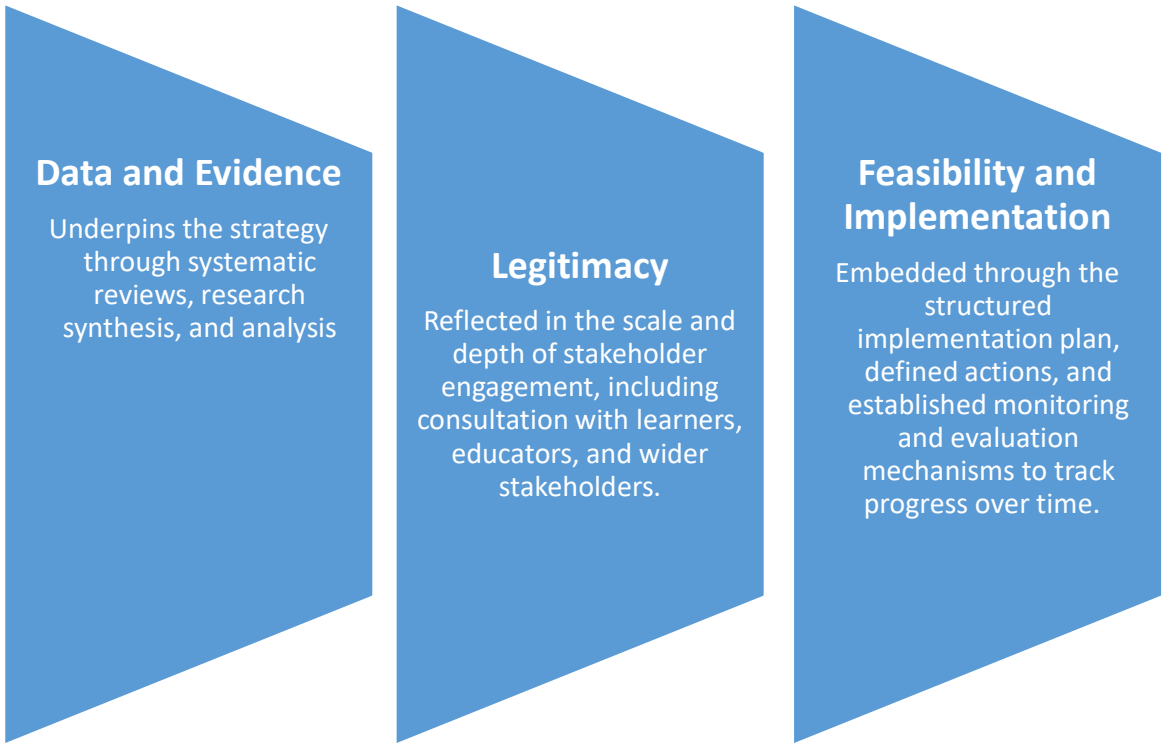
The strategy includes 22 objectives organised under five key pillars:

- **Pillar 1:** Enabling parents and communities to support learners' literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy
- **Pillar 2:** Supporting the professional practice of early years educators and teachers
- **Pillar 3:** Supporting leadership in early learning and care and in the school system
- **Pillar 4:** Improving the learner experience through curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment
- **Pillar 5:** Supporting diverse learners to achieve their potential

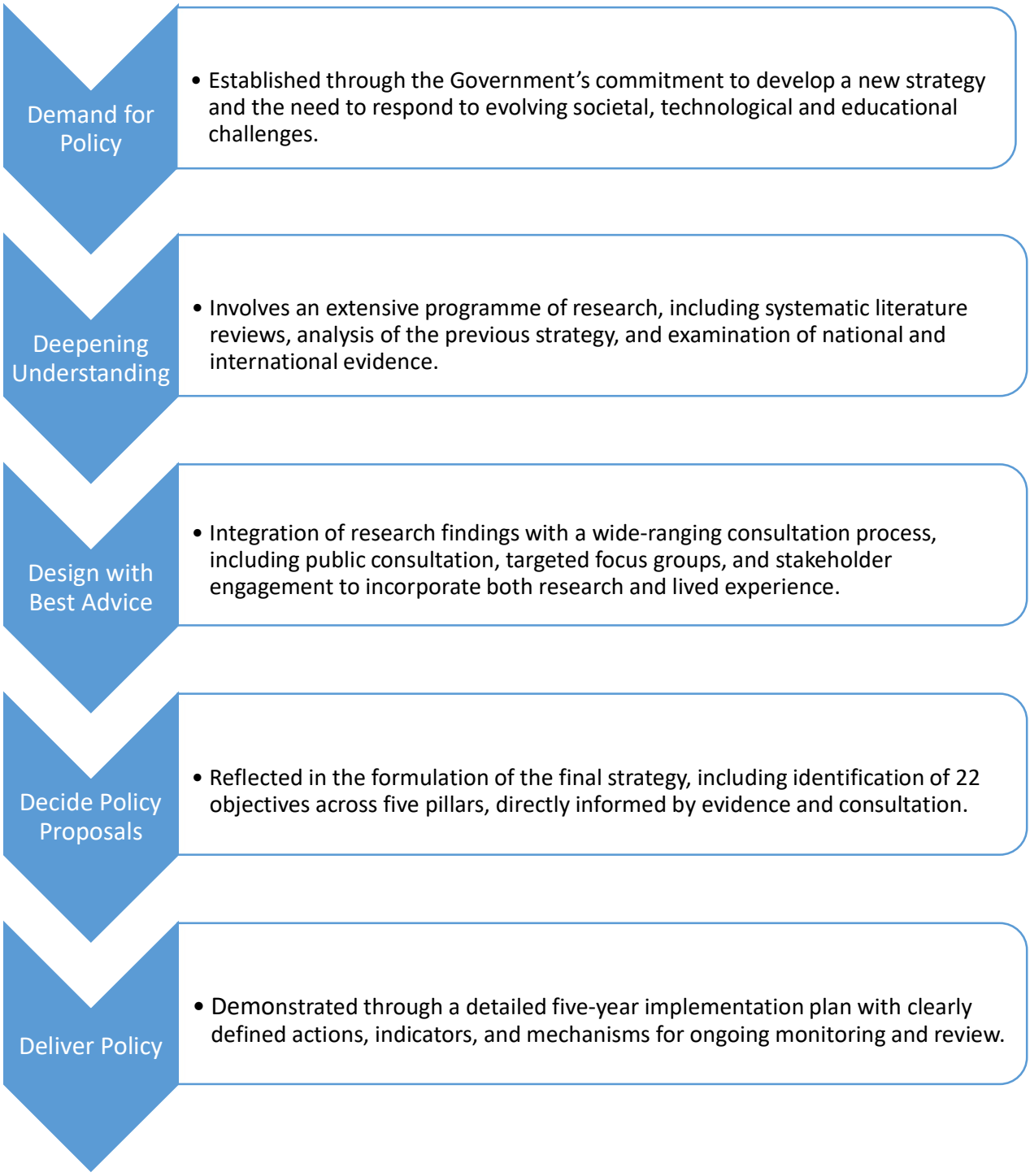
A comprehensive five-year implementation plan has been developed with over 100 actions set out under the 22 objectives. Measuring the success of the strategy will be a continuous process involving the collection and analysis of data and feedback from a broad range of sources. These include data from both departments, information, and feedback from key stakeholders and learners, and results of national and international testing at primary and post-primary school level. Indicators have also been identified to track progress over the lifetime of the strategy. The development of the Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy demonstrates the central role of research, evidence, and data in informing policy.

The Link to the Policy Handbook

The 3 Pillars



The 5 Ds


Demand for Policy
• Established through the Government's commitment to develop a new strategy and the need to respond to evolving societal, technological and educational challenges.
Deepening Understanding
• Involves an extensive programme of research, including systematic literature reviews, analysis of the previous strategy, and examination of national and international evidence.
Design with Best Advice
• Integration of research findings with a wide-ranging consultation process, including public consultation, targeted focus groups, and stakeholder engagement to incorporate both research and lived experience.
Decide Policy Proposals
• Reflected in the formulation of the final strategy, including identification of 22 objectives across five pillars, directly informed by evidence and consultation.
Deliver Policy
• Demonstrated through a detailed five-year implementation plan with clearly defined actions, indicators, and mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and review.

Example Three: Impact Measurement in the Targeted Youth Employability Support Initiative

The Challenge

There was a clear need to address how to adequately measure the impact of a youth work programme that supports and engages young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), who frequently report feeling unsafe, unhappy and isolated, often experiencing high levels of anxiety, low confidence, and poor motivation. Research shows that these young people may cycle repeatedly between low-level education or training, temporary or insecure work, and NEET status (Connelly, 2024). This instability undermines their engagement and complicates efforts to measure progress meaningfully.

Traditional experimental impact measurement approaches may not always be suited to research or evaluations in youth work settings. They may not easily capture the nuanced, relational, and subjective changes, (for example, confidence, agency, determination, resilience) that characterise impactful youth work. As the Targeted Youth Employability Support Initiative (TYESI) is an employability-focused youth work programme that prioritises these developmental outcomes, there is a clear need for a robust yet flexible way to understand "what impact looks like" for participants, from the perspective of the young people who participate and engage in the programme.

The Evidence

To address this need, the Youth Affairs Unit in the department partnered with the Department of Applied Social Studies in Maynooth University to adapt the MIYO Toolkit (Measuring the Impact of Youth Organisations) specifically for the TYESI. This work was shaped by research demonstrating that youth work can act as a counterweight, helping young people increase confidence, motivation, and readiness to enter education or employment (Connelly, 2024). It draws on a research approach grounded in co-production and social justice, positioning youth workers and young people as active partners in shaping the tool rather than passive subjects of measurement. This is of value because it ensures that the tool reflects the focus of the practice and produces more credible and actionable

findings, rather than externally imposed indicators of success, while also strengthening trust, ownership, and building sustained engagement in the process (McGarry, Bradley & Kirwin, 2024).

Insights from Young People and Practitioners

Through seven consultations in phase 1 (with youth workers, managers of youth projects and ETBS, and past TYESI participants), a rich evidence base was developed. Young people described how TYESI supports their:

a. self-discovery and recognising transferable strengths
b. confidence to move into education or work
c. presentation and language skills
d. managing anxieties about employment
e. speaking up and expressing themselves
f. developing structure, friendships, and a sense of belonging
g. building CVs and gaining experience

This reinforced the need for an impact approach that reflects real-world, lived experiences and captures both personal, social development, soft skills, and their employability outcomes. The evidence shaped the design of a new measurement tool based on five key outcome areas:

1. Communication Skills
2. Confidence
3. Agency
4. Resilience
5. Determination

Two core design considerations guided development:

- creating demographic questions to understand context, identify patterns, and monitor "harder to reach" groups

- constructing indicator statements for each outcome area to assess perceived impact over time

Demographic information is essential to understanding progress among priority groups, supporting inclusive practice, and ensuring resources reach those most in need. A TYESI-specific focus group guide and training package were developed to enable youth workers to facilitate structured conversations to elicit young people's experience of their engagement in the programme. These qualitative elements offer deeper insights into experiences of impact, complementing the survey data.

Pilot Phases and Refinements

The evidence base for the development of the tool was further strengthened through:

- Pilot surveys across all 18 TYESI projects
- Pilot focus groups with three projects (two in the South and one in the East)
- A reflections workshop involving young people and youth workers

Feedback from pilots led to adjustments in survey statements, focus group prompts, and tool usability, ensuring the toolkit is both robust and youth friendly. This process reflects youth work practice as a continually evolving, reflective discipline.

The Policy Action

The evidence garnered from engagement with young people and youth workers and piloting the tools, informed the next steps of implementation, focusing on:

- equipping projects with a structured, proportionate, meaningful way to measure impact
- capturing the developmental outcomes that matter most to NEET young people
- strengthening programme learning and accountability
- supporting continuous improvement in employability-oriented youth work
- generating high-quality data from the analysis of 206 completed impact surveys on a bespoke system to inform future policy and practice development

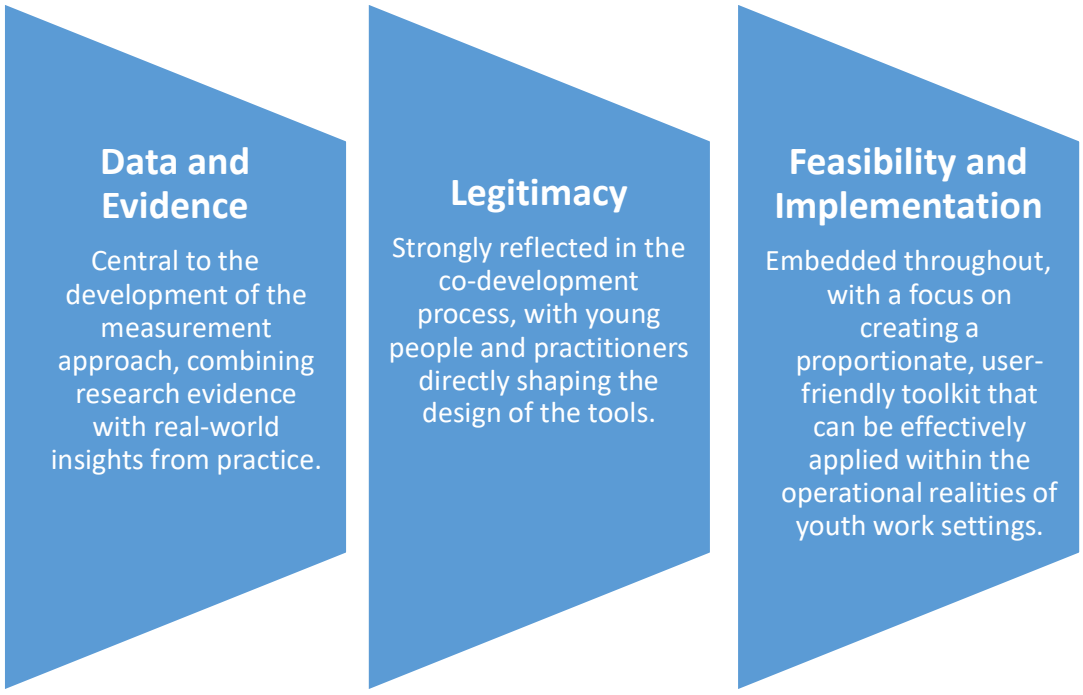
The toolkit includes:

- a self-completion survey instrument aligned to the five outcome areas
- an Excel-based bespoke analysis tool and user guide
- a focus group facilitation guide and training materials
- templates for ongoing reflection and adaptation

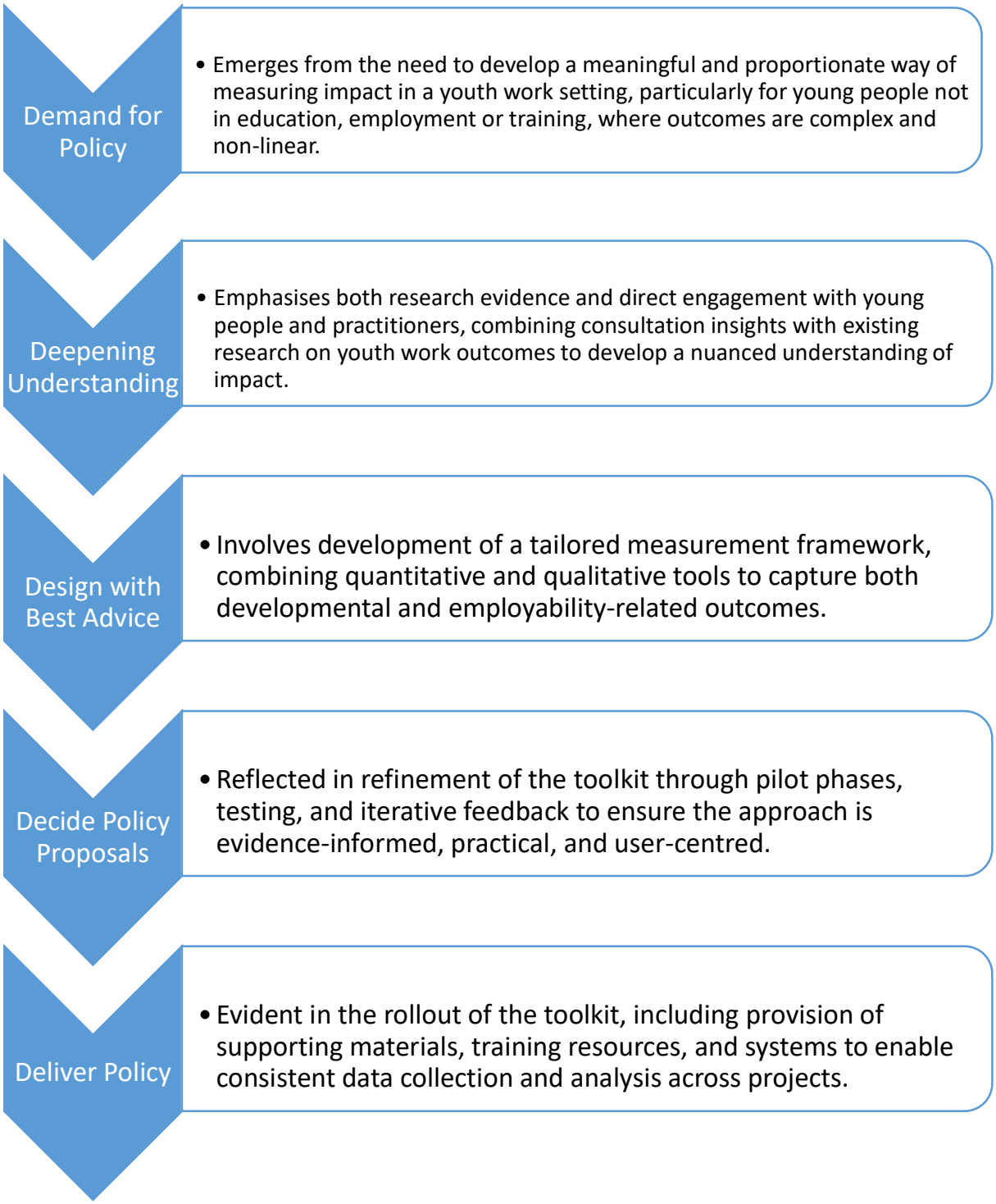
Next steps include completing final refinements, preparing implementation materials for TYESI projects, and embedding the toolkit within ongoing programme practice. Over time, the data generated will help build a more robust understanding of what impact looks like for young people, from their own perspective, who face significant social and employability barriers.

The Link to the Policy Handbook

The 3 Pillars



The 5 Ds


Demand for Policy
• Emerges from the need to develop a meaningful and proportionate way of measuring impact in a youth work setting, particularly for young people not in education, employment or training, where outcomes are complex and non-linear.
Deepening Understanding
• Emphasises both research evidence and direct engagement with young people and practitioners, combining consultation insights with existing research on youth work outcomes to develop a nuanced understanding of impact.
Design with Best Advice
• Involves development of a tailored measurement framework, combining quantitative and qualitative tools to capture both developmental and employability-related outcomes.
Decide Policy Proposals
• Reflected in refinement of the toolkit through pilot phases, testing, and iterative feedback to ensure the approach is evidence-informed, practical, and user-centred.
Deliver Policy
• Evident in the rollout of the toolkit, including provision of supporting materials, training resources, and systems to enable consistent data collection and analysis across projects.

Example Four: Redeveloping the Primary School Curriculum

In recent years, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has worked with teachers, children, parents, school leaders, and partners across the system to redevelop the Primary School Curriculum so that every child can learn, thrive, and flourish in a changing world. The redeveloped primary curriculum is for all primary and special schools. The approach has been evidence-informed and human-centred combining research, sustained consultation processes, extensive work with schools, and iterative deliberation through NCCA's development structures.

What follows distills this journey identifying the challenge, the evidence that guided decisions, and the policy actions required to ensure impact at scale.

The Challenge

The 1999 Primary School Curriculum served Ireland well but by the mid-2010s no longer reflected the realities of children's lived experiences or the complexities of modern classrooms. Today, children are growing up in a world shaped by climate change, rapid advances in digital and artificial intelligence technologies, shifting demographics, and the legacy of the pandemic. At the same time, contemporary research gives us a clearer understanding of how children learn and develop, and there is stronger recognition of children's voice and agency in their learning.

In the years following the introduction of the 1999 Primary School Curriculum, reviews (2005, 2008) unearthed significant challenges in its implementation, including a sense of curriculum overload and challenges related to the use of time across the curriculum – having too much to 'cover' in too little time, balancing integrated learning with subject learning, and necessary guidance around assessment and progression of learning across the curriculum. In more recent years, the Children's School Lives study (2018 – 2023) highlighted the impacts of the pandemic on children's learning and development, as well as their limited sense of 'voice' in their learning, and how assessment practices impact on how they see themselves as learners – a key determinant of future learning and development for children.

The developments at primary level unfolded alongside the updating of Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (2024) and the development of the Framework for Junior

Cycle (2015) in post-primary education. The task, therefore, was not simply to develop new specifications, but to support coherence across sectors ensuring children and their learning remain at the centre of policy intentions.

The Evidence

The scale and nature of these challenges demanded a redevelopment process capable of drawing together diverse forms of evidence and lived experience. In response, the NCCA adopted a multi-strand approach, integrating research, consultation, networks, and structured deliberation, to build an accurate picture of what was happening in classrooms, what teachers and children needed, and how the curriculum could better reflect contemporary understandings of learning.

Research

The NCCA generated, used and shared diverse forms of research to inform and advance the work on the redeveloped Primary School Curriculum. Over 150 published artefacts informed the redevelopment, including systematic reviews across the five curriculum areas, research papers on digital technology, integration, assessment, curriculum structures, pedagogies, competencies, and principles of learning, teaching, and assessment.

In parallel, the NCCA commenced a five-year longitudinal study in 2018, Children's School Lives, in collaboration with researchers in University College Dublin (UCD). The study tracked 4,000 children across 189 primary and special schools in Ireland providing deeply insightful and up-to-date research on the experiences of primary education in Ireland in the period 2018 – 2023.

Consultation

Leveraging the knowledge and expertise of all the partners in education, particularly that of children, teachers, school leaders, and parents, is central to the curriculum development work of the NCCA. In the redevelopment of the Primary School Curriculum, a number of consultative approaches and formats were employed, including online and in-person events, webinars, symposia, bilateral meetings, focus groups, online surveys, and other fora.

Across consultations hosted from 2016 to 2024, the NCCA:

- received 9,383 questionnaires
- received 1,474 written submissions
- consulted with over 350 children
- conducted 111 bilateral meetings
- engaged with 1,122 people through consultative events
- worked with 231 schools.

The views of all contributors were gathered, analysed, and reported through comprehensive consultation and technical reports. You can find out more about the consultations here.

Networks

In its development of advice for the Minister for Education and Youth, the NCCA employs a variety of approaches to interact and collaborate with children, teachers, school leaders, parents, and wider stakeholders in reviewing, discussing, and shaping curriculum and assessment developments. In terms of the primary curriculum redevelopment work, networking with schools has been a central component to the redevelopment process. Established in 2018, the Schools Forum comprises representatives from approximately 60 schools, including a cross-section of urban, rural, Irish-medium, and both DEIS and non-DEIS schools. The Forum has provided in-depth feedback on key proposals related to the curriculum.

In addition, an Advisory Panel was established to support the curriculum redevelopment process in 2020. The appointment of the Advisory Panel was a deliberate effort by the NCCA to open up its curriculum redevelopment process to outsiders who brought particular insights and expertise relating to curriculum redevelopment from outside Ireland. Through their work, the panel members have engaged with NCCA Executive Team members, department officials, and wider education partners.

Deliberations

Given the extensive work undertaken, the deliberations undertaken by the NCCA in terms of using the evidence and perspectives gathered, were a critical feature of the redevelopment process.

The redevelopment process was supported through a number of structures within the NCCA. These include:

- Council - the corporate body of the NCCA with overall responsibility for curriculum and assessment advice for the Minister for Education and Youth.
- Early Childhood and Primary Board - comprising representatives of educational stakeholders and providing oversight of developments across early childhood and primary education.
- Development Groups - comprising individuals with experience and expertise in specific curriculum areas who work on the detail of specification development through engaging with research, debate, and discussion, collaborating with, and listening to, contributions from school leaders, teachers, children, and parents.

The Policy Action

The Primary School Curriculum was reviewed and redeveloped to ensure it continues to provide a strong foundation for high-quality learning, teaching, and assessment for all children in primary and special schools. The redevelopment reflects Irish society's shared understanding of, and confidence in, the strengths of primary and special education, while providing clear updated priorities for what children learn and how they learn in school.

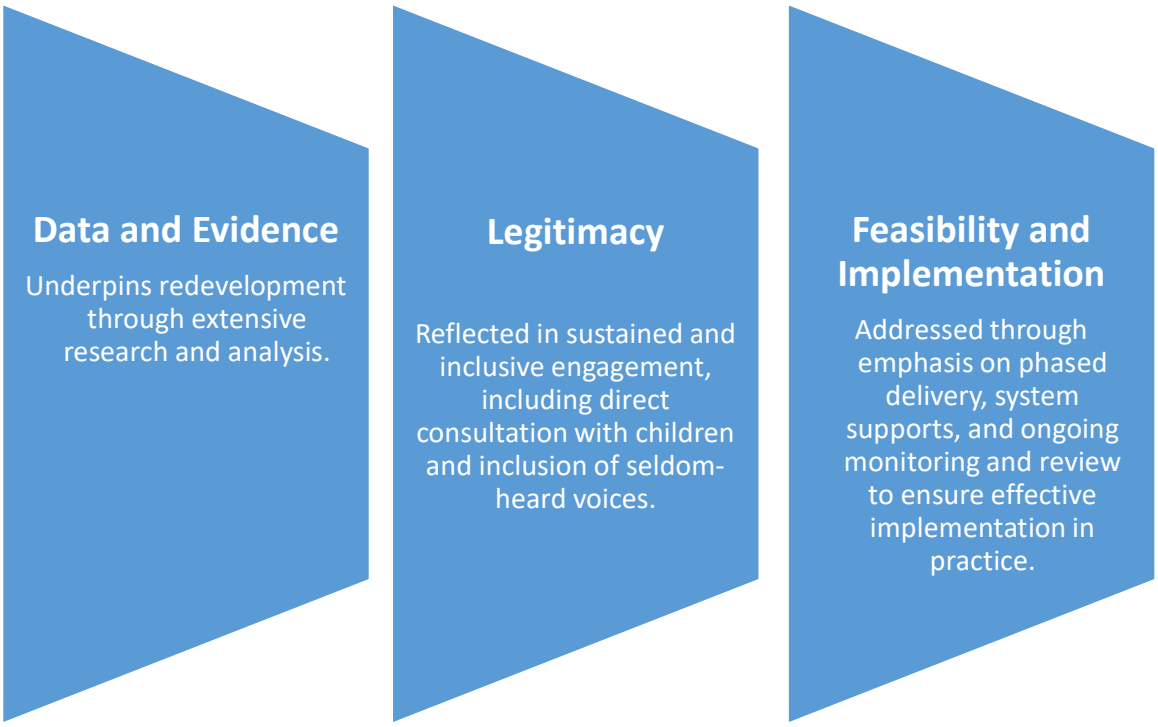
The redeveloped curriculum:

- is for all primary and special schools
- sets the vision and principles for a redeveloped curriculum
- introduces key competencies for children's learning
- introduces and expands aspects of learning including STEM Education, Modern Foreign Languages, Technology, Religions, Beliefs and Worldviews (RBW), and a broader Arts Education
- holds increased emphasis on existing areas such as Physical Education and Social, Personal, and Health Education (SPHE) (Wellbeing), and digital learning
- provides greater agency and flexibility for teachers and children.

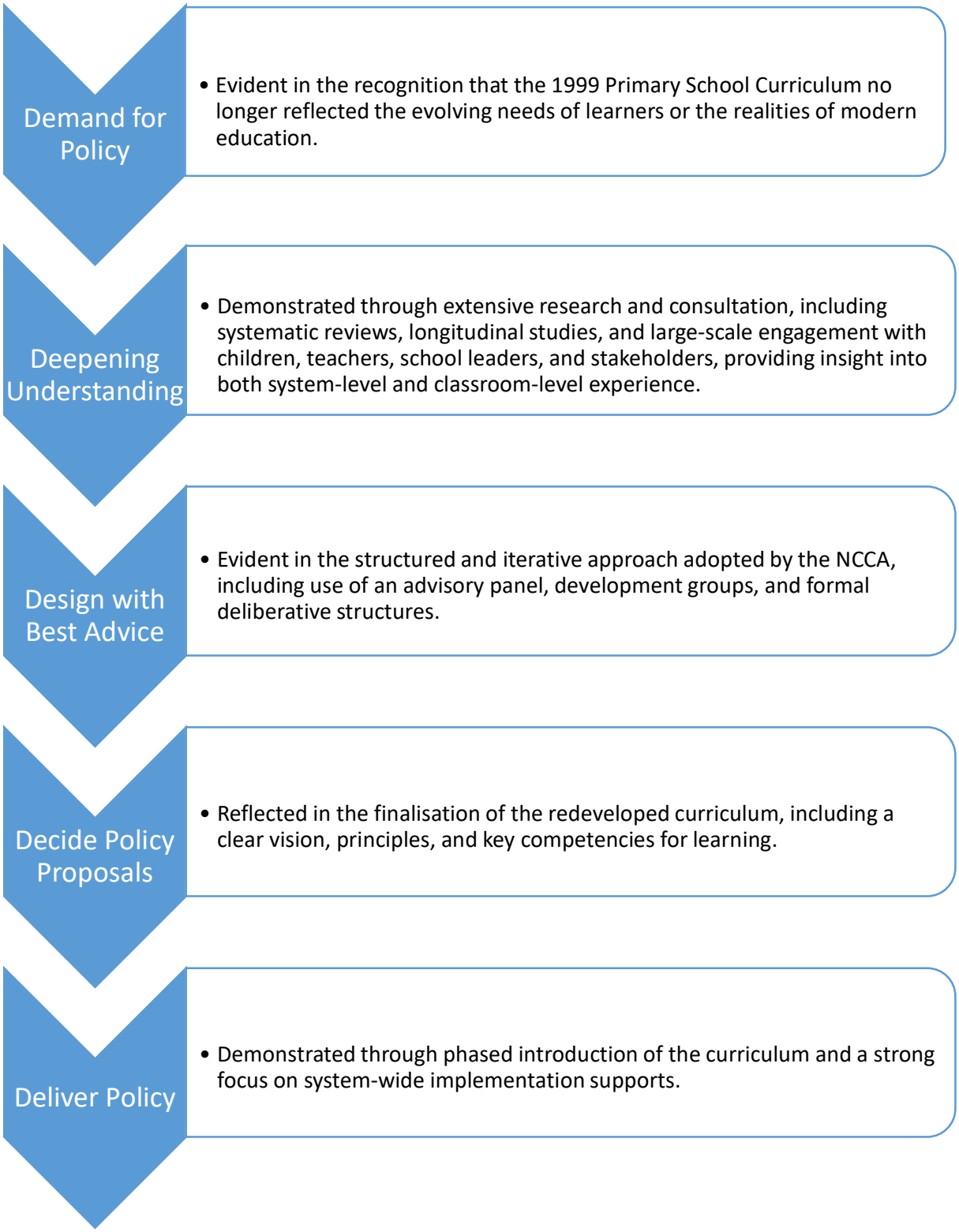
The redeveloped curriculum has begun with a phased introduction, with full enactment over several years. Importantly, there has been sustained attention paid to the conditions to

support the redeveloped curriculum at a system level. This has involved the identification of shared vision, policy alignment, capacity building, ongoing monitoring and review, communications, and professional learning as key levers for successful enactment. This work has necessitated sustained inter-agency and departmental collaboration across those with responsibilities in these areas involving a departmental Steering Group, inter-agency communications work, quality assurance processes for curriculum supports/resources, and stakeholder involvement in professional learning design.

The Link to the Policy Handbook



The 5 Ds


Demand for Policy
• Evident in the recognition that the 1999 Primary School Curriculum no longer reflected the evolving needs of learners or the realities of modern education.
Deepening Understanding
• Demonstrated through extensive research and consultation, including systematic reviews, longitudinal studies, and large-scale engagement with children, teachers, school leaders, and stakeholders, providing insight into both system-level and classroom-level experience.
Design with Best Advice
• Evident in the structured and iterative approach adopted by the NCCA, including use of an advisory panel, development groups, and formal deliberative structures.
Decide Policy Proposals
• Reflected in the finalisation of the redeveloped curriculum, including a clear vision, principles, and key competencies for learning.
Deliver Policy
• Demonstrated through phased introduction of the curriculum and a strong focus on system-wide implementation supports.

Appendix One: Definitions

Term	Definition
Research	"Creative and systematic work undertaken to increase the stock of knowledge – including knowledge of humanity, culture, and society – and to use this knowledge to devise new applications." The Frascati Manual states that research must involve: – Novelty: Aim for new findings. – Creativity: Using original concepts and hypotheses. – Uncertainty: The outcome is uncertain or cannot be guaranteed. – Systematic: Planned and budgeted activity, following a defined project plan. – Transferability and/or Reproducibility: Results should be transferable to other contexts or reproducible in other similar conditions. OECD (2015)
Data	"Data in its broadest sense includes structured data fields (largely found in databases and systems) and also unstructured information such as documents, image or video files and social media posts." DoE Data Strategy 2024-2027 (2024)
Evaluation	"The systematic and objective assessment of a planned, ongoing, or completed intervention, its design, implementation, and results. The aim is to determine relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. Evaluation also refers to the process of determining the worth or significance of an intervention. An evaluation should provide information that is credible and useful, enabling the incorporation of lessons learned into decision making processes." OECD (2023)
Evidence	"Facts or information that support the validity and truth of a conclusion, assumption, or assertion." OECD (2023)

Impact	"The extent to which the intervention has generated or is expected to generate significant positive or negative, intended, or unintended, higher-level effects. To note: impact addresses the ultimate significance and potentially transformative effects of the intervention." OECD (2023)
Intervention	"The intentional activity or effort that is being evaluated (also called the evaluand or object of the monitoring or evaluation)." OECD (2023)
Monitoring	"A continuing process that involves the systematic collection or collation of data (on specified indicators or other types of information). Provides the management and other stakeholders of an intervention with indications of the extent of implementation progress, achievement of intended results, occurrence of unintended results, use of allocated funds and other important intervention and context-related information." OECD (2023)
Review	"An assessment of the performance of an intervention, periodically or on an ad hoc basis." OECD (2023)
Self-evaluation	"An evaluation of an intervention by those who are responsible for its design and delivery." OECD (2023)
Triangulation	"The use of three or more theories, sources, or types of information, or types of analysis to verify and substantiate an assessment." OECD (2023)

Appendix Two: Recent Department Publications

Evidence Informed Policy and Practice

Developing Evidence for Policy and Practice in the Department of Education and Youth

Inspectorate

Confidence, Creativity and Connection: Highlights from the Summer Programme 2025

Strengthening student support files: Inspection findings and reflective questions

Perspectives on Bullying Behaviour 2025

Irish Medium Education

Research and evaluation study of the Gaeltacht school's recognition scheme

School Transport

Review of the school transport scheme

Statistics

Survey of substitute teachers

Survey of teacher unmet demand in post-primary schools

Teaching Council Register Analysis: Analysing Teacher Activity in the State using CSO Administrative Data

Appendix Three: Other Notable Publications

Assessment and Student Achievement

National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading (ERC)

TIMSS 2023 report on students' experiences in school and attitudes towards mathematics and science (ERC)

Bullying and School Climate

Bullying in context: how families, schools and social ecologies shape student perceptions in Ireland (International Journal of Bullying Prevention)

Experience of bullying and bullying behaviours in childhood and adolescence (ESRI)

Children and Young Peoples Lives

Primary School Matters: Everyday Living and Learning in Children's Schools Lives (UCD)

Parental co-residence, intergenerational support and transitions to adulthood (Nuffield Foundation)

RED C: Cost of Living Impact Study (National Youth Council of Ireland)

Growing up in Ireland in context (DCED)

Curriculum Reform and Implementation

A policy analysis of the primary curriculum framework: implications for curriculum reform in Irish primary education (Irish Educational Studies)

Aistear's Reflective Cycle of Planning and Assessing (NCCA)

The redeveloped primary curriculum: Key messages from early enactment (NCCA)

Digital Education, AI and Technology

Guidelines on the ethical use of artificial intelligence and data in teaching and learning for educators (European Commission)

Short video addiction and it's impact on cognitive functioning in adolescents and youth: A systematic review (International Journal of Adolescents and Youth)

Digital Education Outlook 2026 (OECD)

Navigating youth, smartphones, and policy: a balanced perspective on digital wellbeing (Pediatric Research: Nature)

Future Proofing Schools: Bringing School Policies into the AI era (ESRI)

Using digital resources for learning: Policy insights from PISA 2022

Education Policy and Strategic Foresight

Staying the course on what matters most: Ireland's education system (National Centre on Education and the Economy)

Reconnecting school and society: Defending the school as a public institution (Philosophical Inquiry in Education)

Perspectives on education policy-making in Ireland, 1999-2025 (Irish Educational Studies)

Looking ahead to the 2026 Irish EU Presidency (IIEA)

Education and Training Monitor 2025 (European Commission)

Report on the foresight cycle on Education and Skills Development (Humanities in the European Research Area)

Leadership, Governance and School Improvement

A Systematic Review of School Governance Literature Between 2000 and 2023 (Leadership and Policy in Schools)

Educational leadership for inclusive education: a systematic literature review (Cogent Education)

From aspiration to reality: a qualitative exploration of novice primary principalship in Ireland (Irish Educational Studies)

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Child, adolescent and youth mental health in the 21st Century (OECD)

Trajectories of mental health difficulties from childhood to adolescence: Evidence from Growing up in Ireland (ESRI)

Supporting student wellbeing in school contexts: A narrative review (ESRI)

Mental Health in the Irish LGBTQI+ population with disabilities (TCD, BeLongTo)

Research, Evidence Use and Ethics

Guidance for Developing Ethical Research Projects Involving Children and Young Adults (Department of Children, Equality and Disability)

From foundations to frontiers: Fifty years of educational research in Ireland (Irish Educational Studies)

Understanding the implementation of evidence-informed policies and practices from a policy perspective (Journal of Implementation Science)

What works to promote research-policy engagement? (Journal of Evidence and Policy)

How can quality assurance agencies support research use in policy and practice? (OECD)

Exploring randomised controlled trials in education: key features and selected examples from Ireland (Irish Educational Studies)

School Attendance and Absenteeism

The long-term outcomes of school absence (ESRI)

School-level patterns of non-attendance (ESRI)

Social Inclusion

The impact of school social composition and neighbourhood social mix on upper secondary exam performance in Ireland (International Journal of Comparative Sociology)

Socio-economic inequalities in teacher-student relationships at age 5 (ESRI)

Thematic report on persistent income poverty and deprivation in Ireland (Department of Social Protection and ESRI)

Evaluation of the STAR Pilot Report (CES)

Review of Resourcing Schools to address Educational Disadvantage (OECD)

Special Educational Needs

Funding special education for equity: a systematic review on funding models for special education (European Journal of Special Education)

Monitoring and Evaluation Systems in Inclusive Education Policy (EASNIE)

In-service general education teachers' competence for inclusive education: A systematic scoping review and evidence-gap map (European Journal of Special Needs Education)

Dyslexia in the Irish Medium and Gaeltacht Context: Considerations for Educators (REACH Journal of Inclusive Education)

Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder in Ireland: Wellbeing, Living Experience and the Need for Change (Royal College of Surgeons Ireland)

Sustainable and Environmental Education

PIMSS 2023 Environmental Awareness Report (ERC)

Does sludge slow down the solar schools scheme? An assessment of administrative burdens preventing climate action in Ireland (ESRI)

School Workforce and Professional Learning

Understanding the factors that support the recruitment and retention of teachers: A mixed methods review (Education Endowment Foundation)

The first decade of teachers' professional lives: a scoping review of research in the Republic of Ireland (Irish Educational Studies)

Exploring teacher professional collaboration within the Framework for Junior Cycle in Ireland (Irish Educational Studies)

Irish Teachers' Journal (INTO)

Reviews of the literature (Teachers' Professional Journeys Study)

Design and Instruments Technical Report (Teachers' Professional Journeys Study)

Teacher education stakeholder perspectives on initial teacher education, the continuum of teacher education and teacher supply (Teachers' Professional Journeys Study)

Youth Affairs

Growing youth work in Europe: A methodology for mapping studies on national youth work ecosystems (European Commission)

Regional youth employment: trends, drivers and the impact of the knowledge economy and decarbonisation (ESRI)

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