

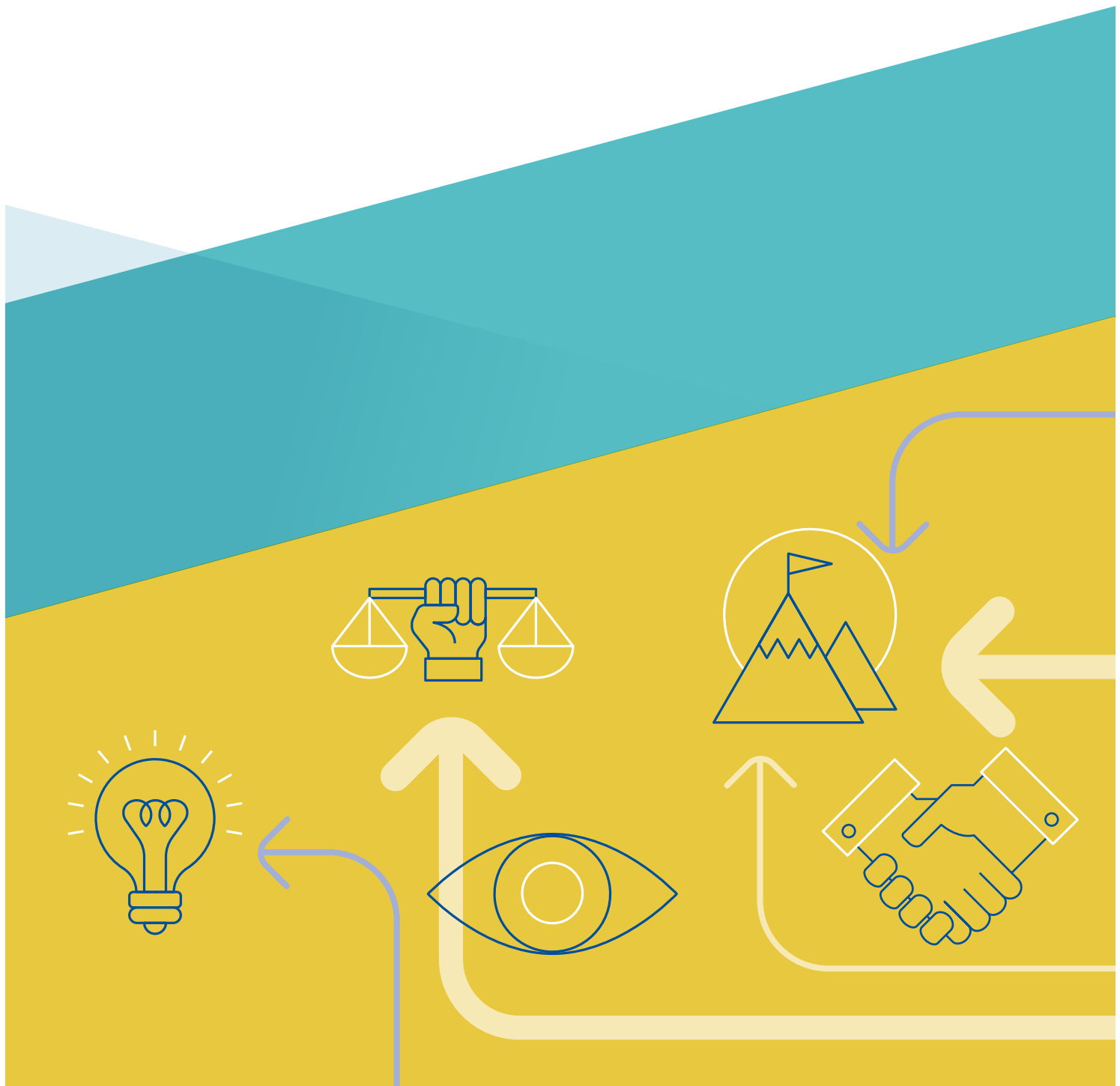


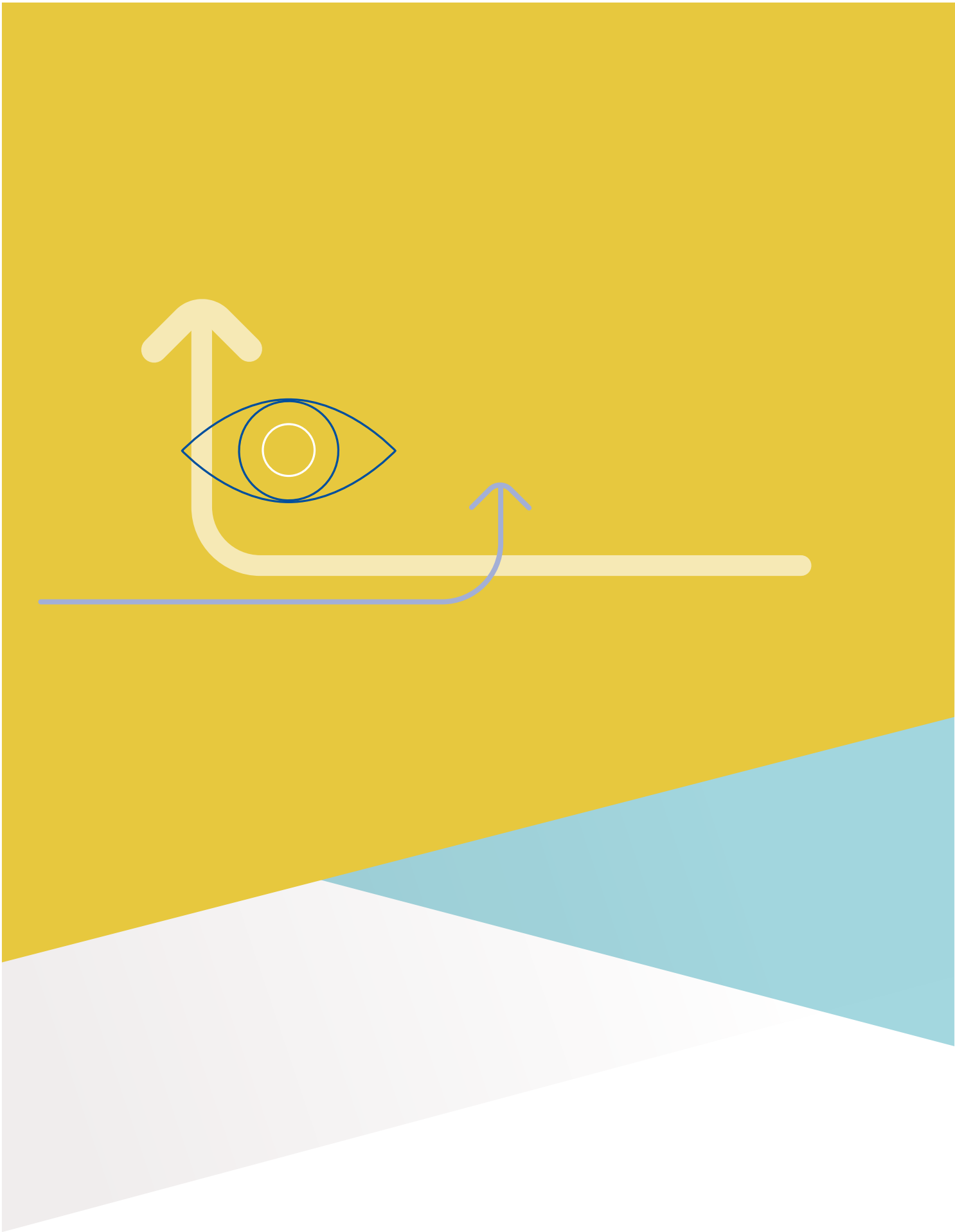
An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
um Oideachas Speisialta
National Council
for Special Education

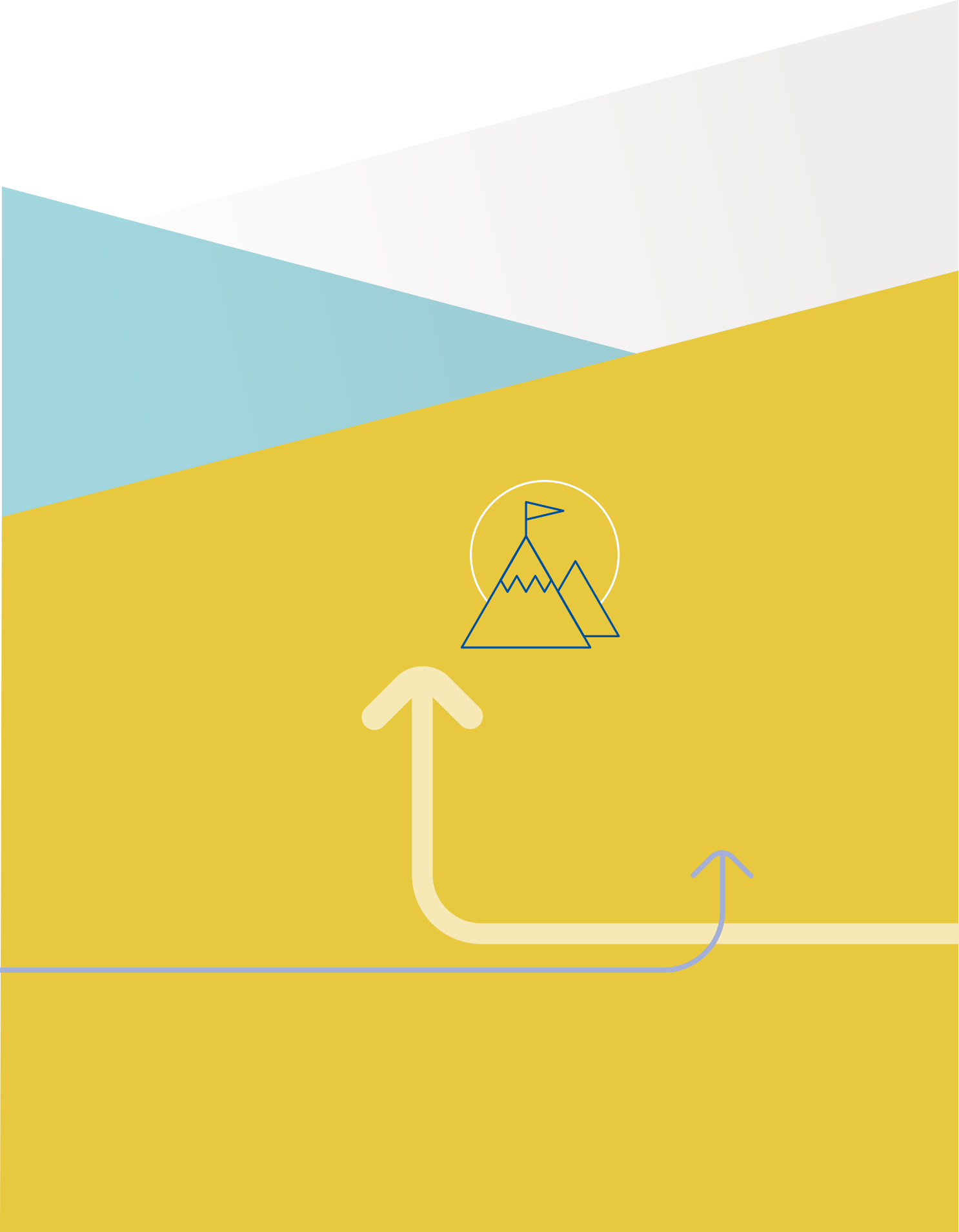


An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
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Statement of Strategy 2023-2026

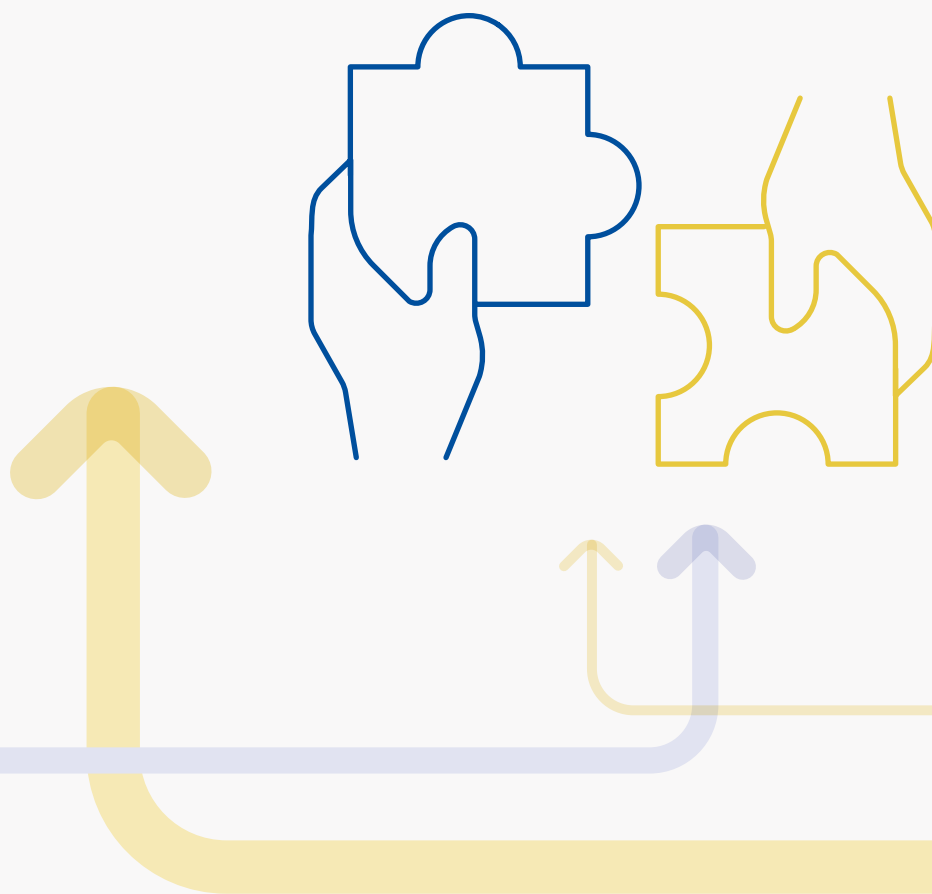






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Introduction from the Chief Executive Officer

I am pleased to present the NCSE's Statement of Strategy 2023-2026, setting out the programme of work we are committed to undertake over the next three years. The NCSE's vision for 2026 is a world class inclusive education system for Ireland.

The new Statement of Strategy builds on previous strategies and reflects our ambition and mission to drive the progressive realisation of an inclusive education system, as set out in our recent Policy Advice, 'An Inclusive Education for an Inclusive Society – Policy Advice Paper on Special Schools and classes. It is twenty years since the NCSE was set up to improve the delivery of education services to persons with special educational needs. In 2023, the NCSE commenced an extensive organisational review and has since been delivering organisational change through a transformation programme including a much needed expansion in our staffing numbers to meet the increased need in our education system, utilising the significant additional investment of €13m provided by the Government as part of Budget 2023. We reviewed our previous strategy earlier than anticipated due to the significant expansion. I would like to extend a thank you to our stakeholders and staff for their contribution to the development of the strategy.

Our new strategic plan sets out the goals, objectives and high-level actions that will see the NCSE provide students, schools and parents with a coordinated service relevant to the best outcomes for students in Ireland. There are key synergies between the strategies of the NCSE and the Department of Education, for example in the area of service delivery, strategic goal 1 for the NCSE sets out to 'provide students, school communities and parents with professional co-ordinated services and specialist support provision relevant to the best outcomes for students', in line with the Department's overarching goal 2 to 'Ensure equity of opportunity in education and that all children and young people are supported to fulfil their potential. In pursuit of our vision for 2026, additional staff have been recruited to join our skilled teams, with further staff joining throughout 2024 – our professional and committed staff across the organisation are key to the successful implementation of this strategy. We have taken on a structured process for planning for and delivering our services, supports and resources which is critical to the success of our programme of transformation and the realisation of the NCSE's vision for 2026.

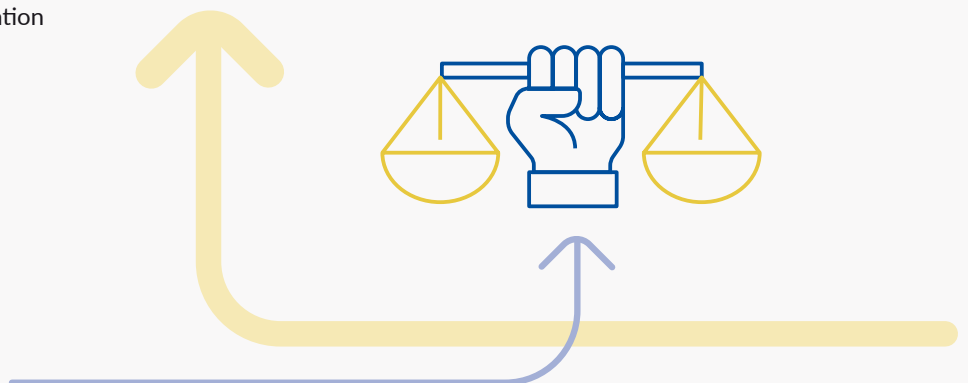
Looking to the years ahead, I am confident that the NCSE can be agile and responsive in our remit and will continue to work with other agencies and have meaningful consultation with our stakeholders. Students, families and school communities are central in our strategy and are the focus for all our skilled teams as we strive to best meet the needs of students with special educational needs in Ireland.

Yours sincerely

John Kearney

Chief Executive Officer,

National Council for Special Education





Our Vision

A world class inclusive education system for Ireland.



Our Mission

We will drive the realisation of an inclusive education with integrated research, policy and practice. Our skilled and committed staff will work with students, schools and communities to provide access to quality learning and opportunities.



Our Values

1. **Person-centred:** Children and adults with special educational needs and their families are at the centre of what we do.
 2. **Inclusion-focused:** Inclusion guides our beliefs and actions.
 3. **Equity and equality-focused:** We allocate existing and additional resources equitably and fairly to schools in line with the needs of students and within Department of Education policy.
 4. **Evidence-informed:** We base policy advice on research evidence, national and international best practice, consultation with our stakeholders and expert input.
 5. **Expert-led:** We are an expert source of valuable information, guidance and support for parents and schools as well as supporting continuing professional development for education practitioners.
 6. **Consultation-focused:** We engage in regular and meaningful consultation with our stakeholders.
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Our Functions

In striving to achieve this vision, we have a number of activities arising from our functions as set out in Section 20 of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act, 2004. Specifically, these include:

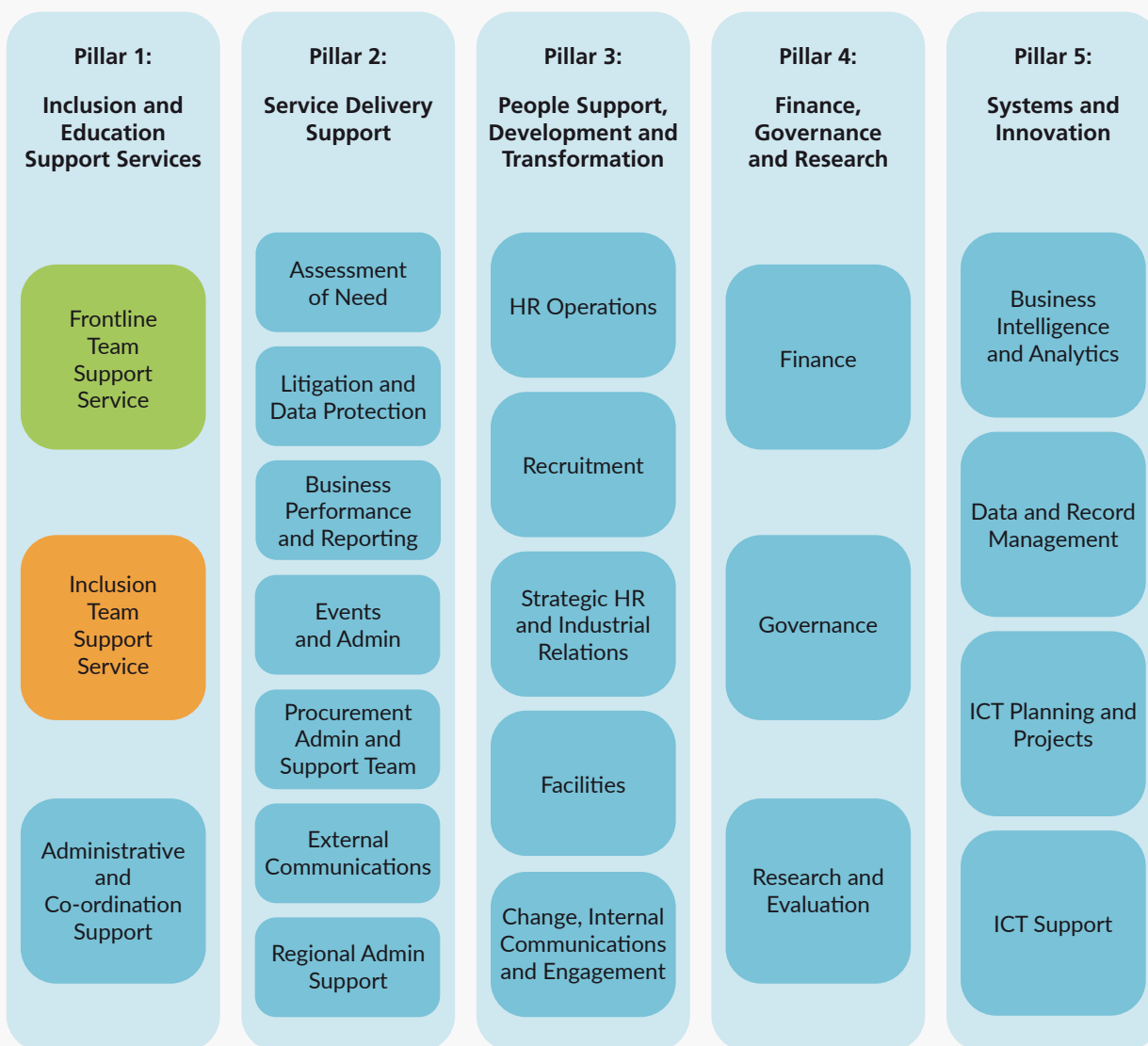
- Planning, reviewing and coordinating the provision of education supports for children with special educational needs.
- Conducting and commissioning research.
- Advising the Minister for Education on policy for special education.
- Disseminating information, including best practice, on special education to parents, schools and other interested persons.
- Consulting voluntary bodies to ensure their knowledge and expertise inform the development of NCSE policy.
- Reviewing and advising on educational provision for adults with disabilities.

NCSE Organisational Review and Expansion

On foot of an additional investment of €13 million announced in Budget 2023, which included provision for an additional 161 staff, the NCSE commenced an Organisational Expansion Programme of Work. This presented a unique opportunity for the NCSE to evaluate both its structure, operating model and resource requirements in order to identify an organisational design that will deliver on its strategic objectives and is responsive to the needs and demands of students, parents and schools. A significant process of engagement with both internal and external stakeholders was carried out the context of the organisational design process.

The NCSE transformation programme “Vision 26”, which gives effect to a revised and expanded organisation supported by the additional funding allocation in Budget 2023, was launched on 19th October 2023. A new detailed organisational design has significantly changed the structure of the organisation which has increased the divisional structure from 4 to 5 divisions, as well as aligning key functions to primary and secondary/support activities. A summary of the new pillars is outlined in Figure 1. The changed structure is underpinned by a robust workforce planning model and plan.

Figure 1. The new operating structure of the NCSE



Overview of the 5 pillars:

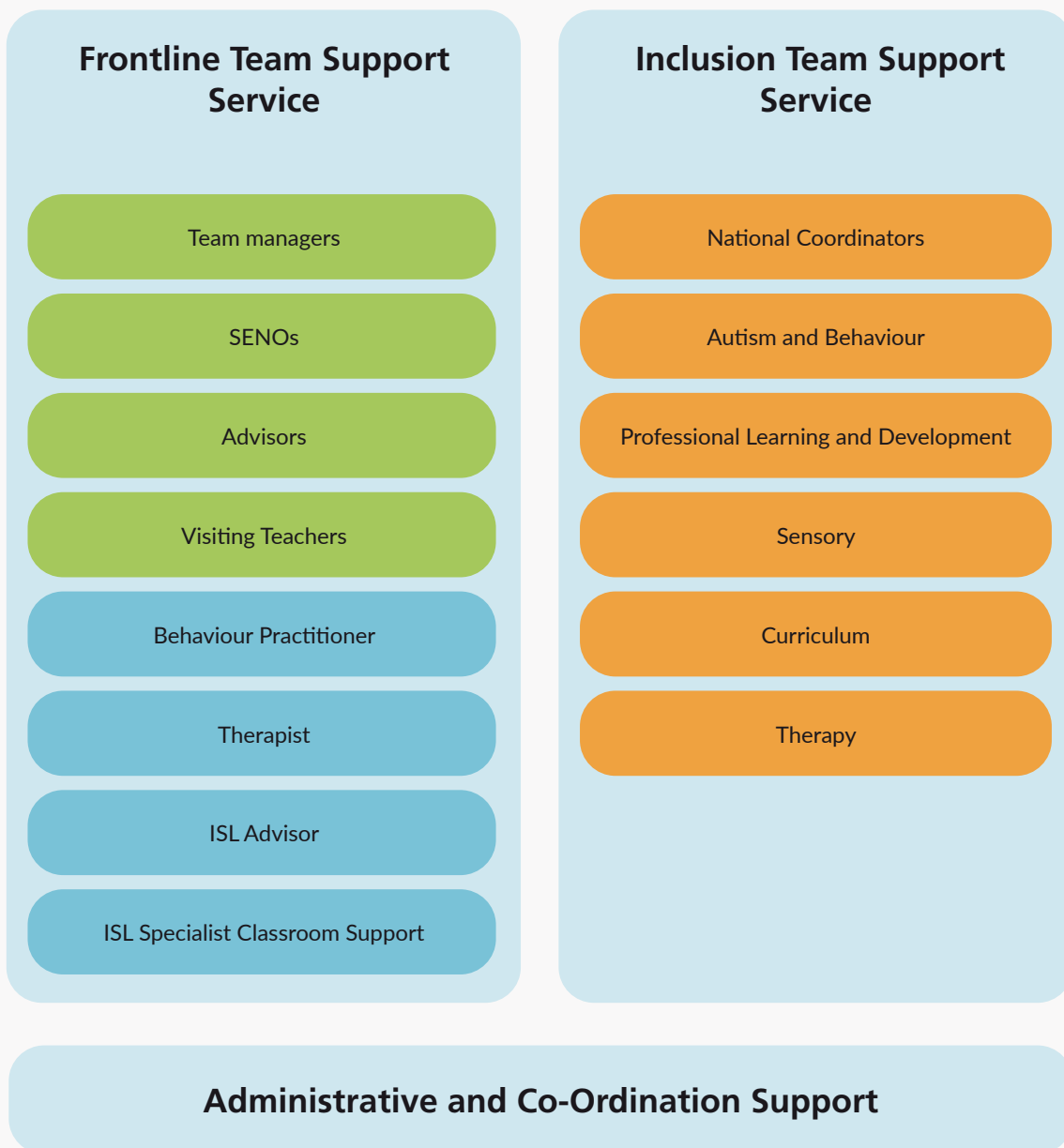
- 1. Inclusion and Education Support Services:** This Pillar will ensure the delivery of a professional and co-ordinated regional service aligned with students, school communities and parents on a county and national basis. The Pillar will provide quality evidence-based advice and professional learning to parents, school leadership, teachers and stakeholders. Inclusion and Education Support Services is focused on professional delivery by frontline staff informed by quality service standards. All professional programmes will be delivered to the highest standards and will be reflective of both student and school needs, informed by both student and parental voice and facilitate the continuous support of students, school communities and parents throughout their school and post-school educational journeys.
- 2. Service Delivery Support (SDS):** This division will support the implementation of Inclusion & Education Support Services (IESS) and thus allowing the Division above to focus efforts on frontline service delivery. To achieve this, SDS will manage administrative support to IESS and will also manage and oversee the operation of the statutory obligations of the NCSE in respect of the AON process and any litigation requiring NCSE involvement..
- 3. People Support, Development and Transformation:** Previously the Business Support Services Division, this function has been realigned to focus solely on people activities of the organisation. Its purpose is to ensure NCSE staff are provided with professional support services to deliver a positive 'people experience'. It will maintain consistent and coherent engagement at appropriate strategic levels and ensure that the workforce has the required skills and resources to deliver the business strategy going forward.
- 4. Finance, Governance and Research:** The continued purpose of this division is to ensure financial decisions and budgeting requirements are managed effectively for both the internal and external affairs of the NCSE. The Division will continue to manage the corporate governance framework for the NCSE and compliance across the organisation. This division also manages the commissioned and in-house programme of research and evaluation and will be responsible for developing a new practice-based research programme for teachers.
- 5. Systems and Innovation:** This is a new pillar which includes two distinct teams: one dedicated to IT Projects and a second with responsibility for IT Support. A new team has also been established in response to needs identified in areas such as data management and analytics. The purpose of this division is to ensure that the NCSE is equipped with effective IT systems and the capability to properly manage organisational data activity. The division will manage data and provide oversight for records management, manage data analytics as well as forecast, plan and innovate in order to meet the future needs of the organisation and respond to projected demands of the sector.



Pillar 1 Inclusion and Education Support Services – New frontline services structure

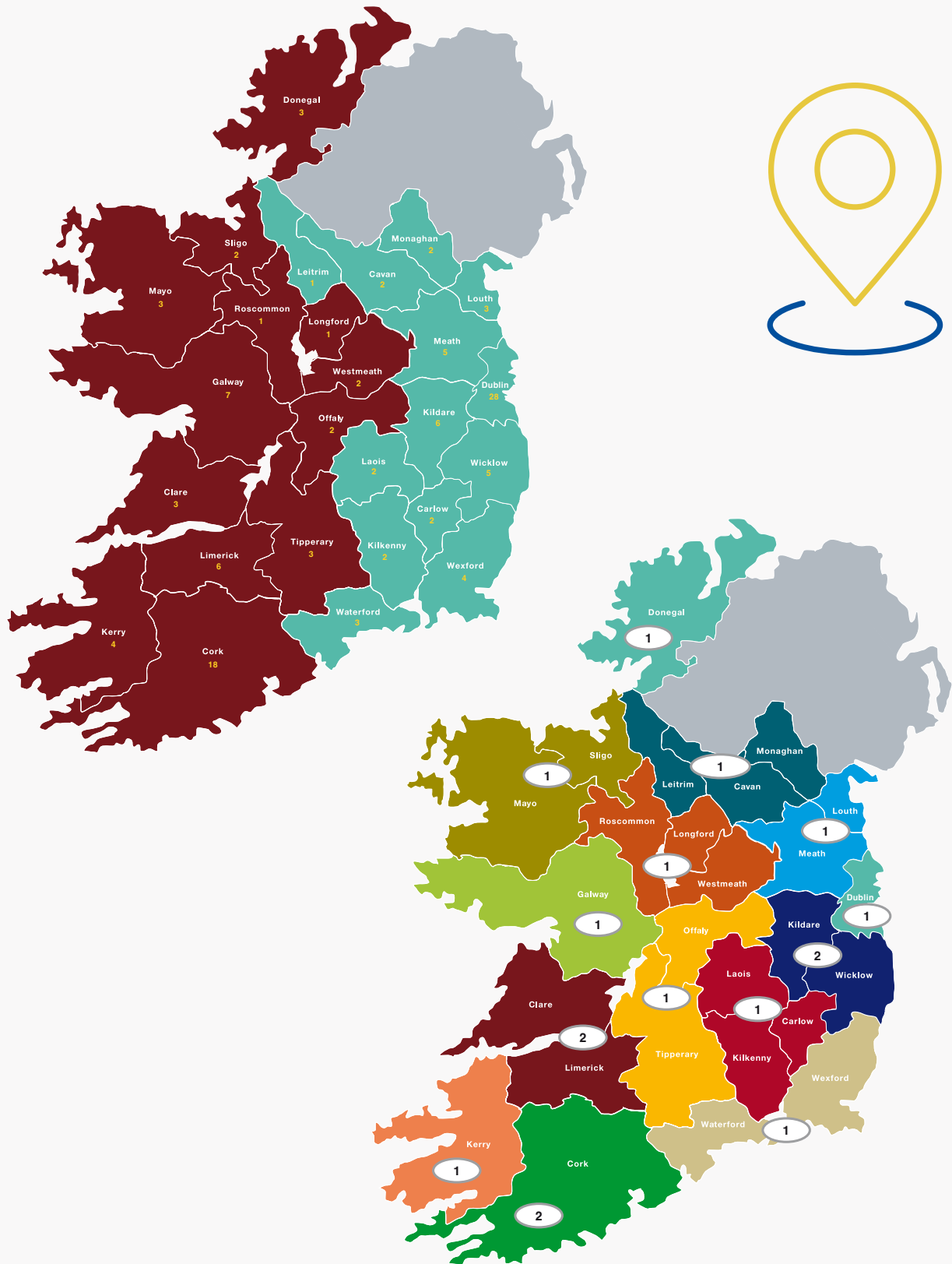
Pillar 1, Inclusion and Education Support Services has a new frontline services structure. Local teams consist of Team Managers, Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), Advisors and Visiting Teachers. These teams are overseen by National Coordinators (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. NCSE Pillar 1 Structure of Frontline Team Support Service, Inclusion Team Support Service, Administrative and Co-Ordination Support



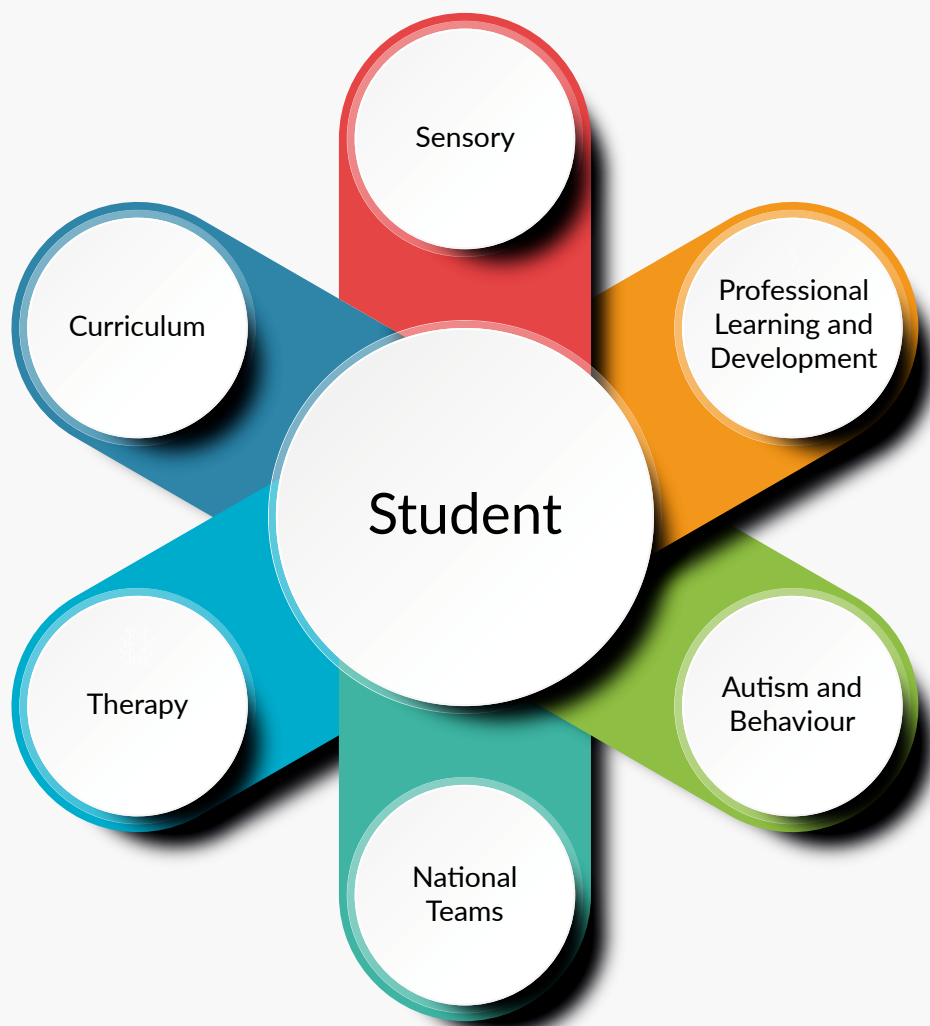
One of the key changes for NCSE frontline teams is the departure from a 5 region base to that of a 2 region structure, with the assignment of 2 National Co-ordinators who oversee national operations (see Figure 2 and Figure 3). The National Coordinators are underpinned by 20 Team Manager areas, an increase of 10 Team manager areas on the previous organisational structure (see Figure 3). This will facilitate a more county-based approach, to offer more concentrated and focused supports in each geographical/county area. Work has been ongoing through 2023 and early 2024 to recruit and train staff in line with the new structures to be rolled out in September 2024.

Figure 3. Map of the 2-Region structure and assignment of SENOS, and the Team Manager allocation by county



From September 2024, SENOs will be assigned on a county basis and undertake caseloads associated with that county, providing for an integrated community-based service and developing strong relationships with parents and schools in the provision of services to students.

Figure 4. Range of NCSE professional and specialised staff within Inclusion Teams Support Service providing supports to students



Staff from professional and specialised teams under the NCSE's Frontline Team Support Service and Inclusion Team Support Service engage with the local teams across the country, providing a range of services and supports to schools and students:

- Visiting Teachers for the Deaf/Hard of Hearing and Blind/Vision Impaired
- Advisors for SEN, Behaviour for Learning and Wellbeing, Autism, Primary Curriculum and Irish Sign Language.
- NCSE Therapists (Occupational Therapists and Speech and Language Therapists)
- Behaviour Practitioners
- Specialist Leads and National Development Leads for Primary, Post-Primary, Therapy, Behaviour, Autism, Professional Learning and Development, Sensory, Curriculum
- ISL Specialist Classroom Support staff.

NCSE Strategic Goals 2023-2026

Goal 1

Service Delivery

Provide students, school communities and parents with professional co-ordinated services and specialist support provision relevant to the best outcomes for students.

Goal 2

Research, Policy and Practice

Develop and provide expert policy advice, practice and professional learning programmes that are evidence-informed and underpinned by the latest national and international research and expert input.

Goal 3

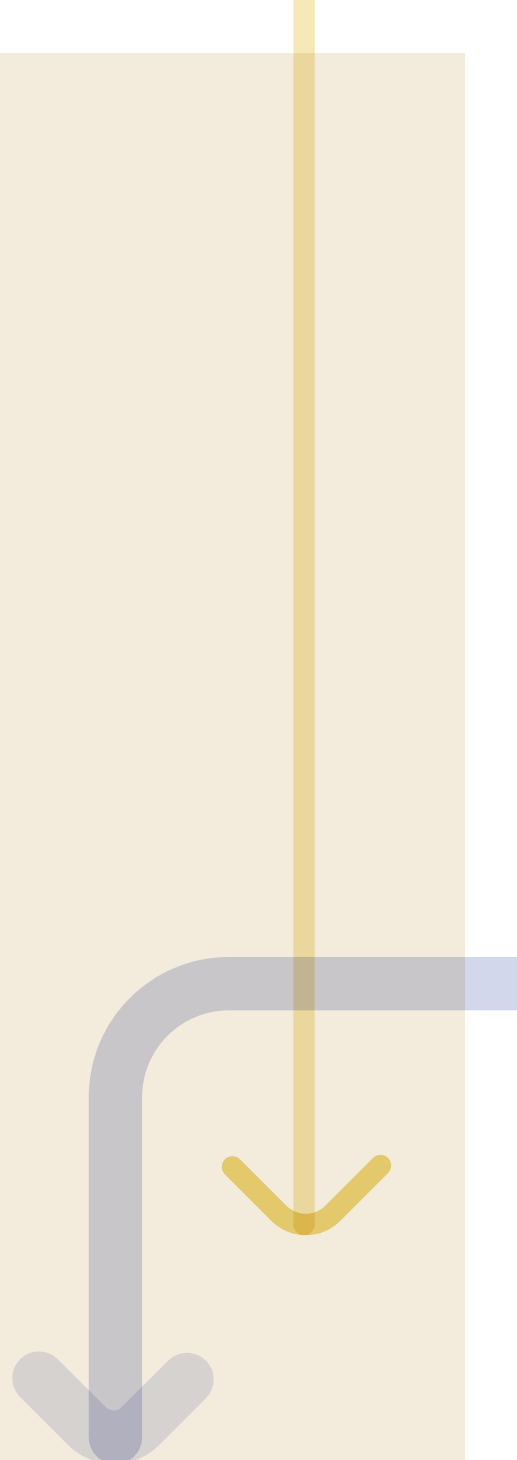
Our Staff – Development, Support and Leadership

Develop a progressive workplace culture in collaboration with staff to embed effective leadership and best practice.

Goal 4

Organisation Support and Development

Develop a corporate identity grounded in the principles of operational excellence, responsiveness and innovation with best practice in governance.



Goal 1 Service Delivery

Provide students, school communities and parents with professional co-ordinated services and specialist support provision relevant to the best outcomes for students.

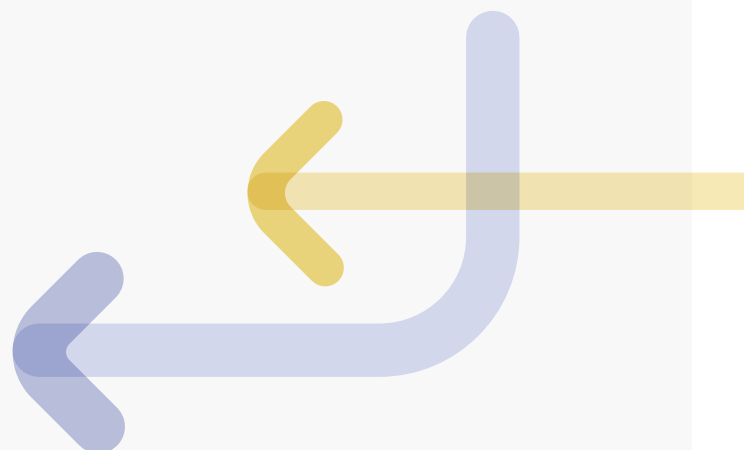
Objectives	Pillars	Actions
1. Provide advice, information and support for parents and students to maximise their educational opportunities	P1,P2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prepare, implement and deliver timely parental and student engagement at local and Regional team level through consistent quality assured messaging 2. Grow, diversify and improve frontline delivery of services and engagement with parents and students in line with enhanced Customer Charter and Total Quality Management standards of operational excellence 3. Provide the logistical, communicative and referral support required to ensure regional teams are enabled to engage effectively in line with national policy
2. Develop, deliver and review standardised, coordinated regional team services within each local community to support students, parents and school communities to enhance the educational participation, learning experience and outcomes for students	P1,P2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strengthen and unify regional standards for frontline delivery of NCSE services 2. Deliver an equitable suite of NCSE services to strengthen student learning and educational outcomes 3. Provide the logistical, communicative and referral support required to ensure regional teams are enabled to engage effectively in line with national policy 4. Provide relevant data, information and available resources and supports to school communities
3. Plan for the provision and review of suitable student placement and seamless transitions together with parents, schools and stakeholders;	P1,P2, P5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Utilise, analyse and prepare relevant data to prepare for student placement and transition at regional and national level 2. Develop a framework and guidelines to support school communities provide access to specialist and mainstream provision for their student community 3. Apply high level modelling to inform forward planning for future developments in primary, post primary and special school sectors
4. Develop a wrap-around support service in schools as part of the National Therapy Support Service ¹ .	P1,P2, P4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide a world class therapy service in line with internationally and nationally informed practice. 2. Widen and strengthen ongoing service provision of therapy on a national level. 3. Monitor and report on implementation of support services under therapy.
5. Comply with our statutory obligations under the Disability Act by working with all stakeholders in response to the receipt of AON related referrals to provide assistance in the completion of the assessment of need by the HSE.	P2,P1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support high quality consistent delivery of AON related services nationally 2. Develop continuity of service of AON advisor support at National delivery level. 3. Co-ordinate and support the delivery of AON logistical services

¹ The National Therapy Support Service was previously referred to as the School Inclusion Model (SIM) while it was rolled out as a pilot project in two regional areas.

Goal 2 Research, Policy and Practice

Develop and provide expert policy advice, practice and professional learning programmes that are evidence-informed and underpinned by the latest national and international research and expert input.

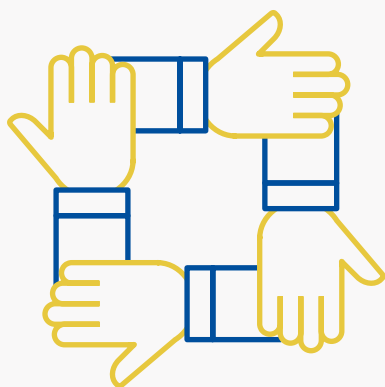
Objectives	Pillars	Actions
1. Provide independent, expert and evidence-informed policy advice to the Minister for Education and support the implementation of advice as required	P1, P4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop policy advice for the Minister for Education informed by expert advice and evidence-based data and research 2. Develop a programme of expert professional learning to ensure NCSE delivery of best practice informed education in school communities
2. Develop, deliver and review evidence-informed practice and professional learning programmes to support the inclusion of students in a manner that is responsive and relevant to the needs of school communities.	P1,P2, P4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review, prepare and deliver an enhanced programme of sustained support and professional learning programmes to school communities 2. Engage in ongoing consultation on and continuous improvement of NCSE professional learning programmes to school communities 3. Provide and co-ordinate the delivery of resources, logistical and in-person/online engagement with NCSE professional learning programmes to school communities at local and national level 4. Develop a programme of practice-based research to inform local school practice and national guidance and advice.
3. Engage in extensive consultation with our education stakeholders, including our Consultative Forum, parents, students and advocacy groups and draw on expert knowledge and advice.	P1,P4, P5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop and co-ordinate an annual engagement schedule with relevant representative, leadership, management and Patron bodies to inform the discernment of school community based needs and partnership opportunities 2. Support the work of the Consultative Forum to guide and inform the work of the NCSE
4. Produce an annual programme of commissioned and in-house research to inform the work of the organisation.	P4, P1,P5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop and implement a national programme of commissioned and in- house research 2. Disseminate research and evidence-informed practice to all stakeholders using our website and social media, the annual research conference and other stakeholder events



Goal 3 Our Staff – Development, Support and Leadership

Develop a progressive workplace culture in collaboration with staff to embed effective leadership and best practice.

Objectives	Pillars	Actions
1. Develop the systems to recruit and retain staff with the necessary and desired skills and expertise to deliver NCSE strategic objectives.	P3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review our role profiles to ensure we attract people whose skills, competencies and values are aligned to our requirements. 2. Utilise effective selection techniques to ensure our recruitment is both efficient and effective.
2. Provide corporate induction, mentoring and professional development to equip and empower staff to provide effective services and to pursue innovation and growth.	P3, P1, P2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop tailored induction programmes for different staffing groups. 2. Provide the opportunities for staff training and professional learning and mentoring through a structured suite of learning and development supports. 3. Implement the appropriate talent management supports which enable staff to grow and develop in their current roles and to progress in their professional career.
3. Promote a positive working culture which instils constancy of purpose regarding vision and strategic plans of the organisation.	All	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop and implement a coherent communications strategy and create opportunities for collaborative working across the organisation 2. Lead on principles of organisational culture across each pillar 3. Align all staff members to the principles of a positive working culture with commitment to a shared vision and strategy at the relevant strata within a TQM framework.
4. Develop systems and structures to instil inclusion, wellbeing, equality, communication and diversity in leadership and organisational culture	P3, All	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop and implement a people strategy to support the delivery of a positive working culture 2. Develop a dedicated Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy and action plan. 3. Define and disseminate shared systems across the relevant pillars which underpin organisational values



Goal 4 Organisation Support and Development

Develop a corporate identity grounded in the principles of operational excellence, responsiveness and innovation with best practice in governance.

Objectives	Pillars	Actions
1. Develop and embed a Total Quality Management System (TQM) to ensure coherent and co-ordinated delivery of organisational services.	All	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop and implement TQM processes and systems across pillars with associated behaviour related indicators 2. Review outcome of systems and implement change as necessary
2. Create and implement an NCSE Communication and Branding Strategy to develop and embed a unified corporate identity of service with stakeholders.	P2, All	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Define, design and implement a Communication and Branding strategy and systems and communicate to stakeholders and staff 2. Respond to media and parliamentary queries 3. Align staff of all pillars to agreed internal communication principles and practices
3. Develop an ICT and Data Management Strategy to inform effective planning and reporting requirements for the needs of the NCSE and external stakeholders.	P5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Initiate a dedicated ICT strategy and work plan on an annual basis which centres on projects that support accessibility, reporting and information management. 2. Develop and implement an organisational Data Management Strategy 3. Develop and implement a standardised and electronic records management system
4. Ensure compliance with governance, administrative, financial and legal legislation and guidance to optimise efficiencies and continue to meet all statutory requirements	P4, All	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure implementation of and compliance with the Performance Delivery Agreement actions and oversee timely reporting on business goals as per the Statement of Strategy and work plans 2. Review and ensure compliance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies and other key governance, administrative, financial and legal legislation and guidance to ensure the NCSE upholds all statutory requirements. 3. Provide on-going support to the operations of the Council. 4. Provide relevant legal support and information in consultation with external bodies

