

Chapter 6: Reporting and Communicating

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Chapter 6

Reporting and Communications

This chapter outlines how the NCSE should relate to all the persons and bodies within its ambit: the Minister for Education and Skills, the media, and members of the public. Central is the preparation of the annual report and financial statement for presentation to the Minister. There are various levels of communication with all related stakeholders. These activities have implications for Council members, which are included here as Notes for Council members. The material is presented under the following headings:

- 1 Legislative framework and government policy
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1 Legislative Framework and Government Policy

- See Section 34, *Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004*, which requires the Council to prepare and publish an annual report relating to its activities and proceedings under the Act.
- See the *Code of Practice for Governance of State Agencies*, which covers a wide variety of issues relating to the annual report including
 - Section 13 which requires the Chairperson to affirm in the latest annual report to the Minister that the procurement procedures as set out in the *Code* were complied with
 - Section 13 which requires the Chairperson to affirm in the annual report to the Minister that all appropriate procedures for asset disposals and access to assets by third parties specified in section 18 of the *Code* have been carried out
 - Section 13 which requires that the Chairperson include details in the annual report to the Minister of assets have been disposed of or access granted to property or infrastructure for commercial arrangements with third parties above a threshold of €150,000 without auction or competitive tender.
 - Section 16 which requires the Chairperson to confirm in the annual report to the Minister that the *Guidelines for the Appraisal and Management of Capital Expenditure Proposals* issued in February 2005 are being adhered to
 - Sections 12 which requires the Chairperson to include a statement regarding the system of internal financial control
 - Section 13 which requires the Chairperson to affirm in the annual report that all procedures for internal audit as set out in the *Code* have been complied with

- See Section 34(4) of the *Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004*, which requires that the Council provide the Minister with such information as he/she may request.
- See Section 20(1)(d) of the *Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004*, which provides that NCSE make available to parents information in relation to entitlements for children with special educational needs.

2 The Minister for Education and Skills

- The NCSE is required in the performance of its duties to implement the policies relating to the education of children with special educational needs, policies which are formulated from time to time by the Minister for Education and Skills.
- The Minister for Education and Skills grants funds annually to the Council to meet the expenses of the Council in the performance of its functions. The Minister may attach particular conditions and reporting requirements in relation to such grants.
- A copy of the annual report must be provided to the Minister for laying before the Houses of the Oireachtas.
- The Minister is answerable to Dáil Éireann for the activities of NCSE. He/she is obliged to attend the Dáil or one of its committees from time to time to answer questions on the problems, conduct or performance of the organisation. This places an onus on the Council to keep the Department fully up-to-date with its activities.

3 The Department of Education and Skills

- The Department of Education and Skills has a role in monitoring and evaluating the activities and performance of the NCSE.
- It also ensures that the NCSE is kept up-to-date on government policy and priorities. While the Council and especially the Chairperson will normally report to the Minister, the senior management team will deal with officers of the Department.
- The Department provides the day-to-day link between the NCSE and the Minister.
- The Department can provide support and advocacy within government circles and can be a useful source of advice on government policies.
- The Council should endeavour to maintain a productive working relationship with the Department of Education and Skills.
- The code highlights the need to continuing with and adapting service level agreements as part of the performance framework for state bodies and agencies. A Performance Delivery Agreement between DES and NCSE for 2012-14 has expired and a new PDA is due to be agreed with DES(**Appendix 4**).

4 Dáil Committees

- Dáil Committees are appointed to scrutinise the activities of state bodies. The Dáil Select Committee of Public Accounts has a significant role in analysing the external audit reports presented by the Auditor and Comptroller and Auditor General (see Chapter 3).
- Dail Committees dealing with education or other areas relevant to the role of NCSE may also review activities of NCSE
- The Chief Executive of NCSE, as the accounting officer, the Chairperson and sometimes other members, may be summoned to appear before Oireachtas Committees. Representatives of the Department of Education and Skills may also be summoned to appear.

5 The Annual Report

- The purpose of financial statements is to provide information about the financial position, performance and changes in financial position of an organisation that is useful to a wide range of stakeholders in making economic decisions. These statements show the results of the stewardship of management, or the accountability of management for the resources entrusted to it. General purpose financial reports include internal monthly/quarterly management accounts, as well as the annual financial statements.
- The annual report and statement of financial position is the primary means by which a state body reports on its activities to the relevant Minister, the sponsor Department, the Dáil and the public.
- The NCSE is required to produce an annual report. The areas to be covered in the annual report typically include:
 - information about the NCSE and its objectives
 - achievements and performance against key targets as set out in the strategic plan
 - business prospects and corporate strategy
 - annual accounts for the organisation, audited for the period (may be presented separately).

The Council's Audit Committee has a role in overseeing and approving the accounts.

- In order to ensure proper scrutiny of the accounts, it is important that the audited accounts are submitted in the first instance to the Audit Committee and then to the full Council, before being formally presented to the Minister.

- The format of the annual report is not fixed but because it is the paramount means of communicating with stakeholders the use of photographs and graphs and a well-structured narrative is recommended.
- The Code requires the annual report to include information on members' attendances at Council (and its Committees).

6 Information to Outside Bodies

- NCSE has developed a communications strategy.. A copy of this strategy is attached at **Appendix 17**.
- The Council is required to provide the Minister with such information as he/she may request. This requirement is additional to the requirement to publish an annual report and encompasses issues such as briefings for the Minister for parliamentary questions and responses to representations by public representatives to the Minister.
- In addition, the Council is required to make available to parents and guardians information in relation to entitlements for people with special education needs. Primary responsibility for this task rests with the staff of NCSE. Section 41 of the *Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004* requires the Council to keep and maintain records on people receiving services, places where services are available and for the planning of services.
- Members of the press and media may approach Council members for information on issues. All such enquiries should be referred in the first instance to the NCSE Press and Information Officer for response.
- In terms of promoting the work of the NCSE in the community, Council members have the opportunity to act as ambassadors for the Council in the special education sector.

Notes for Council members

- If discussing any aspect of the organisation's business, Council members should be aware that they will be acting as ambassadors for the Council in the special education sector.
- All official communications on behalf of NCSE are made by authorised Council spokespersons.
- Council members should remember that their loyalty is to the NCSE in relation to the work of the organisation. Therefore, if they have NCSE issues that they feel strongly about, they should raise them with the Chairperson and CEO in the first instance.
- Council members should acquaint themselves with information provided by the Minister and the Department of Education and Skills.

- In any dealings with the Minister's office or with officials of the Department they should strive to develop good working relationships.
- Council members are obliged to scrutinise the audited accounts carefully before they are sent to the Minister.
- In some exceptional circumstances, Council members may have to make themselves available to Oireachtas Committees.

