



**An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
um Oideachas Speisialta**

**National Council
for Special Education**

NCSE CORPORATE PROCUREMENT PLAN 2024-2026

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1. Procurement in the NCSE

The National Public Policy Procurement Framework requires that all non-commercial state bodies produce a Corporate Procurement Plan (CPP). A CPP guides procurement activity in an organisation for a set period, including procurement planning, identification of priorities and key actions, and monitoring and compliance of practice. The ultimate aim of a CPP is to achieve improved procurement outcomes: value for money; efficient, fair and equitable use of resources; better informed decision making.

Having a CPP is also an indicator of good governance. The Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies requires all non-commercial state bodies to have a CPP. The Public Spending Code emphasises the need for procurement planning – a key benefit of a CPP.

One of the key objectives in Goal 4 – Organisation Support and Development in the NCSE Statement of Strategy 2023 -2026 notes the importance of ensuring compliance with governance, administrative, financial and legal legislation and guidance to optimise efficiencies and continue to meet all statutory requirements.

The development of a CPP contributes to this goal through its function as a tool for informing decision making, identifying areas of good practice and where improvement is needed.

2. Aim and Objectives of the Corporate Procurement Plan

The aim of the NCSE Corporate Procurement Plan 2024-2026 is to achieve greater value for money through improved delivery of the procurement function in the organisation. A number of objectives follow this aim – see Figure 1. Set across these key objectives, the NCSE aims to ensure goods and services and procured in accordance with best practice as set out by the Office of Government Procurement (OGP).

Figure 1. NCSE Corporate Procurement Plan Objectives

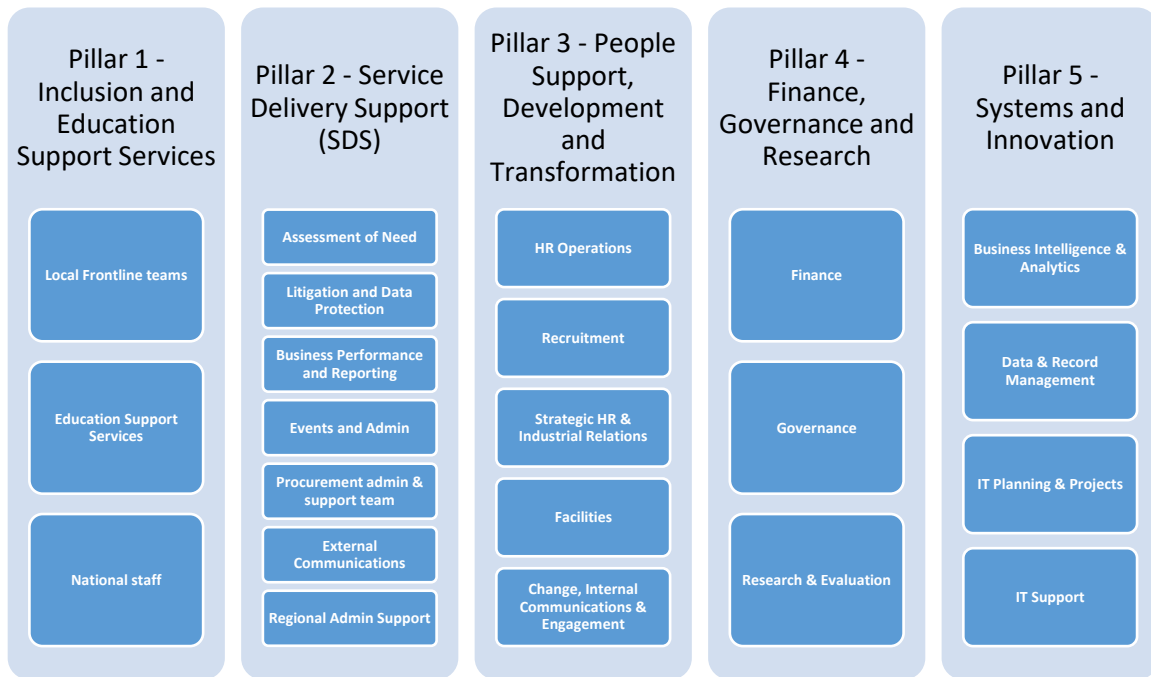


3. Key factors influencing procurement in the NCSE

On foot of an additional investment in excess of €13 million announced in Budget 2023, which included provision for more than 160 additional staff, the NCSE commenced an Organisational Expansion Programme of Work. 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. One of the critical changes to the operating structures of the NCSE is the departure from a 5 region base to that of a 2 national region base structure, and the move from 10 team areas to 20 within this structure which is due to rollout in September 2024.

Figure 2. New NCSE Pillar Structure



The new Pillar structure is included in this Corporate Procurement Plan in relation to the analysis of expenditure for the 2023 Accounts. Related to the organisational expansion, there is an increase in staff numbers that impacts on the number of staff procuring goods and services directly or supporting procurement functions and anticipated growth in expenditure in certain areas. These are key factors that influence and guide the actions in Section 7 of this plan.

In line with these changes, new Statement of Strategy 2023-2026 was published by the NCSE, guiding the work of all teams across the Pillars in their work planning and is a significant factor in the actions for the Corporate Procurement Plan actions in section 7.

4. NCSE Procurement Structure and Policy

The NCSE operates a devolved procurement structure, meaning pillars and sections are responsible for their own procurement activities and ensuring they are compliant with procurement policy and practice guidelines. In this instance, procurement in the NCSE is every staff member’s business and has roles and responsibilities in relation to complying with procurement guidelines.

The procurement officer and other staff in Pillar 4 are responsible for supporting and guiding procurement activities, where requested, through the sourcing and provision of advice and information, for monitoring compliance across the organisation and reporting on procurement issues to the NCSE Council and the Department of Education. This is mainly conducted by the Research and Governance team who support the Procurement Officer function, and through the collection of information for monitoring compliance through the Finance section.

The organisation’s procurement policy is influenced by the results of internal and external audits which have directly or indirectly examined the procurement function. The findings of recent audits have been taken into account in producing this Corporate Procurement Plan.

NCSE procurement policy is underpinned by the key strands of the National Public Policy Procurement Framework. These are:

- Legislation
- Government policy as set down in circulars
- General Procurement Guidelines for Goods and Services
- Technical guidance, templates and advice issued by the Office of Government Procurement.

Together, these influence the day-to-day procurement guidance contained in the NCSE’s Financial Policies and Procedures Manual.

5. Expenditure Analysis

The OGP recommends that the development of any CPP should be informed by an analysis of expenditure in an organisation over a selected preceding period. This analysis should identify:

- how much was spent
- by what sections
- on what goods and services, and
- the main suppliers used.

The non-pay expenditure from the draft accounts from 2023 was examined for this purpose. Specifically, the expenditure analysed only includes that related to goods and services of non-pay activity. This amounts to €5,358,242 or 30.0% of all expenditure. Other expenditure areas are excluded (e.g. wages & salaries, PRSI; travel and subsistence for staff and for CPD participants; loss on disposal of assets; debtors write-off; and depreciation). These excluded areas amount to €12,483,513 or 70.0% of all expenditure.

There were 332 suppliers engaged by the NCSE in 2023, with 206 suppliers receiving less than €5,000 per annum and 76 suppliers receiving between €5,000 and €25,000 per annum (Table 1).

Table 1. NCSE ranges of expenditure in 2023 and numbers of suppliers

Expenditure	Number of suppliers
Above €25,000	50
€5,000 – €24,999	76
€1,000 - €4,999	102
Below €1,000	104

5.1 Analysis by spend, section responsibility and area of activity

Table 2 below presents information on the analysis of expenditure by amount, section responsible and the types of goods and services involved. Throughout the analysis of expenditure for 2023, expenditure for Pillars 1 and 2 is combined in some areas of activities in line with the business support function of Pillar 2 to support the frontline delivery of services in Pillar 1.

Table 2: Expenditure analysis by spend, section responsibility and area of activity

Section	Area of activity	Amount €	% of total spend analysed
Pillar 3 - HR	Training and Development	892,161	16.7
Pillar 5 – IT	IT expenses	866,702	16.2
Pillar 3 – Facilities	Rent and rates	838,169	15.6
Pillar 1 / 2	Training participants (CPD)	750,223	14.0
Pillar 1 / 2	Professional services & intervention (e.g., occupational therapy, professional assessments, speech & language therapy)	417,147	7.8
Pillar 4 – Research	Research expenditure	335,385	6.3
Pillar 3 – Facilities	Printing, postage and stationery	278,614	5.2
Pillar 5 – IT	Telephone	190,968	3.6
Pillar 3 - Recruitment	Recruitment fees	180,558	3.4
Pillar 3 – Facilities	Repairs and maintenance	132,848	2.5
All Pillars	Meeting expenses	95,861	1.8
Pillar 3 – Facilities	Light and heat	80,044	1.5
Pillar 2 – Litigation	Legal fees	63,999	1.2
Pillar 5 IT and Pillar 2 External Communications	Consultancy fees	60,360	1.1
All Pillars	General expenses	57,417	1.1
Pillar 3 - Finance	External audit fee	48,600	0.9
Pillar 3 - HR	Outsourced services	28,971	0.5
Pillar 3 - HR	Internal audit fee	23,591	0.4
Pillar 4 - Finance	Accountancy fees	16,624	0.3

Source: Draft accounts 2023, see appendix 1 for further detail.

As can be noted from the table above, the vast majority of expenditure analysed is concentrated in four of five Pillars, with annual expenditure of between €1.1m and €1.6m.

- Pillar 3 (HR operations, Strategic HR, Recruitment, Facilities and Internal Communications) accounts for €1,600,608 (23.9%) of analysed spend.
- Pillars 1 & 2 (Support for frontline services, Regional Administration, Events & Admin, Assessment of Need (AON), External Communications, Procurement support, Litigation) accounts for €1,263,231 (23.6%) of analysed spend.
- Pillar 5 (IT support, IT Planning & Projects, Data & Analytics, Business Intelligence) accounts for €1,118,030 (20.9%) of analysed spend.

5.2 Analysis of suppliers

An analysis of suppliers used across the NCSE in 2023 was also undertaken where expenditure of over €5,000 was incurred. In total, there were 126 suppliers in this category.

A breakdown of the 126 suppliers analysed where expenditure was in excess of €5,000 is outlined in Table 3 below. Suppliers are often engaged by different sections in respect of services and goods supplied to the NCSE, where multiple sections across pillars procured from the one supplier, the pillar with the primary spend was noted.

Table 3: Analysis of supplier expenditure by section and number

Section	No. of suppliers	Example of suppliers
Pillar 1 & Pillar 2	47	Events and logistics; venues for CPD e.g., education centres, hotels; educational resources companies; legal services
Pillar 3	40	Recruitment services (e.g., Orange recruitment), utilities (e.g. Eir, Vodafone, An Post), leases (e.g. OPW, Nesta), office supplies (e.g., Codex), security (e.g., Securitas Security Services)
Pillar 4	15	Accountancy companies (e.g. Evelyn Partners), printing and publishing related activity (e.g. CleverCat design); research companies/institutions (e.g. UCD, RSM Ireland), venues and AV services (e.g. Croke Park, AVCOM); venues for governance meetings (e.g. Trim Castle Hotel).
Pillar 5	24	Data solutions, IT hardware and software (e.g., Derilinx, Dell products, Micromail, Version 1 software).
Total	126	

As with the previous analysis, the majority of suppliers to the NCSE in 2023 where payments exceeded €5,000 were engaged by the Pillars 1 and 2 - Inclusive Education and Support Services and Service Delivery Support and Pillar 3 People, Support, Development and Transformation.

6. Procurement supply and assessment of risks

There are a number of factors that impact on procurement supply and supplier engagement and in relation to assessing internal and external risks in a wider sense. These are outlined below:

- **Managing competing demands for staff time and focus** – This is mitigated by additional staff joining the NCSE under the transformation programme. Ongoing induction, training and management for new and existing staff is a key action in this procurement plan.
- **Frontline local team input into procurement processes** – End-user input into requests for quotation and tenders is essential to ensure that the outcome of the procurement activities is fit-for-purpose. Acknowledging competing priorities and demands on time and including forward planning and scheduling of this engagement will mitigate this risk.

- **Office of Government Procurement support and collaboration** - Delivering on the priorities within this plan, including achieving the compliance targets requires the provision of support and ongoing collaboration with the OGP.
- **Supplier engagement** – Engaging with existing and potential suppliers and a focus on climate action and green procurement requires a proactive approach to be integrated into procurement planning and processes.
- **Programme and change management within Vision 26** - The delivery and monitoring of the Corporate Procurement Plan 2024-2026 will be driven by principles of Total Quality Management (TQM), with tracking of all initiatives, process mapping and change management risks identified and mitigated as appropriate.
- **Increasing demand for procurement services** – With the transformation programme underway in the NCSE, there is increased demand for procurement support on an ongoing basis across all Pillars. The Procurement Officer and supporting staff in Pillar 4 will review capacity and focus on induction and ongoing training to build capacity across teams.

7. Actions for Corporate Procurement Plan 2024-2026

Based on the analysis of expenditure in the NCSE from the 2023 Accounts, the review of the National Public Policy Procurement Framework, and the recommendations in internal and external audit reports, a number of actions are outlined below.

These actions relate to the aims and objectives outlined in section 2 and have timelines attached to them. Many actions outlined below are already established and we will endeavour for continuous improvement alongside new initiatives under the plan. Delivery sets out further detail on the action and in relation to the specific components of each action. The timelines relate to the plan for future implementation.

The development and implementation of a CPP is the responsibility of the NCSE Procurement Officer. The Procurement Officer reports to the Head of Finance, Principal Officer in Pillar 4.

Goal 1 - Ensure goods and services are procured in accordance with best practice as set out by the OGP.

Actions	Delivery	Timelines
Update the procurement section of the NCSE FPPM	Incorporate updates to the procurement section of the FPPM to ensure that it reflects the latest guidance from the OGP.	Annually Q2 and ongoing as required
Participate in the Procurement Officer Network	NCSE Procurement Officer and team to engage with Procurement Officer Network and events to incorporate best practice into NCSE procurement activities	Ongoing
Encourage greater use of centralised arrangements	Where appropriate for NCSE needs, encourage use of the OGP and OGCI frameworks, Dynamic Purchasing System.	Ongoing

Encourage greater use of OGP templates for procurement and contract management.	Encourage staff to use OGP templates for procurement and contracts, in line with the spend and complexity of procurement activities.	Ongoing
Update internal contract templates	Engage with Pillar 2 legal and external legal services where appropriate to update internal contract templates	Q1 2025
Continue to ensure all sections are informed of the latest OGP publications and guidance.	Share updates, circulars and other relevant publications/guidance with sections in relation to procurement best practice and guidance	Ongoing
Annual procurement planning for all sections	Initiate annual procurement planning by sections (including identification of multi-annual procurement), engaging with the Procurement Officer and team on undertaking procurement in a coordinated manner – to increase compliance and underpin value for money.	Annually, Q4
Review the CPP on an annual basis to ensure that it is fit for purpose.	Procurement Officer to review the CPP annually to ensure actions and implementation are in line with business needs of the NCSE, and procurement best practice.	Annually, Q3
Review the spend across Pillars to encourage combined procurement processes	Review of spend across Pillars and encourage combined procurement processes and contracts in accordance with value for money.	Annually, Q3

Goal 2 - Enhance staff awareness and capacity to undertake procurement activities in a compliant manner

Action	Delivery	Timeline
Deliver induction sessions for new NCSE staff	Delivering differentiated training for staff in head office (procurement-facing roles) and frontline teams	Ongoing, as required
Deliver training sessions for NCSE staff, as required	Delivering training for staff in head office (procurement-facing roles) and frontline teams on updated guidance and processes	Ongoing, as required
Update guidance, induction and information and training sessions for staff in line with new circulars, legislation and guidance issued	Continue to update staff on relevant procurement publications (guidance, templates, information notes) issued by OGP and other relevant bodies, seeking clarification where necessary from sources.	Ongoing
Engage with the eTenders group across sections to enhance and further build capacity in sections	Engagement on a quarterly basis (or as required) with the eTenders group – assigned staff from each section, to build capacity and ensure best	Ongoing – quarterly engagement

	practice is incorporated into calls for tender.	
Engage with HR to review training needs /engage external procurement training	Review the need for externally delivered procurement training for staff in procurement-facing roles across the organisation	Q2-Q3 2025
Provide ongoing support to staff on procurement activities, where required.	Procurement Officer and team in Pillar 4 to support head office staff with procurement queries and activities, and engaging with OGP and other relevant bodies,	Ongoing
Systems, applications and tools to support procurement activities are made available to staff	Engage with Pillar 5 in line with systems and innovation work plan to put in place processes and applications to support staff and maintain compliance with procurement guidelines	Ongoing
Capture staff feedback and suggestions for improvements	In conjunction with review of the CPP, findings from audits, feedback will be sought from staff across the NCSE to incorporate continuous improvement.	Annually, Q3

Goal 3 – Maintain effective governance and compliance in relation to procurement activity in the NCSE

Action	Delivery	Timeline
Engage with Finance section to ensure that payments are processed in line with FPPM requirements.	Engage with Finance section in relation to procurement monitoring and compliance regarding processing of payments.	Ongoing
Maintain and publish the Contracts Register quarterly for all procurement over €25,000	Update and publish the contracts register on a timely basis every quarter, in line with national procurement guidelines.	Quarterly, Ongoing
Circulate a Cumulative Spend Tracker to all sections on a quarterly basis	Preparation and circulation of a Cumulative Spend Tracker to all sections to support compliance with public procurement rules for procurement by quotation threshold.	Quarterly, Ongoing
Annual review of SOPs in relation to procurement compliance monitoring mechanisms and reporting activities for outcomes to Council	Procurement Officer and team to review SOPs in conjunction with Finance section on procurement monitoring and reporting activities. Includes monitoring and reporting procedures for procurement processes for all payments €1,000-25,000, and in respect sample of payments above €25,000.	Annually, Q2

Undertake quarterly expenditure review and update on procurement compliance, as part of the NCSE Finance Report to Council.	NCSE Procurement Officer to prepare a report to Head of Finance for inclusion in Finance Report to NCSE Council - update for monitoring and review of procurement activities in each quarter.	Quarterly, Ongoing
Undertake a random check on all purchase orders over €25,000 for compliance with procurement procedures.	Engage with Finance section to check procurement documentation for all purchase orders for amounts over €25,000 processed in quarter	Annually, Q3
Provide an update on progress in relation to the implementation of the Corporate Procurement Plan	Reporting to Council on progress on actions and timeline across Goals 1-4	Annually, Q1
Council approval is required for all procurement contracts greater than €250,000	All procurement contracts over €250,000 threshold are brought to NCSE Council for approval	Ongoing, as required
Inclusion of aspects of procurement in Internal Audits	Aspects of procurement to be included in the Internal Audit Plan	Ongoing, as required.

Goal 4 – Facilitate environmental objectives through procurement

Action	Delivery	Timeline
Report on green procurement activities across the NCSE, in line with legislation and guidance	Sections to collate and report on incorporation on green procurement into activities to Procurement Officer	Annually, Q2
Review staff needs to build capacity to include sustainable approaches in procurement activities across the NCSE	Engage with management and staff across teams on needs to enhance sustainable and green procurement practices where appropriate	Annually, Q3
Deliver information and training sessions on green procurement to staff	Prepare and deliver training on green and sustainable procurement to staff in procurement-facing roles	Annually, Q1

8. Conclusion

The aim of this Corporate Procurement Plan, which informs procurement activity in the NCSE to the end of 2026, is to deliver greater value for money and improve compliance with procurement legislation, policy and practice. Furthermore, a new area has been included in the plan on green and sustainable procurement and its implementation across the NCSE. The plan outlines a set of objectives and related actions to contribute to these aims.

While the implementation of good procurement practice is the role of everyone in the organisation, the oversight and implementation of the actions in this plan will be the central role of the Procurement Officer, supported by colleagues in Pillar 4 Research and Governance.

The actions outlined here will, when implemented, lead to improved practice across the organisation. This in turn will ultimately result in greater compliance and a more confident and knowledgeable staff comfortable in their purchasing roles.

Appendix: Extract from Draft Accounts 2023

Area of Expenditure	€
Printing, postage and stationery	278,614
Rent and rates	838,169
Telephone	190,968
Light and heat	80,044
Repairs and maintenance	132,848
Training and development	892,161
Training participants (CPD) ¹	750,223
Travel and subsistence expenses ²	1,383,711
Travel and subsistence participants ³	179,427
Meeting expenses	95,861
General expenses	57,417
Recruitment fees ⁴	180,558
Research expenditure ⁵	335,385
IT expenses	866,702
Consultancy fees ⁶	60,360
Outsourced services ⁷	28,971
Professional services & intervention ⁸	417,147
Internal audit fee	23,591
External audit fee	48,600
Accountancy fees	16,624
Legal fees	63,999
Loss on disposal of assets	901
Debtors historic write off	158,810
Wages & salaries	9,699,407
Employers PRSI	929,330
Depreciation	131,927
Total Expenditure	17,841,255

¹ This reflects the training costs associated with providing CPD for participants such as venue costs, lecturer costs and course fees.

² Travel and subsistence increased in 2023 due to additional staff recruiting associated with the expansion of the NCSE. Foreign travel and subsistence expenses in the year amounted to €17,347 (2022: €6,503).

³ This reflects the travel and subsistence costs incurred by participants attending CPD courses.

⁴ In 2023, a contract was put in place with a recruitment company to support the significant recruitment activities linked to the organisational expansion.

⁵ This includes the evaluation costs for the CES programme which is a ring fenced project that includes the cost of the evaluation.

⁶ Consultancy fees were incurred in relation to IT and communication services.

⁷ This reflects the administration costs associated with the outsourced payroll.

⁸ This reflects costs incurred from the provision of services such as occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, literacy and numeracy interventions, behaviour improvement interventions and professional assessments.