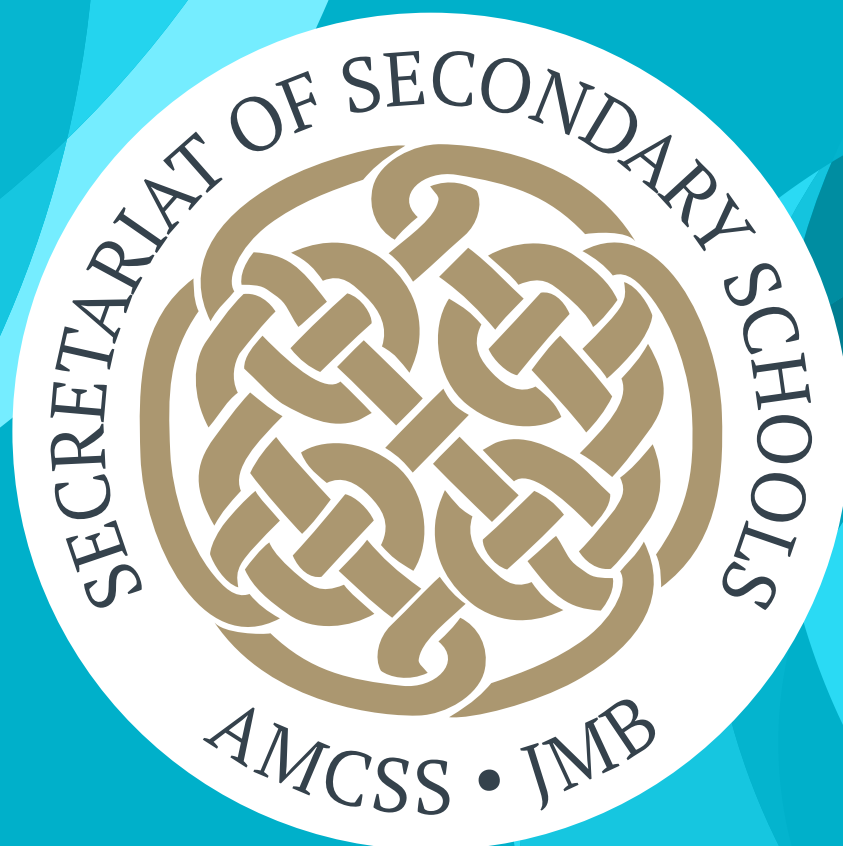















Strategic Development Plan 2022 – 2025



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Section 1: Foreword



On behalf of the Secretariat of Secondary Schools (SSS), I am delighted to present our strategic development plan 2022-2025.

The process of developing a new plan at the Secretariat has given rise to important conversations among our stakeholders. These have enabled us to determine our vision and strategic goals considering the challenges ahead and in light of the extraordinary challenges posed by a global pandemic. In setting out our strategic goals for the work of the Secretariat over the next three years we seek to energise our organisation around a shared set of values as well as to guide and prioritise decisions in the years leading up to 2025.

While the plan sets out our direction over the next three years, it should be understood as part of an overall trajectory, beginning in the origins of the Secretariat, building on the work of the staff and councils of the organisation since then, and the more recent work to revise the company's constitution and internal regulations. The plan is true to our essential character as an organisation, as we have refined our understanding of how we will most effectively achieve our vision.

The five strategic goals demonstrate our commitment to excellence through the core functions of a recognised school management body, our commitment to the value of denominational education, our commitment to promoting educational research in support of the development aims of the voluntary secondary sector, as well as our duty to engage stakeholders. Through this engagement and the development of strategic relationships with the partners in education we will articulate an identity consistent with our mission, vision, and values in order to facilitate the education community in understanding our goals and in recognising our achievements.

To achieve these goals, we need to ensure that the Secretariat is appropriately developed and resourced as an organisation, with the capacity and flexibility to meet unknown challenges which may lie ahead. The strategic context in which the Secretariat operates has been profoundly affected by a sustained period of austerity and underfunding of education followed by the extraordinary challenge of maintaining an education system during a global pandemic and a critical lack of teachers in most, if not all, subjects. In recognition of the as yet unknown challenges ahead, our response requires this to be a flexible strategy, a living document to be reviewed and updated as circumstances change.

This plan represents the efforts of all members of the organisation whose valuable input in the consultation phase gave those charged with its development much food for thought. I would like to thank everyone who took part in the consultation phase and in particular, the members of the strategy committee, the risk committee, and the board for their work in bringing this plan to fruition. I am confident that the extensive consultation process undertaken in the development of the plan, and the deep commitment it demonstrates to providing strategic leadership, service and support to schools will secure the support and advocacy of our staff, schools' boards of management, senior leadership and management teams, and our external partners.



Mrs Deirdre Matthews,
President AMCSS/JMB

Section 2: About the Secretariat of Secondary Schools

2.1 History and Origins of the Secretariat

Up to the 1960s, Catholic voluntary secondary schools were established and run by the bishops (Diocesan schools) and by religious orders of priests, brothers, and nuns. In addition, a small number of Catholic schools were owned and run by lay people.

The interests of Catholic school management were upheld by a number of organisations: the Catholic Headmasters Association (CHA) representing priests; the Conference of Convent Secondary Schools (CCSS) representing nuns; the Teaching Brothers Association (TBA) representing teaching brothers' institutes, and the Federation of Lay Catholic Secondary Schools (FCLS) representing the lay owners of schools. With the exception of FCLS, the organisations were subject to either episcopal or religious authorities.

There were two education commissions for Catholic schools: the Episcopal Commission for Education (Bishops) and the Education Commission of the Conference of Major Religious Superiors (CMRS).

In 1968, the Council of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools (CMCSS) was established by the Episcopal Conference and CMRS. CMCSS comprised representatives from CHA (2), CCSS (3), TBA (2), FCLS (1), Episcopal Commission (1) and CMRS (1).



In 1964, religious and lay Catholic managerial groups and the Protestant groups came together informally as the Joint Managerial Body (JMB) to conduct negotiations with, and make representations to, the Department of Education and the ASTI. This cooperation was particularly important in presenting a united front to respond to industrial relations issues and the consequences of the introduction of free education in 1968.

The Secretariat of Secondary Schools (SSS) was incorporated as a company limited by guarantee in 1973 under the Companies Act 1963 to look after the interests of voluntary secondary schools. SSS provided a small administrative staff to support the work of the CMCSS and the JMB.

In 1987, CMCSS was restructured to take account of the declining numbers of religious in schools and the advent of boards of management. Part of this restructuring led to the establishment of the Association of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools (AMCSS) comprising ten geographic regions. The principal and chairperson of the board of management of each school in the region attended meetings of the region. Each region elected one principal and one chairperson to represent the region on CMCSS, giving twenty regional representatives. One representative from the Episcopal Commission and one representative from the Conference of Religious in Ireland, brought the total membership of CMCSS to twenty-two.

The CMCSS, together with three representatives of the ISA, came together in 1987 to form the Council of the JMB. Administrative and support services continued to be provided for both Catholic and Protestant secondary schools by the SSS General Secretary and the Secretariat.

In 2018, the Irish Episcopal Conference (IEC) and the Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland (AMRI) approved a new structure for the management and trusteeship of post-primary Catholic schools. As part of this restructuring SSS drew up a revised constitution comprising a Memorandum of Association and Articles of Association. In conjunction with the constitution, Internal Regulations were drawn up and approved. These regulations replace the Manual on Procedures first drawn up in 1987 and revised in 1993 and 2000.

From small beginnings, SSS through its AMCSS and JMB divisions, has firmly established an excellent reputation as a recognised school management body and key stakeholder in the field of Irish education. Through cooperation with the Department of Education, the inspectorate and other education partners, SSS has contributed significantly to the improvement of teaching and learning and the educational experience of students.

2.2 Secretariat of Secondary Schools Mission, Vision, and Values

The Secretariat of Secondary Schools (SSS) is a company limited by guarantee. It is managed by its directors and governed by its constitution composed of a memorandum of association and articles of association.



Mission

The mission of the Secretariat of Secondary Schools is to promote and represent the interests of Catholic voluntary secondary schools and voluntary secondary schools under the aegis of the Irish Schoolheads' Association, and to carry out the role of a recognised school management organisation on behalf of all voluntary secondary schools.



Vision

The Secretariat of Secondary Schools is a professional school management organisation representing the interests of all voluntary secondary schools, promoting the advancement of education, providing support, training, and advisory services, and carrying out educational research and development.

SSS fulfils its mission and vision by

- › Offering professional development, support, and advice to all voluntary secondary schools
- › Negotiating with the Department of Education and education partners on behalf of all voluntary secondary schools
- › Collaborating with relevant partners in education
- › Undertaking quality research and development and the sharing of best practice



Values

The SSS vision is underpinned by values which seek to reflect a vision of life and a corresponding philosophy of education based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. SSS promotes the value of denominational education in schools both with a Catholic ethos and those under the aegis of the Irish Schoolheads' Association. SSS engages with all stakeholders in a spirit of partnership and support, and offers a distinctive leadership based on our shared values.

2.3 Governance

The objects and powers of SSS are laid out in its constitution in compliance with the Governance Code of the Charities Regulator.

In legal terms, the Catholic Education Partnership (CEP) is the sole member and owner of SSS and appoints its board of directors. The business of SSS is managed by the board of directors in accordance with the provisions of its constitution.

The board of directors of SSS comprises:

- › The president of the Council of the AMCSS, who is chairperson of the board
- › The deputy president of the Council of the AMCSS
- › The outgoing president of the Council of the AMCSS
- › The treasurer of the Council of the AMCSS
- › Two persons appointed by the ISA, who must be members of the Council of JMB
- › One person nominated by AMRI
- › One person nominated by the IEC
- › Two persons nominated by the Council of the AMCSS who are serving members of that council
- › Two persons nominated by APTCS who are serving directors of APTCS
- › Three persons nominated by the board of directors who have been recommended by the Nominations Committee having regard for the balance of skills and expertise required

At least three of the directors appointed will be serving school principals in voluntary secondary schools and at least two will be chairpersons of boards of management in voluntary secondary schools.

The SSS company is organised in two divisions, the AMCSS and the JMB. Each has a distinct role and function which are governed by the board of directors.

The AMCSS promotes the interests and welfare of Catholic voluntary secondary schools in Ireland. The principal and chairperson of each Catholic voluntary secondary school in each AMCSS Region form the membership of each AMCSS Region.

Certain of the Company's activities are operated by its JMB division, including engaging in discussion and negotiation, and specific supports and services. The JMB Council is constituted as a committee of the Board of Directors and is comprised of all members of the Council of the AMCSS from time to time and three persons appointed by the Irish Schoolheads' Association.

The board has overall responsibility for SSS, its divisions, committees, the Financial Support Services Unit (FSSU), the Schools Procurement Unit (SPU) and all employees. The FSSU and SPU are hosted in the offices of SSS under mandate from the Department of Education, and it is recognised that the FSSU and SPU engage in planning processes in accordance with those mandates agreed between the Department and SSS.

SSS represents and provides services and advice to the boards of management and principals of voluntary secondary schools in areas such as school management, finance, procurement, governance, good practice, and compliance. These services and advice are delivered through its AMCSS and JMB divisions.

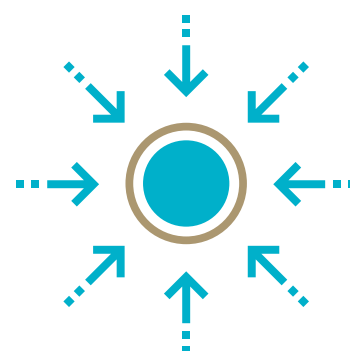
The company's activities at local level are organised by the AMCSS which operates on a regional basis comprising ten AMCSS regions. The principal and chairperson of each Catholic voluntary secondary school in each region form the membership of the region.



2.4 Key Objectives

Under its constitution as a company limited by guarantee, the SSS key objectives are:

- › Promoting the advancement of education in accordance with Catholic ethos in Catholic voluntary secondary schools
- › Promoting the advancement of education in accordance with the ethos of each of the Irish Schoolheads' Association schools in Ireland
- › Carrying out the role of a recognised school management organisation, recognised by the Minister for Education for the purposes of the Education Act 1998 [S.7.(4)(b)]
- › Providing an information, advice, and support service for all such schools, and, at the discretion of the Board of Directors, any other voluntary secondary schools, such as Gaelscoileanna and Educate Together schools, which may wish to avail of SSS services and advice in areas such as school management, finance, governance, good practice, and compliance
- › Promoting educational research and development
- › Working with APTCS and CEP to promote cooperation and cohesion between SSS and these bodies
- › Providing training and guidance to promote best practice in the provision of education
- › Working to influence education policy



2.5 Strategic Context

In the second decade of the current century, the Secretariat and its almost 400 schools operated in a period of financial austerity. Now, as the third decade emerges, we must meet the extraordinary challenges of a global pandemic.

The overarching aims of the Secretariat's work as set out in its objectives nonetheless remain constant.

The strategic context in which the Secretariat operates is shaped by a number of key factors:

- › The priorities of the school communities we serve
- › The challenges arising from the Covid19 pandemic in terms of its impacts on voluntary secondary school leaders and boards of management
- › The need to seize the opportunity provided by the Secretariat's new governance and regulatory structures to renew and invigorate the organisation at operational and regional levels
- › The imperative to enhance our effectiveness and align our business planning with the overarching aims of this strategic plan
- › Responding, through a continued and intensive focus on staff development and resourcing, to meet the needs of our schools
- › The recognition that contemporary societal and policy pressures on denominational education will place significant demands on our sector
- › Increasing resource implications and the need to achieve a sustainable future funding model
- › The need to enhance our level of ambition for research and innovation with the aim of establishing a stronger base for our negotiating, advocacy, and representational roles
- › The need to mitigate educational disadvantage and to support inclusion across our school network
- › The development of an executive structure enabling the key features of distributed leadership and community of practice
- › Awareness of the principles of sustainability as they apply to people and resources

Section 3: Planning for 2022 – 2025

3.1 About this Plan

The Board of the Secretariat, under S.11 of its Regulations, constituted a Strategy Committee, with a mandate to ‘establish and carry out an effective strategic planning process’. This process was formally initiated in early 2021 with the operational support of a member of the executive.

The systematic process underpinning the development of the plan aimed at establishing an ambition for our organisation’s future and determining how best to achieve it. Specifically, the strategic development planning process set out to:

- › Agree actions that will contribute to the development of the Secretariat and its sub-divisions
- › Align resources for optimal results
- › Build a distinctive and purposeful identity
- › Professionally develop and resource our staff
- › Comply with our governance and other statutory requirements
- › Underpin the development of an annual corporate plan which will help provide clarity of role expectation for each staff member and clearly chart the tasks and functions required to meet our strategic objectives

Another significant purpose of strategic planning has been to help us manage and reduce risk, and to:

- › Analyse potential risks
- › Manage uncertainty
- › Implement risk control measures
- › Consider how to minimise the impact of risks, should they occur

The board's Risk Committee carries the function of assessing, reviewing, and reporting on risk.

A detailed schedule of phases, actions, approvers, and timelines was drawn up and the following stages undertaken:

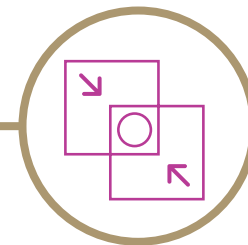
1	Defining mandates, roles, and responsibilities
2	Communication on the purpose of strategic development planning
3	Consultation with the strategy committee, the board and with staff
4	Consultation with schools, AMCSS Regions, the ISA, and with other stakeholder groups
5	Research
6	Analysis
7	Drafting
8	Final limited consultation
9	Final drafting
10	Approval by the board of directors

3.2 Strategic Goals

The five Strategic Goals identified by the Secretariat of Secondary Schools for the 2022 to 2025 planning timeframe are:

- **Promoting Denominational Education in Voluntary Secondary Schools**
To advance education in accordance with Catholic ethos and the ethos of schools within the Irish Schoolheads Association
- **Carrying out the Role of a Recognised School Management Body**
To negotiate on behalf of all schools in the voluntary secondary sector and to develop strategic relationships in influencing education policy
- **Providing Management, Compliance and Advisory Services**
To provide information, advice, support, professional development, and training to all our schools
- **Promoting Educational Research and Development**
To generate, use, and share knowledge and research in support of the educational development aims of the voluntary secondary sector
- **Organisational Effectiveness and Governance**
To develop the Secretariat's governance and organisation structures, processes, skills, and competences, and to communicate the work and achievements of the Secretariat

Section 4. Achieving the Strategic Goals

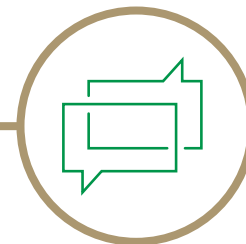


Goal 1: Promoting Denominational Education in Voluntary Secondary Schools

To advance education in accordance with Catholic ethos and the ethos of schools within the Irish Schoolheads Association

We will deliver on this goal through the following planned outcomes

	Outcomes	Enabling Measures	Timeframe
1.1	Living-Out our Constitution The SSS aligns all its planning and activities to the principles set out in its Constitution and its operational framework as set out in its Internal Regulations	The SSS Constitution and Internal Regulations are made accessible, shared, and comprehended by all key stakeholders within the organisation	Ongoing
1.2	Advancing Catholic Education The SSS works cohesively with the APTCS and CEP in the advancement of Catholic education and the continuing development of excellence in schools with a Catholic ethos	The current Memorandum of Agreement between SSS, APTCS and CEP is implemented in light of the evolution of each company and the needs of schools with a Catholic ethos	Ongoing
1.3	Advancing ISA Schools The SSS works cohesively with the Irish Schoolheads Association in the advancement of school ethos and the continuing development of excellence in schools comprehended by the ISA	A structured communication plan is developed to provide regular contact between the leadership of ISA and the JMB	Ongoing Planning: Year 1
1.4	Development of the AMCSS Regional Structure AMCSS Regions are supported in their operation and development by the sharing of good practice	The SSS produces a development plan, supporting the good management, leadership, and operation of our AMCSS Regions	Ongoing Draft Plan: Year 1
1.5	Developing Prospective Faith School Leaders The SSS actively supports the professional and faith development of a cohort of prospective school leaders	The SSS collaborates with APTCS and CEP in the creation of a pool of advocates for Catholic education, and in the development of prospective leaders who have an ongoing commitment to denominational education	Ongoing

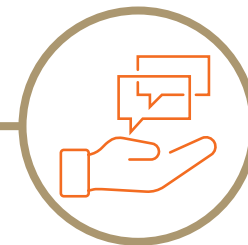


Goal 2: Carrying out the Role of a Recognised School Management Body

To negotiate on behalf of all schools in the voluntary secondary sector and to develop strategic relationships in influencing education policy

We will deliver on this goal through the following planned outcomes

	Outcomes	Enabling Measures	Timeframe
2.1	Establishing Clarity of Role and Service Clarity is established and shared on the role of a management body, the service-level arrangements provided by the SSS, and its policy positions in key areas	A statement of the scope, roles, and responsibilities of SSS as an approved school management body, the SSS agreed service-level arrangements, and SSS key policy positions, is developed and communicated to stakeholders	Year 1
2.2	Advocating for All Voluntary Secondary Schools The SSS is active in its advocacy for all voluntary secondary schools, including promoting greater equity of funding for schools in the sector	The SSS commissions research on the funding of schools in the voluntary secondary sector, which carries sections devoted to fee-charging schools of all faith denominations, DEIS schools, new and developing schools, and schools serving the wide variety of communities across Ireland	Ongoing Research: Commissioned, Year 1 Completed, Year 2
2.3	A Dedicated Professional Development Remit The SSS works to support the professional development of school leaders, relevant school personnel, and Board of Management chairpersons and members	A mandate for the SSS in respect of relevant and appropriate professional development within the sector is established, resourced, and implemented, and opportunities for external collaboration are explored	Medium-term
2.4	Developing Purposeful Relationships Liaison and collaborative relationships with a range of organisations and government departments are improving the awareness of school management concerns in policy implementation	SSS has a clearly framed mandate based on its mission, vision, and values, and which underpins all its relationships with government and other stakeholders	Ongoing Mandate Development: Initiated in Year 1
2.5	Growing Relationships Internationally The SSS establishes formal and informal links with equivalent education bodies in UK and European jurisdictions	SSS identifies the potential for engagement with international bodies engaged in the promotion and support of education in second-level schools	Ongoing

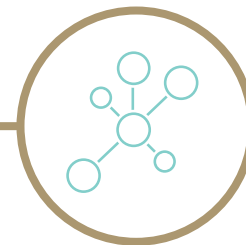


Goal 3: Providing Management, Compliance and Advisory Services

To provide information, advice, support, professional development, and training to all voluntary secondary schools

We will deliver on this goal through the following planned outcomes

	Outcomes	Enabling Measures	Timeframe
3.1	Providing a Comprehensive Range of Relevant Services SSS provides a comprehensive and high calibre range of information, advice, support, professional development, and training services to all voluntary secondary schools	SSS engages regularly with its schools to identify needs in relation to services currently provided-for, (e.g., in legal/HR/IR, in building, in vetting support services and in schools' professional development requirements), and expands and enhances its services in response to such needs	Ongoing Consultation during Year 2
3.2	Aligning Human Resources to Service Plan The human resource capacity of the SSS is developed to meet the needs of our schools	The Board reviews staffing capacity, deployment, and internal operational structures to provide for alignment with the strategic objectives of the organisation over the term of this plan, and supports the development of a community of practice across its operations	Ongoing Review Initiated in Year 1
3.3	Further Developing an SSS Training Service SSS engages periodically with its schools to identify their training needs and appropriate professional development opportunities are developed and provided	The Secretariat consults annually with its schools to determine their current training requirements, to inform decisions around such provision, and to develop a calendared schedule of such professional development	Annually
3.4	Enhancing the SSS Management Advisory Service SSS regularly reviews and aligns its management advisory services to identified school priorities and to current and impending demands on school management	SSS engages periodically with its schools to identify expansion or enhancement needs in relation to advisory services currently provided-for, and configures its human and other resources to provide for such requirements	Ongoing
3.5	Supporting the Agency of Volunteers SSS recognises, affirms, and supports the significant contribution of volunteer activity across both the organisation and within its schools	SSS comprehends the scope and scale of volunteer agency across the organisation, identifies and provides for support and development opportunities, particularly in relation to board of management chairpersons and region leadership teams	Initiated in Year 2
3.6	Monitoring of Service Recipient Satisfaction SSS periodically seeks feedback from schools on the suitability, efficiency, and effectiveness of its services, and responds appropriately and within its resources to such feedback	SSS periodically conducts research on school management satisfaction levels with its roles and services, and reports to the board of directors on the findings	Annually

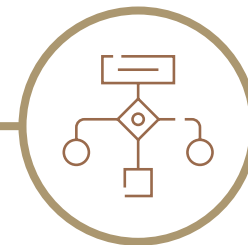


Goal 4: Promoting Educational Research and Development

To generate, use and share knowledge and research in support of the educational development aims of the voluntary secondary sector

We will deliver on this goal through the following planned outcomes

	Outcomes	Enabling Measures	Timeframe
4.1	Purposeful Research Activity The SSS carries out, commissions, and collaborates with other relevant bodies in the generation of, high quality research which supports the strategic aims of the organisation	Print and digital media are used to effectively disseminate SSS research findings, discussion papers, submissions etc.	As determined
4.2	Prioritising Principal and Deputy Principal Wellbeing The SSS researches the issue of school leaders' workload and wellbeing	SSS commissions, or carries out, high calibre research on the extent of workload pressures and their consequences on principals and deputy principals	Medium-term
4.3	Researching Faith Education and Policy The SSS carries out research on the value of Catholic education and assesses the impact of government policy on denominational education generally	The SSS commissions research on the value of faith schooling to contemporary Irish society and assesses how government policy supports or erodes such provision	Current and Ongoing
4.4	An Evidence Base for Funding Equalisation The SSS researches and reports on the inequitable state funding arrangements relating to schools in the voluntary secondary sector	SSS commissions high level research to provide evidence of the discrepancies in state funding of schools in our sector vis-à-vis schools in the ETB and C&C sectors	Short-term
4.5	Supporting Leader-Practitioner Research SSS encourages and supports the research activities of voluntary secondary principals and deputy principals, and works to disseminate relevant outcomes from such activity	SSS welcomes, affirms, and supports relevant research activity carried out by voluntary secondary school leaders and collaborates where feasible with such investigations and in the sharing of findings, recommendations, and pertinent publications	Ongoing



Goal 5: Organisational Effectiveness and Governance

To develop the Secretariat's governance and organisation structures and processes, and to communicate its work and achievements

We will deliver on this goal through the following planned outcomes

	Outcomes	Enabling Measures	Timeframe
5.1	Operational Structure Meets Service Function Internal operational structure is aligned with an efficient and effective service model and key strategic objectives	Engage in an internal review of the operational structure across the Secretariat's functioning, with a view to achieving greater cohesion and coherence of activity	Ongoing Initiated in Year 1
5.2	Providing for Effective Corporate Functioning Corporate and Human Resource services are fully provided for	Identify a set of functions to be assigned to a corporate services role, and introduce a performance management and development system	Initiated in Year 1
5.3	Monitoring our Governance The work and functioning of the organisation's governance structures are regularly evaluated	Compliance with CRA obligations as a registered charity, and other legislative requirements, will be monitored, and gaps or discrepancies identified for remediation	As determined
5.4	A Contemporary Communications Strategy Using an effective media strategy and process, key messages relating to the work of SSS are shared internally and externally	A Communications Strategy is developed with the aim of building communications awareness into all areas of the Secretariat's work	Ongoing Strategy Development in Year 2

Section 5:

Implementing, Monitoring and Reporting

This strategic plan sets out the strategic goals, outcomes and enabling measures that will direct the work of the Secretariat of Secondary Schools over the period January 2022 to December 2025.

Ongoing progress will be monitored by the strategy and risk committees and reported through general updates to the board of directors and through published reports to annual conference.

The preparation and implementation of an annual corporate plan and the operation of a performance management and development system are central to guiding and monitoring progress at organisational and individual level.

Progress reports and presentations on the various areas of work will be presented to the board over the course of the strategy.

Appendix

Secretariat of Secondary Schools

General Secretaries

1972 – 1975 : Fr John Hughes SJ
1975 – 1977 : Unfilled
1977 – 1996 : Br Declan Duffy
1997 – 2005 : Mr George O'Callaghan
2006 – 2015 : Mr Ferdia Kelly
2016 – : Mr John Curtis

Presidents

1987 – 1990 : Br Adrian McGrath
1990 – 1997 : Mr Liam Murphy
1997 – 2000 : Sr Marie Celine Clegg
2000 – 2003 : Mgr Jim Cassin
2003 – 2006 : Mr Paul Meany
2006 – 2012 : Mr Noel Merrick
2012 – 2018 : Fr Paul Connell
2018 – : Mrs Deirdre Matthews