



# TransformED

**Northern Ireland Curriculum 2028**  
Short Guides for Schools

## Frequently Asked Questions





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## Understanding the reform

### Why is the curriculum changing?

The [Strategic Review of the Northern Ireland Curriculum](#) concluded that the current curriculum does not provide sufficient clarity, coherence and progression.

This lack of specificity about what pupils should learn leads to variation between schools, curriculum overload, gaps in learning and weak progression.

The proposed reform seeks to address these challenges by providing a clearer entitlement, stronger progression and a more coherent curriculum framework.

### What is the overall aim of the new curriculum?

The overall aim is to support young people to develop their capabilities by equipping them with the knowledge, skills and experiences that enable them to have genuine choices and empower them to make informed and responsible decisions throughout their lives.

### Is the new curriculum based on the curriculum used in other jurisdictions?

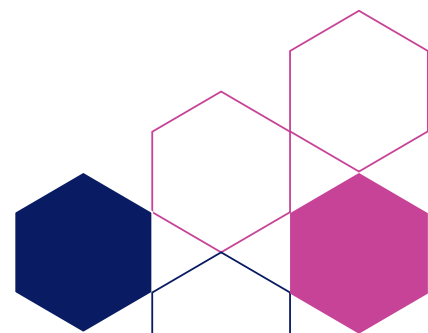
The curriculum has been developed specifically for Northern Ireland.

Of course, curriculum design has been informed by international evidence and practice but the structure, drafting and approach is specific to Northern Ireland and the proposed curriculum has been designed to reflect the local context, learners and educational priorities.

### Why does Religious Education (RE) appear to be less prominent in the consultation?

Religious Education is an important part of the curriculum and contributes to the curriculum aim, objectives and capabilities. The publication sequence meant that the RE syllabus was still in development when the wider curriculum reform consultation was launched.

The RE syllabus has now been released, and you can respond to the consultation here: [Consultation on the Religious Education Core Syllabus | Department of Education](#)



## Curriculum design and content

### **Will schools and teachers still have flexibility in what they teach?**

Yes. The curriculum establishes a shared entitlement by setting out the knowledge, skills and experiences that learners should encounter as they progress through their education.

Within this framework, teachers and leaders will be able to exercise their professional judgement in curriculum design and planning for their students. This will also include decisions about how content is taught, the resources used and how learning is organised to meet the needs of their students and school community.

### **Are the examples included in the curriculum documentation compulsory?**

No. They are not statutory requirements and should not be interpreted as a prescribed list of content. They are illustrative and intended to exemplify the ambition and the learning outcomes, but teachers can select the examples they wish to use within their own school and classroom contexts.

### **Are the subject frameworks written for teachers or for students?**

The subject frameworks are professional curriculum documents written for teachers and leaders. Their purpose is to support curriculum planning, teaching and assessment.

As a result, the language, structure and categories used within the frameworks are designed to communicate curriculum expectations clearly to education professionals.

This terminology is not intended to be introduced directly to students or used as classroom language in all cases.

### **Do the categories and headings within the frameworks need to be replicated in classroom practice?**

No. The subject-specific categories and headings within the frameworks are intended to support curriculum planning.

### **Will schools need to rewrite their school curriculum immediately?**

No. The implementation phase is intended to provide time for schools to familiarise themselves with the new curriculum, review existing provision and make changes gradually as part of the phased roll-out.

Schools will be provided with curriculum resources to support planning.



**Will schools still be able to teach local topics and reflect their own context?**

Yes. The curriculum establishes a common entitlement for all learners, but schools retain flexibility to select relevant local examples, texts, case studies and experiences that reflect their community and context.

**Knowledge, skills and capabilities****Does a knowledge-rich curriculum mean less emphasis on skills?**

No. The curriculum recognises the importance of both subject-specific knowledge and skills. A knowledge-rich curriculum carefully identifies the most important knowledge and skills pupils need, rooted in the concepts, content and disciplinary traditions of subjects, organises that knowledge coherently, and ensures that learning builds cumulatively over time.

**Will pupils receive a narrower education under the new curriculum?**

The opposite is true. The aim is to provide all learners with a truly broad, balanced and high-quality education across all subjects while ensuring greater consistency in what children are taught.

**Does a knowledge-rich curriculum mean more memorisation and testing?**

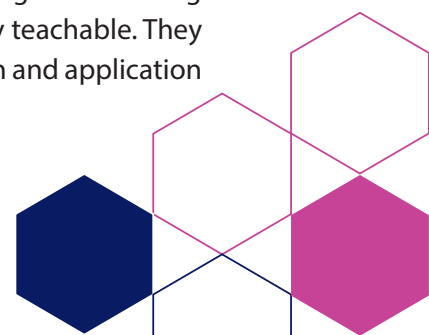
No. A knowledge-rich curriculum is not about recalling facts. The purpose of secure knowledge is to support worthwhile educational goods, including understanding, reasoning, creativity, communication and problem-solving, and so forth. Knowledge and thinking are viewed as complementary rather than competing priorities.

**Does the curriculum reduce opportunities for pupil voice and inquiry?**

No. High-quality discussion, investigation and inquiry remain important aspects of learning. The curriculum seeks to ensure that these activities are supported by secure knowledge and understanding rather than replacing subject content. The Northern Ireland Pedagogical Principles will provide a shared, evidence-informed foundation for subject-by-subject teaching that will support the new curriculum to be implemented effectively in classrooms. The principles will draw on cognitive science to help teachers support memory, fluency and understanding.

**Are the capabilities intended to be taught and assessed separately?**

No. The capabilities are intended to emerge through high-quality teaching and learning across the curriculum. Capabilities are not generic skills. They are not directly teachable. They emerge through learning across curriculum areas and through the acquisition and application of knowledge and skills.



## Inclusion and learner entitlement

### How will the curriculum support learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN)?

Implementation guidance and supporting resources will help schools ensure that teaching approaches, adaptations and support arrangements enable all learners to access the curriculum and make progress.

Additional guidance will be provided for schools on making adaptations to the curriculum in mainstream classrooms. This may include supporting pupils who have missed previous learning, have additional learning, sensory or physical needs, or are newcomer pupils who need extra support to access the curriculum.

### What about Special Schools?

The new curriculum framework will not be statutory for special schools. Instead, it will serve as a flexible guide to inform planning and curriculum development across the sector and will be used to support students within special schools where appropriate. However, this is not sufficient to meet the needs of the special school sector.

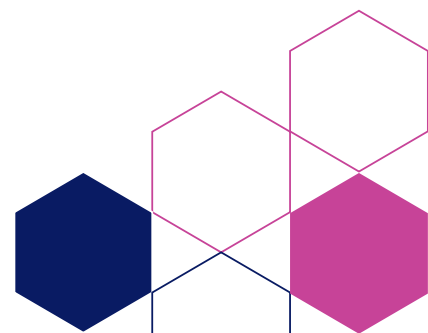
The Department has commissioned Professor Noel Purdy OBE to lead the development of a bespoke curriculum framework specifically for use by special schools. Professor Purdy will be supported by a practitioner advisory group, which will shape the new curriculum content for special schools.

### What about Irish Medium Education (IME)?

The new Curriculum Framework will be statutory for Irish-medium schools. However, the Independent Review of the Curriculum recommended that IM schools should have specific strands to ensure that their bespoke linguistic, pedagogical and immersion education needs are appropriately addressed.

The Department has commenced work on establishing subject-specific working groups to develop and consider these bespoke strands. In addition, St Mary's University College, Belfast, has been commissioned to develop a literacy framework specifically for IM schools.

While the Curriculum Framework for IM schools will support the pedagogical requirements of immersion education, it will continue to be underpinned by the principles of a knowledge-rich curriculum. Therefore, the guidance documents referenced above remain appropriate for use in IM schools, with schools able to consider and address the relevant questions through a bespoke Irish-medium lens.



**Will all pupils be expected to learn the same curriculum?**

The curriculum provides a common entitlement for all learners and reflects high expectations for everyone. Teachers will continue to use professional judgement, appropriate adaptations and support strategies to help learners access the curriculum and make progress.

**How will the curriculum support disadvantaged learners?**

A clearer and more coherent curriculum helps ensure that all learners have access to important knowledge, regardless of background or circumstance.

One of the core aims of the reforms is to strengthen educational equity and reduce differences in curriculum entitlement.

## **Curriculum development**

**How were decisions made about the content included in individual subject frameworks?**

A Taskforce Advisory Committee (TAC) oversaw the programme of curriculum reform, providing assurance, challenge and strategic direction.

Subject Working Groups (SWGs) were established to develop statutory curriculum frameworks for each subject.

**How have teachers been involved in developing the curriculum?**

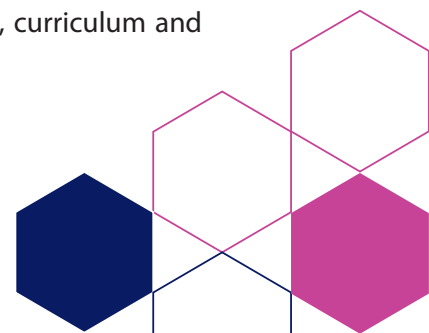
The Subject Working Groups (SWGs) included local Northern Ireland teachers, academics and subject specialists who were responsible for developing the statutory curriculum frameworks for each subject.

The consultation process provides an opportunity for further feedback from teachers on the proposed content, progression and level of challenge within each subject.

**How do the Literacy and Numeracy Frameworks relate to the new curriculum?**

The [Literacy](#) and Numeracy Frameworks are designed to complement the Northern Ireland Curriculum 2028. The curriculum sets out the knowledge, skills and experiences that pupils are entitled to learn, while the Literacy and Numeracy Frameworks will provide greater clarity about the development of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum.

Together, they are intended to support stronger progression, improve consistency and help ensure that all learners develop secure foundations in literacy and numeracy. Further guidance will be provided to support schools in understanding how the frameworks, curriculum and assessment arrangements work together.





## Implementation

### **How will the new curriculum be implemented in schools?**

Implementation will be phased and supported over time. Schools will be provided with guidance, professional learning opportunities and supporting materials to help them prepare for and enact the new curriculum. Further information on implementation arrangements will be communicated as plans are finalised after the curriculum consultations come to a close.

### **What happens if pupils begin learning under the new curriculum at post-primary level before experiencing it in primary school?**

Curriculum planning and implementation arrangements will take account of transitional cohorts. Schools will be supported to ensure that learners can progress successfully, regardless of whether they have experienced all aspects of the reformed curriculum in earlier key stages.

### **Will teachers receive professional development to support implementation?**

Yes. Professional learning is intended to be a central feature of the implementation programme and will focus on curriculum content, progression, subject knowledge and curriculum design.

## Curriculum and workload

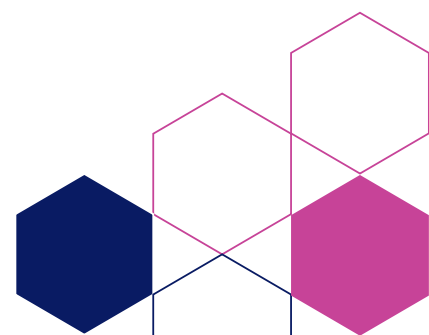
### **Will plans for the new curriculum increase teacher workload?**

The intention is to reduce unnecessary workload by providing clearer curriculum expectations, progression frameworks and curriculum-aligned resources that support planning and implementation.

### **Will new teaching resources be provided?**

Yes. Curriculum-aligned resources, exemplification materials and professional learning are expected to form an important part of implementation support.

Schools will continue to decide which resources best support implementation of the curriculum. The curriculum itself does not require schools to adopt specific commercial programmes or schemes.



## **Assessment**

### **How will pupils' learning be assessed under the new curriculum?**

The curriculum consultation focuses on curriculum content and entitlement. Assessment arrangements are being considered as part of wider TransformED reforms and will be consulted on separately.

### **Will assessment become more frequent under the new curriculum?**

The curriculum itself does not prescribe additional assessment. Decisions about assessment arrangements will be considered separately through the wider TransformED assessment reforms.

### **Will teachers need to assess the capabilities?**

No. The capabilities are not intended to function as assessment criteria, performance indicators or reporting categories. They emerge from a rich curriculum experience.

## **Subject FAQs**

### **Why is there no requirement for students to learn a modern language in primary school?**

Language and Cultural Awareness is included as an optional curriculum subject at Key Stage 2 to give schools a framework for providing pupils with a positive first experience of language learning and to broaden their awareness of different cultures.

The immediate introduction of statutory language learning could create challenges relating to workload; therefore implementation will require significant professional development and support.

### **How will the Key Stage 3 curriculum connect to GCSEs and A-levels?**

The curriculum is being designed as part of a learner journey from primary through to post-16 education. Progression pathways and alignment with future qualification developments are important considerations within TransformED.

### **Is the new curriculum reducing opportunities for children to study creative subjects such as art, music and drama?**

The new curriculum gives greater prominence to art, music and drama and, for the first time, sets out clear knowledge, skills and experiences that all pupils should learn throughout their education.

Creativity and imagination are also identified as capabilities that the curriculum seeks to develop in all young people. The arts play an important role in achieving this.





### **Will all pupils receive education about healthy relationships and consent?**

Yes. Under the proposed curriculum, topics such as healthy relationships, consent, recognising abuse, and knowing how to seek help would become part of the statutory entitlement for all pupils.

Schools will continue to decide how best to teach pupils. The curriculum sets out what should be learned, while schools determine the most appropriate approach and resources.

### **Will pupils learn about the risks of social media, online content and Artificial Intelligence (AI)?**

Yes. Through PSCE and Digital Technology, pupils will learn about online participation, digital environments, the risks and opportunities of technology, and AI-generated content.

The curriculum strengthens pupils' understanding of how information is created, shared and used online, while helping them develop judgement and critical-thinking skills.

### **Does the new curriculum reduce the focus on Northern Ireland's history?**

No. The proposed curriculum gives significantly greater emphasis to Northern Ireland's history than the current curriculum, with more detailed and explicit content across different periods and themes.

The curriculum includes teaching about the origins and course of the Troubles, peace processes and the legacies of conflict as part of a broader study of Northern Ireland's history.

Northern Ireland's history is taught within a wider study of British, Irish and Northern Ireland history, helping pupils understand connections between local, national and international developments.

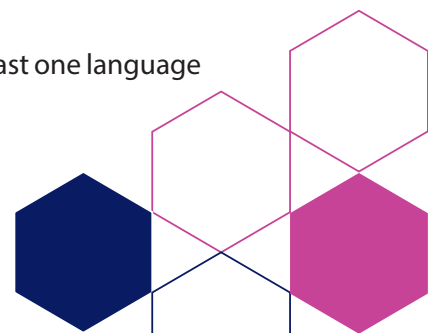
### **Is the Department limiting schools to teach only one modern language at Key Stage 3?**

As is currently, the proposed new statutory curriculum continues to require schools to provide access to at least one modern language, and schools remain free to offer additional languages where they wish to do so.

The framework has been designed around the principle that language proficiency develops through sustained, cumulative learning. Learning a language requires the gradual acquisition of vocabulary, grammar and phonics over time, with repeated opportunities to encounter and use that knowledge.

The proposed framework seeks to provide a clearer entitlement than the current curriculum by specifying the knowledge, vocabulary and grammar pupils should learn.

All pupils should have the opportunity to develop a secure foundation in at least one language by the end of Key Stage 3.



### **What is the purpose of the word lists in the Modern Languages curriculum?**

The word lists identify a core body of high-frequency vocabulary that pupils are entitled to learn at Key Stage 3. Their purpose is to provide greater clarity, support progression and help ensure that pupils across Northern Ireland develop a common foundation of language knowledge.

The word lists have been informed by research into language learning, vocabulary frequency and proficiency. Evidence suggests that frequent exposure to high-frequency words and language patterns plays an important role in developing reading, listening, speaking and writing proficiency. Learners are more likely to acquire and retain language that they encounter regularly and in a structured sequence.

The lists are not intended to limit schools or teachers. Schools remain free to teach additional vocabulary, texts, topics and cultural content. Rather, the lists provide a shared entitlement and a clear foundation on which schools can build broader and richer language learning experiences.

