



TransformED

Northern Ireland Curriculum 2028
Short Guides for Schools

Guide 3: The aim and objectives of the new curriculum





Purpose of this guide

This guide explains the proposed aim and objectives of the Northern Ireland Curriculum 2028 and why they are an important part of curriculum reform.

The new curriculum is purpose-led. This means that decisions about curriculum content, subject frameworks and capabilities are all shaped by a clearly defined educational purpose.

Understanding the proposed aim and objectives is, therefore, essential because they provide the foundation for the entire curriculum.

Why do the aim and objectives matter?

A curriculum is much more than a list of subjects or content to be taught. The aim and objectives provide:

- clarity about the purpose of education;
- coherence across the education system;
- a basis for curriculum decision-making; and
- a framework for selecting and sequencing knowledge and experiences.

In other words, they help ensure that curriculum content, teaching, assessment and wider educational priorities are all working towards the same goals.

The proposed aim and objectives are also closely connected to the new [Capabilities](#). The Capabilities describe the qualities and attributes that pupils are expected to develop by learning a rich and carefully sequenced curriculum.

Why change the current aim?

The current Northern Ireland curriculum aims to: “empower young people to achieve their potential and to make informed and responsible decisions throughout their lives.”

While the curriculum review recognised the positive intentions behind this statement, it raised concerns about the phrase “achieve their potential.” The Strategic Review argued that this language can unintentionally suggest that an individual’s achievement is limited by a fixed level of potential. This can create a risk that expectations are lowered for some learners, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds or those who experience difficulties in learning.



The review emphasised that attainment is strongly influenced by access to knowledge, high-quality teaching and meaningful opportunities to learn. For this reason, the curriculum should reflect a belief that education expands what young people can know, do and become, rather than helping them reach a predetermined limit.

The proposed aim of the new curriculum

The proposed aim of the new Northern Ireland Curriculum 2028 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.”

Several important themes are reflected in this statement.

Developing capabilities

The curriculum aims to support the development of capabilities that help young people thrive in learning, life, work and society.

Knowledge, skills and experiences

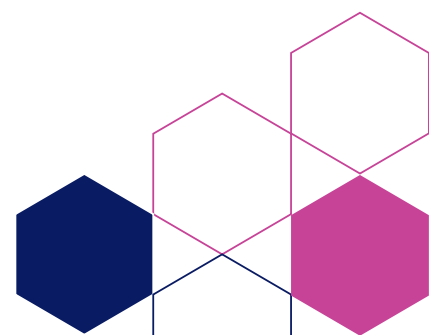
The proposed aim places knowledge at the centre of learning while recognising the importance of skills and experiences.

Young people need access to knowledge that helps them understand the world, participate in society and make informed decisions. At the same time, they require opportunities to apply their learning through meaningful experiences.

Genuine choice and agency

A notable feature of the proposed aim is its emphasis on genuine choices.

The curriculum seeks to provide young people with the knowledge and understanding that expand future opportunities. Education should increase freedom, agency and participation rather than limiting possibilities.



The proposed objectives of the new curriculum

Alongside the aim, every young person should develop as:

- *an individual;*
- *a member of society;*
- *a contributor to the economy;*
- *a steward of the environment; and*
- *a lifelong learner.*

Within a system that expects excellence and places no limit on what young people can achieve.

These objectives reflect a broad and balanced view of education.

Developing as an individual

Education should support personal growth, wellbeing, confidence and self-understanding. The curriculum recognises that schools contribute not only to academic learning but also to the development of identity, character and personal fulfilment.

Developing as a member of society

Young people should be equipped to participate positively in their communities and wider society. This includes understanding democratic participation, respecting others, contributing to civic life and engaging with the world around them.

Developing as a contributor to the economy

The curriculum should help learners understand the world of work and develop the knowledge and capabilities needed to participate successfully in economic life.

This objective recognises the important role education plays in preparing young people for future employment and economic participation.

Developing as a steward of the environment

The proposed objectives place greater emphasis on environmental responsibility than the current curriculum. Young people should understand their role in caring for and sustaining the environment and be equipped to make informed decisions about environmental challenges and opportunities.



Developing as a lifelong learner

One of the most significant additions is the explicit reference to lifelong learning. The curriculum recognises that learning does not end when formal schooling finishes. Young people should develop the knowledge, dispositions and capabilities necessary to continue learning throughout their lives.

Excellence without limits

A critical element of the proposed curriculum is that the proposed objectives should be pursued: **“within a system that expects excellence and places no limit on what young people can achieve.”**

It signals high expectations for all learners and challenges any assumption that some pupils are inherently limited in what they can achieve. The statement also places responsibility on the education system itself to provide the teaching, support and learning experiences necessary for success. This reflects the wider TransformED commitment to combining excellence and equity.

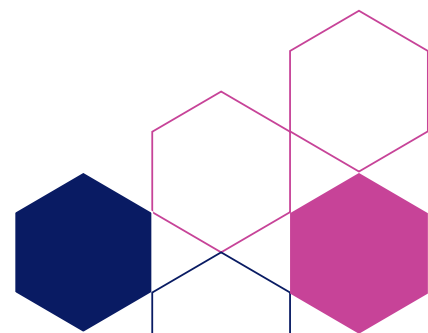
What does this mean for schools?

The proposed aim and objectives also invite schools to reflect on the broader purpose of their curriculum.

Schools may wish to consider:

- whether their curriculum provides pupils with knowledge that expands opportunities;
- how effectively personal development, citizenship and lifelong learning are promoted;
- whether all learners experience high expectations; and
- how wider capability development emerges through curriculum content.

For many schools, the proposed aim may reinforce existing aspirations while providing a clearer and more ambitious framework for curriculum design.



Discussion questions for schools

1. How relevant are the proposed aims and objectives to our school community?
2. Is anything important missing from the proposed aim and objectives?
3. How well does our current school curriculum support pupils to develop as individuals, members of society, contributors to the economy, stewards of the environment and lifelong learners?
4. Which aspects of the proposed aim and objectives would have the greatest implications for our curriculum planning?

Key message

The proposed Northern Ireland Curriculum 2028 is explicitly purpose-led. Its aim is to support young people to develop their capabilities through knowledge, skills and experiences that give them genuine choices and enable informed and responsible decision-making.

The proposed objectives reflect a commitment to personal development, civic participation, economic contribution, environmental stewardship and lifelong learning, all within a system that expects excellence and places no limit on what young people can achieve.

Recommended reading

- Strategic Review of the Northern Ireland curriculum
 - [Summary report](#)
 - [Full report](#) (chapter 8)
 - [Departmental response](#)
- Curriculum 2028: [Overview paper](#) (chapter 7)
- Curriculum 2028: [The Capabilities](#)

