



TransformED

Northern Ireland Curriculum 2028
Short Guides for Schools

Guide 7: The capabilities





Purpose of this guide

One of the most distinctive features of the proposed Northern Ireland Curriculum 2028 is the introduction of a set of [capabilities](#). This guide explains what capabilities are, why they have been included and what they mean for schools in practice.

The capabilities provide a bridge between the curriculum's overall aim and objectives, and the day-to-day learning experiences of pupils. They help explain how a knowledge-rich curriculum supports young people to develop as individuals, members of society, contributors to the economy, stewards of the environment and lifelong learners.

Why capabilities?

Curriculum content alone does not fully explain how education enables young people to flourish and make informed choices throughout their lives.

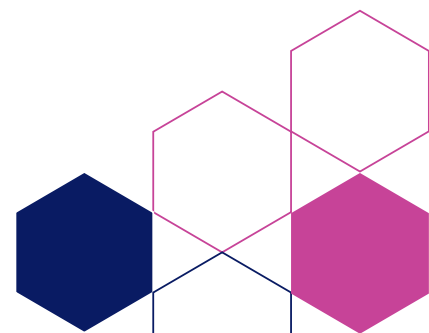
Many education systems have attempted to address this challenge through transferable skills or competencies. However, such approaches can sometimes lead to excessive auditing and an overemphasis on evidencing transferable skills. The proposed Northern Ireland Curriculum 2028, therefore, adopts the concept of capabilities. Capabilities are understood as the qualities and attributes that can emerge when pupils successfully learn a rigorous, knowledge-rich curriculum.

What are capabilities?

Capabilities are the emergent qualities and attributes that young people develop through a well-constructed and well-taught curriculum.

They are not:

- separate subjects;
- additional curriculum content;
- generic skills taught in isolation;
- competency frameworks to be tracked;
- assessment criteria; or
- checklists to be audited.



Instead, capabilities arise when pupils engage actively and purposefully with ideas, information, stories, activities, images, data, theories, argumentation, problem solving, decision making, songs and art, which are at the heart of a knowledge-rich curriculum. Since the capabilities emerge from subjects taught well, schools should not create separate systems for assessing, tracking, auditing or evidencing them.

The capabilities

The proposed curriculum identifies capabilities that emerge from the combined experience of learning across subjects, which comprises capabilities for:

- Creativity and imagination
- Emotional understanding and empathy
- Environmental and ecological responsibility
- Language and communication
- Mathematical and computational proficiency
- Physical health and wellbeing
- Reasoning and problem solving
- Self-regulated learning and perseverance
- Social and civic participation

How do the capabilities develop through a knowledge-rich curriculum?

A key feature of the capabilities is that no single subject is responsible for developing a capability. Each capability arises from the study of more than one subject. This approach reinforces the importance of a broad, balanced and knowledge-rich curriculum. The capabilities arise naturally from effective teaching of the curriculum as pupils know more, understand more and can apply what they have learned in meaningful ways.

Together they describe the intended result of the teaching of the curriculum in its entirety.

For example:

- creativity develops through secure knowledge and broad cultural understanding in the arts, literature, science and technology;
- empathy grows through understanding human experiences and perspectives in literature, PSCE, history and languages;



- reasoning develops through engagement with evidence, concepts and ideas in mathematics, science, humanities and the arts; and
- civic participation develops through knowledge of society, culture and democratic life in history, geography, PSCC and wider school life.

Capabilities provide a shared language for considering the wider potential outcomes of education while maintaining the central importance of subject knowledge and high-quality teaching.

Discussion questions for schools

1. How do the capabilities provide a clear picture of what education should help young people become?
2. How well do you understand the purpose of the capabilities within a knowledge-rich curriculum?
3. What are the benefits of recognising that capabilities emerge through subject learning rather than being taught and assessed separately?
4. How well do the capabilities align with your school's vision and values for learners?

Key message

The capabilities describe the wider outcomes that emerge when young people experience a high-quality, knowledge-rich education. They are not additional content to teach or assess. Rather, they provide a shared language for understanding how subject learning develops young people who can think critically, communicate effectively, participate responsibly and make informed choices throughout their lives.

Recommended reading

- Curriculum 2028: [The Capabilities](#)

