

TransformED

TRANSFORMING TEACHING AND LEARNING

ISSUE 2 : JUNE 2025

03 **STRATEGIC REVIEW OF CURRICULUM PUBLISHED**

Strategic review outlines recommendations to improve Northern Ireland's curriculum.

04 **SCIENCE OF LEARNING PROGRAMME LAUNCHED**

Over 130 post-primary schools enrolled in CPD Academy for teacher development.

06 **INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF ASSESSMENT**

Independent panel announced to review and reform assessment system.



TransformED SCHOOL LEADERS' CONFERENCE

On Thursday 8th May 2025, the Crowne Plaza in Belfast, was buzzing, as over 600 school leaders from across Northern Ireland gathered for the inaugural TransformED School Leaders' Conference.

The conference marked a pivotal moment in the rollout of the TransformED Strategy and was an opportunity for the Department of Education to engage with school leaders and discuss what TransformED means for schools and for the future of our children.

The day featured a dynamic lineup of international experts, each bringing insights to help shape the future of education in Northern Ireland:

Lucy Crehan shared early findings from her review of the Northern Ireland curriculum, revealing key themes that will inform future reforms.

Daisy Christodoulou explored the power of knowledge-rich curricula and how high standards and smart assessment practices can drive real improvement.

Tim Oates spoke on accountability—not as a burden, but as a tool to maintain and elevate quality.

Bradley Busch made the case for becoming an evidence-informed education system, where research directly supports classroom practice.

Hardip Begol reflected on England's 2014 curriculum reforms, offering valuable lessons for Northern Ireland.

Dr Nina Hood brought insights from New

Zealand, outlining how evidence-based policy can transform literacy instruction.

Harold Hislop underlined the central role of professional development, reminding everyone that empowered teachers are the engine of change.

The event provided a valuable platform for school leaders to connect, share experiences and contribute to the future direction of education policy in Northern Ireland. The energy and commitment of those in attendance was clear throughout the day.

The Department hopes this will become a regular event on the school calendar, offering ongoing opportunities for collaboration and professional growth.

Videos from the day are available to watch:

[TransformED School Leaders' Conference](#)
| Department of Education



TransformED

School Leaders' Conference

WHAT YOU SAID:

99% 97% 99%

of respondents felt the content of speeches and presentations was good or excellent.

of respondents felt the range of speakers and expertise was good or excellent.

of respondents said they would be happy to attend a similar event in the future.

As we bring this school year to a close, I want to take this opportunity to thank you—our dedicated teachers, school leaders, and education staff—for your hard work, commitment, and professionalism throughout what has been an incredibly busy and significant period for education in Northern Ireland.

This term has seen the rollout of major initiatives under the TransformED Reform Programme, including the publication of our Delivery Plan, the launch of the online Teacher CPD Academy and the publication of Lucy Crehan's Strategic Review of the Northern Ireland Curriculum. In addition, I also announced the establishment of an Independent Panel to review teacher workload—a vital step in ensuring that the profession is supported to focus on what matters most: teaching and learning.

None of this work would be possible without your willingness to engage with change that aims to strengthen our education system for the future.

I want to acknowledge the incredible efforts that have been made to embrace new ideas, contribute to discussions, and help shape the direction we are taking together.

As we head into the summer holidays I hope you are able to take a well-deserved break. Whether you are travelling, spending time with family, or simply enjoying a slower pace, I hope the weeks ahead offer rest and relaxation. Thank you once again for everything you do.

Paul Givan

Paul Givan
Education Minister

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As a principal of 23 years I was very heartened and excited about what the future of education will look like and the impact the transformation will have on the children and staff.

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The highlight of the conference was listening to how research has influenced and transformed education systems globally. It was fascinating to learn about the various changes implemented in different countries and the positive impacts these have had. Additionally, discovering the planned changes for our own system and understanding the rationale behind them was incredibly insightful and thought-provoking.

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An incredibly insightful day, filled with inspiring speakers sharing fresh perspectives and a real sense of positivity about the future of education in Northern Ireland.



Publication of Strategic Review of the Northern Ireland Curriculum



On 3rd June 2025, Education Minister Paul Givan announced the findings of a Strategic Review of the Northern Ireland Curriculum, led by international education policy expert Lucy Crehan.

This review marks the first comprehensive evaluation of the curriculum in over 17 years. It has identified a range of critical weaknesses in the current curriculum framework and is proposing a transformative, knowledge-rich framework to better serve all pupils.

Key findings of the review on the current curriculum include:

- A lack of specificity on what should be taught. This has led to inconsistent implementation across schools, contributing to inequality and curriculum overload.
- A lack of vertical coherence across year groups and Key Stages which inhibits learning from being progressively built upon from one key stage to the next. This leads to repetition, gaps in knowledge and difficulties with transitions.
- A failure to meaningfully articulate the role and importance of knowledge, particularly subject-specific knowledge and skills and their relationship with

broader skills. The importance of prior knowledge is not sufficiently recognised so it does not facilitate the gradual building of powerful knowledge over time.

- A failure to meet the diverse needs of all our pupils, particularly pupils with special educational needs and those educated through the medium of Irish.

The report advocates for a new curriculum framework that is:

- Purpose-led, designed in pursuit of a clear vision so all children can develop their capabilities.
- Knowledge-rich, prioritising the careful and intentional teaching of substantive and well-sequenced concepts.

- Continuous and coherent, providing a structured framework for seamless progression and logical connections across year groups, subjects and skills.
- Specified and focused, with well-articulated objectives about what pupils should know and by what stage.
- Inclusive and flexible, capable of responding to the diverse needs of learners, schools and communities.

The report emphasizes the importance of equipping pupils with essential knowledge and skills to bridge socio-economic gaps, foster critical thinking and prepare them for life and work. There is now an exciting opportunity to create a new curriculum framework for Northern Ireland that is knowledge-rich; grounded in evidence; well sequenced and supports progression for all.





The Curriculum Taskforce that will take forward the design and development of a new curriculum for Northern Ireland will be chaired by Christine Counsell (left), with Lucy Crehan (right) as deputy chair.

Knowledge-rich has been and continues to be a much-misunderstood term. The idea of a knowledge-rich curriculum comes from a growing body of evidence, backed by cognitive science, that knowledge is not just nice to have - it is the bedrock of all learning.

Knowledge-rich also does not mean 'rote-learning' of disconnected facts or pieces of trivia. Nor does it mean heavy content or curriculum overload.

It is about determining core concepts that are vital in supporting the progressive acquisition and application of deep learning. By being more specific about what should be taught, we can also be more specific about what should not be

taught. Powerful knowledge is not just information; it's the kind of knowledge that enables young people to understand, critique and shape the world around them.

To translate the review's recommendations into a practical framework, a Curriculum Taskforce has been established, chaired by Christine Counsell, with Lucy Crehan as deputy chair. The Taskforce will aim to work with stakeholders to develop a new curriculum framework for Northern Ireland over the next 15 months.

The full review report can be accessed at:
[Review of the Northern Ireland Curriculum](#) | Department of Education.

FEATURES OF A KNOWLEDGE-RICH CURRICULUM

CONTENT-DRIVEN

Prioritises deep, subject-specific knowledge as the foundation for learning.

COHERENT

Builds logically across years, sequencing learning coherently to ensure clear progression and connections.

INCLUSIVE

Equips all students, regardless of background, with the academic and cultural capital to succeed.

BALANCED

Blends factual mastery with critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving skills.

ENGAGING DESIGN

Sparks curiosity through meaningful, well-sequenced content.

LOOK OUT FOR:

THE DEPARTMENT WILL PUBLISH ITS RESPONSE TO THE CURRICULUM REVIEW AND FURTHER DETAILS OF THE CURRICULUM TASKFORCE BY THE END OF JUNE 2025.

ONLINE SCIENCE OF LEARNING PROGRAMME LAUNCHED FOR POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Over 130 post-primary schools have signed up for the online Teacher CPD Academy, a groundbreaking initiative developed in partnership with InnerDrive, a UK leader in cognitive science-based educational training.

This programme will provide professional development for over 6,000 post-primary teachers. It offers interactive, on-demand courses, expert insights and practical resources grounded in cognitive science research. Topics include cognitive load theory, retrieval practice and metacognition.

The Academy will run throughout the 2025–26 academic year and supports the TransformED Strategy's focus on prioritising teacher professional learning and improving access to research.

Further details can be found at: [Education Minister launches online Teacher CPD Academy](#) | Department of Education



LOOK OUT FOR:

EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST ARE CURRENTLY LIVE FOR THE ONLINE SCIENCE OF LEARNING PROGRAMME FOR PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

TransformED DELIVERY PLAN

On 29th April 2025, the Department published the TransformED Delivery Plan.

The Delivery Plan turns the TransformED vision into a series of practical, actionable steps. It focuses on several priority areas, including curriculum reform, assessment and qualifications, school improvement, tackling educational disadvantage, and enhancing teacher professional learning.

A central emphasis is placed on investing in high-quality professional development for teachers and school leaders to support excellence in teaching and learning.

The Delivery Plan also clearly defines the implementation approach, identifying key delivery partners, indicative timescales and estimated costs for each action. It is designed to provide structure, clarity and consistency across the education sector to ensure effective and sustainable delivery.

It has been developed through collaborative engagement with a wide range of sectoral partners. These include the Education Authority, the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment, the Education and Training Inspectorate, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, Higher Education Institutions, the Department for the Economy and various other stakeholders.



To maintain focus and accountability, the Department of Education will establish a TransformED Programme Board that will report directly to the Minister. Oversight and guidance will also be provided by the International Ministerial Advisory Panel, the TransformED Principals' Panel, and the TransformED Academic Panel.

With this Delivery Plan, the TransformED Strategy moves into its next phase, supporting long-term, system-wide improvement across Northern Ireland's schools.

NOW OPEN FOR REGISTRATION CCEA COMPUTER ADAPTIVE ASSESSMENT

Registration is now open for the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)'s free Computer Adaptive Assessment (CAA) for the upcoming 2025–26 academic year.

The CAA offers a powerful way to support evidence-based teaching, improve learner outcomes, and make better use of data—all at no cost to your school.

WHAT IS THE CCEA COMPUTER ADAPTIVE ASSESSMENT?

The CAA is a digital, standardised assessment in literacy and numeracy that adapts to each pupil's ability level based on their responses in real time. This creates a more personalised and inclusive experience for all learners—particularly those with moderate learning

difficulties—while providing a fair measure of progress and attainment.

Unlike traditional assessments, CAA tailors the difficulty of questions to suit each pupil's proficiency, offering a more accurate reflection of their learning stage and helping teachers better understand individual and class needs.

WHY SHOULD YOUR SCHOOL GET INVOLVED?

The use of computer assessments is part of a key initiative under TransformED.

Key benefits include:

- Free to use, reducing or eliminating the need for costly commercial assessments.
- In-depth analytics to support informed teaching, targeted interventions, and school improvement planning.
- Bespoke design for the Northern Ireland curriculum and school system.

- Supports inclusive education, with accessibility built into the platform.
- Supports pupil progress tracking and aligns with current educational priorities.

Last year, 255 schools—including primary, post-primary, and special schools—successfully took part in the CAA programme, highlighting growing engagement and confidence in this valuable tool.

If your school is not already participating and would like to benefit from this innovative and cost-free tool, please email: assessments@ccea.org.uk to express your interest and begin the registration process.

🌐 For further details, visit: ccea.org.uk/adaptive-assessments

Independent Review of Assessment

A key action within TransformED is to develop a new system of national assessment in Northern Ireland for primary school and Key Stage 3.

On 9th June, the Minister launched a fundamental review of assessment in Northern Ireland. An independent panel of experts will conduct an evidence-based review of assessment approaches internationally and make a series of policy proposals regarding the purpose, nature and design of assessment in Northern Ireland.

The three person review panel consists of:

MR TIM OATES CBE, Director of Assessment, Research and Development, University of Cambridge University Press and Assessment (Chair);

MR GARRY MATTHEWSON, recently retired principal of Holy Family Primary School and chairperson of the Northern Ireland Nurture Group Network; and

DR MICK WALKER, former Director of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and Executive Director of Education at the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency.

The panel hope to engage with as many schools as possible across Northern Ireland as they gather evidence for the review over coming months.

The terms of reference for the Panel can be accessed at: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/independent-review-assessment-panel-terms-reference>

**LOOK OUT FOR:
A CALL FOR EVIDENCE AND
ONLINE SURVEYS IN SEPT 2025.**



INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF ASSESSMENT, CHAIR, MR TIM OATES

50 Research-Informed School Conferences Announced

50 school-led conferences aimed at promoting evidence-based teaching and learning practices, have been confirmed across Northern Ireland.

The initiative forms part of the Making Best Practice, Common Practice Programme and offers grants of up to £5,000 to schools and school clusters to organise and host these events.

Designed to connect teachers with the latest research, the conferences will focus on the practical application of educational research to improve pedagogy, curriculum development and pupil outcomes.

The high level of interest and strong quality of proposals submitted by schools underscores a growing demand among educators for accessible, research-driven professional development. This is a positive step in supporting teachers to integrate evidence-informed approaches into everyday classroom practice.

Building on the success of this year's applications, a further funding call will be launched for the 2025/26 academic year.

For further information on the Making Best Practice, Common Practice Programme, visit:

[Making Best Practice, Common Practice | Department of Education.](#)



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www.education-ni.gov.uk

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QUESTIONS | COMMENTS | FEEDBACK
Email: communications@education-ni.gov.uk