

Scotland's Curriculum Improvement Cycle

An explainer for teachers and practitioners

Scotland's Curriculum is evolving

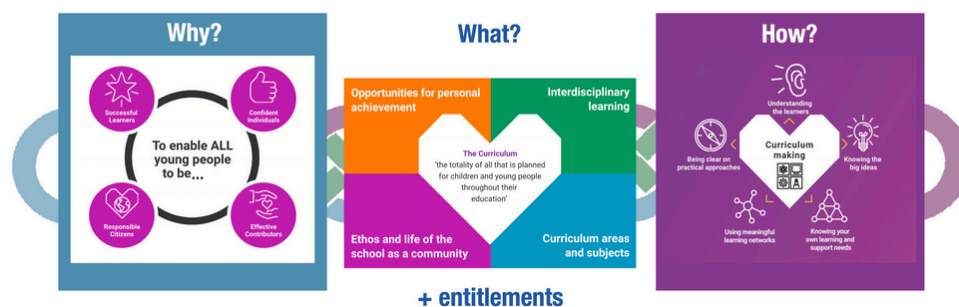
We are currently in the second year of a ten-year programme to strengthen the curriculum. This is called the Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC)

The refreshed curriculum will start to be formally adopted in schools and settings from August 2028. It is being co-created by teachers, practitioners, partners, and children and young people. We anticipate draft curriculum guidance will be shared in the summer of 2026. It will provide greater clarity, strengthen the connections between knowledge, skills and understanding, and improve coherence from the ages of 3 to 18.

Why is the curriculum evolving?

An OECD report in 2021 made several recommendations for how Scotland's Curriculum should evolve. These included introducing a systematic review cycle and updating the curriculum to make more explicit the knowledge and skills children and young people should develop to build and deepen understanding as they progress through learning.

Scotland's Curriculum Framework



Is everything changing?

No. The Four Capacities (see image one above) have been endorsed and supported in recent consultation on curriculum in Scotland and will continue to define our core purpose, or 'Why'. The Four Contexts for Learning – the 'What' – which teachers and practitioners use to plan learning, will also remain in place and be strengthened. Scotland's Curriculum Making model – the 'How' – will also continue and will provide the foundation for the professional learning and capacity building planned, for 2026/27 and 2027/28, to support the enactment of the refreshed curriculum.

Image 1: The 'Why', 'What' and 'How' of Scotland's Curriculum

What will be different?

The main focus of the current phase of the 10-year cycle is evolving the technical framework, that supports the 'What' of curriculum: i.e. the documents and guidance that teachers and practitioners use to plan learning for and with children and young people and alongside communities and partners. This currently includes the Principles and Practice papers, the Experiences and Outcomes, Benchmarks and subject / Curriculum Area progression pathways. These will be phased out from August 2028 and be replaced by a new technical framework

What will the evolved technical framework look like?

A Know–Do–Understand approach (Image 2) will underpin the structure of the new technical framework. Over 1500 teachers and practitioners are contributing to its development, exploring what children and young people need to understand, know, and be able to do at developmentally appropriate stages in their learning.

The new guidance will set out big ideas and associated concepts that all children and young people need to help them be individuals, contributors, citizens and learners. At each level, it will clarify the knowledge and skills that will support children and young people in the development of key conceptual understanding.

Currently, the co-design groups are exploring how interconnected layers of big ideas, concepts, knowledge and skills could structure this clearly for teachers and practitioners.

This change will strengthen how we teach for deep conceptual understanding and should make progression clearer.

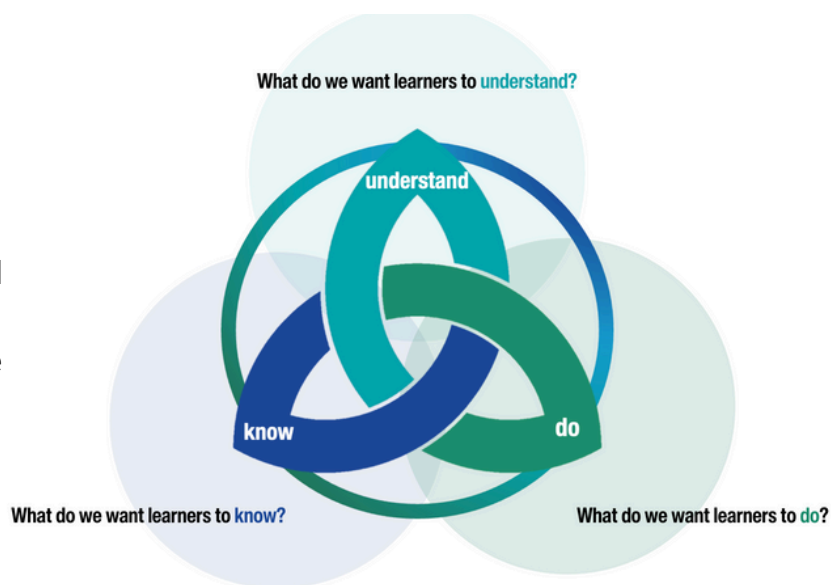


Image 2: The 'Know', 'Do', 'Understand' approach



During the 2025/26 session, we will share emerging outputs which show the latest thinking of the co-design groups as their work progresses.

These will not be, and won't look like, final curriculum documents. Their purpose is to share thinking as it develops and to invite feedback.

How will this affect me as a teacher or practitioner?

The technical framework you use to plan learning for and with children and young people will change. You will no longer use the Experiences and Outcomes or Benchmarks for Early to Fourth Level. Over the course of the 2026/27 and 2027/28 sessions, time and space will be created for you to engage with the new guidance and what it means for your practice. This new guidance will span ages 3 to 18 and will also provide clarity on the range of cross-curricular expectations.

You will be supported through a range of professional learning opportunities, collaboration activities and resources. This will build on the investment colleagues in schools and settings across Scotland have made in place-based curriculum design over the last few years.

If you work with Senior Phase learners, then you will also prepare to teach the next iteration of qualifications, which are commencing development.

What will be different for children and young people?

This work will provide the enabling environment to ensure that all children and young people experience a curriculum that is meaningful, purposeful, relevant, and up-to-date. Through a curriculum designed to support teaching for deeper conceptual understanding, learners will be better equipped to make sense of the world now and in the future.

A set of big ideas, spanning ages 3–18, will also help to address the disconnect between the Broad General Education (BGE) and the Senior Phase, ultimately enabling the Four Capacities.

How is the approach inclusive?

All co-design groups have been recruited to ensure representation from practitioners working across the 3-18 learner journey.

Additional Support Needs (ASN) and equity sit at the heart of the CIC and practitioners with experience and expertise in ASN, inclusion and equalities are part of the co-design groups.

Processes and activities are planned to ensure that all curriculum co-design groups take account of relevant policies and legislation in work across Curriculum Areas and Contexts.

The cross-curricular work will also strengthen the position of equalities across the curriculum.

It is important to note that the curriculum will be planned for and experienced in both English and Gaelic medium schools and settings in Scotland. Those teaching in Gaelic medium settings are involved not just in the planning of the Literacy and Gàidhlig curriculum but also across all Curriculum Areas.

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Key Messages:

- The new, draft curriculum guidance will be available from summer 2026.
- Over 1500 teachers and practitioners are involved in groups working on this.
- During the remainder of session 2025/26, groups will share emerging outputs that demonstrate a snapshot of the thinking and ideas of these groups.
- These outputs are not intended to be drafts of the final curriculum documents or statements, and they will not represent the format or layout of the new guidance. Their purpose is to share emerging thinking beyond the co-design groups so that all teachers and practitioners have the opportunity to provide feedback.
- The new guidance will be formally adopted from August 2028.
- Professional learning and collaboration time, to support enactment, will take place for all teachers and practitioners over 2026/27, 2027/28, and 2028/29.
- Emerging outputs and a feedback form will be on the Curriculum Improvement Cycle website, accessed via www.scotlandscurriculum.scot (QR code below)

The next phase...

This activity is taking place now because we are in Phase 2 of the CIC (see Image 3 below) , **Engaging and Co-creating**.

In January 2027 we will move into the first part of Phase 3, **Sharing, Learning and Adopting**.

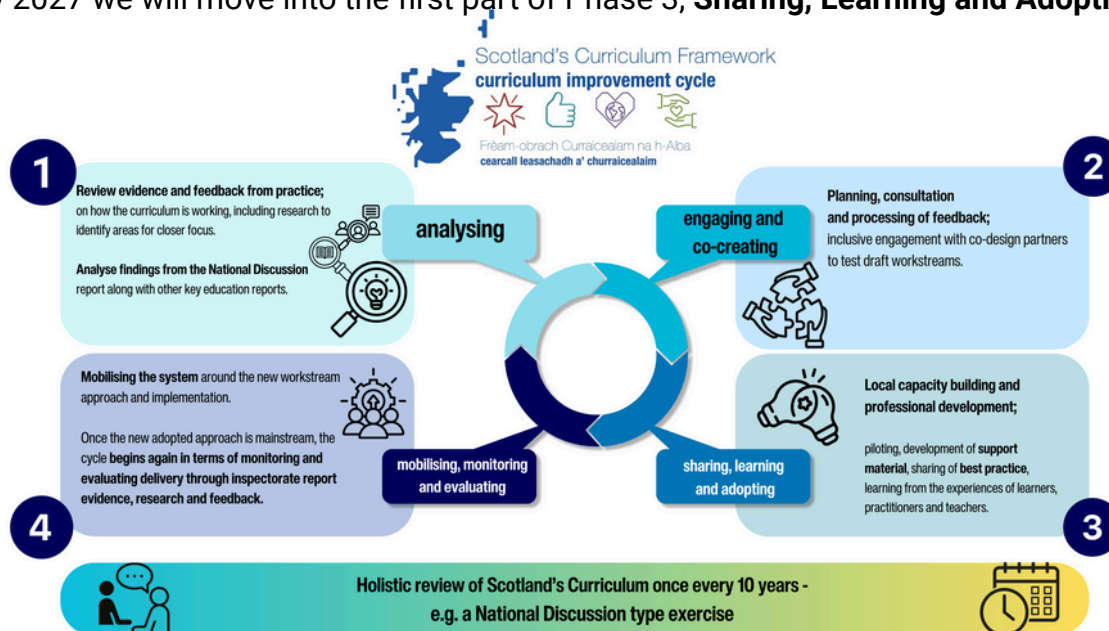


Image 3: The Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC) Process



How can I be involved in the Curriculum Improvement Cycle?

Use this QR code to access further details of these changes, to sign up to receive our CIC Bulletin and to find out how the work is progressing.

Opportunities to be involved in co-creation work will be signposted here.