

Facilitator Guide: Making Sense of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle

Session 1: Why are we embarking on the CIC

Session 1: Why are we embarking on the CIC - Session Overview

These optional materials are designed for education leaders to support development of understanding of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC).

They can be used in whole or in part by leaders themselves, or as a facilitated session with teams to support discussions and sense-making in advance of the 'Sharing, Learning and Adopting' Phase and professional learning offer in 2026/27.

FACILITATOR INFORMATION IS IN BLUE.

INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS IS IN BLACK



This is used to allow reflections throughout the session. You may wish to collate this information to inform next steps.

Session Objectives

This session focuses on background to the CIC, the 'Why' and high-level messages about the focus and timescale for change. By the end of this session, participants will have explored:

- Why we are embarking on the CIC
- A timeline of key dates
- What this means for their own context and team

Slide 1		<p>This is not part of the presentation, rather something to consider as a facilitator.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• From Fullan: 3 aspects of leading change.• Think about these for ourselves, and for our teams.• We have two years to prepare (for formal adoption from August 2028 onwards)
Slide 2		<p>This is not part of the presentation but identifies possible individual tasks that might be helpful in advance or as a follow-up to the session.</p> <p>The short CIC explainer video identified here is included as an embedded video on slide 11 and may also be used during the session.</p>

Facilitator Guide: Making Sense of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle

Session 1: Why are we embarking on the CIC

Slide 3	 <p>Understanding the Curriculum Improvement Cycle Session 1</p> <p>Welcome</p> <p>Scotland's Curriculum Framework Curriculum Improvement Cycle</p>	<h2>FACILITATOR</h2> <p>Introduce yourself (if applicable) and welcome everyone to the session.</p> <p>Explain that this session focuses on developing a shared understanding of 'Why' we are embarking on a Curriculum Improvement Cycle and key, high level messages, including the timeline for change.</p> <p>This session will last approximately 30-45 minutes depending on time allowed for discussions etc.</p>
Slide 4	 <p>National Model of Professional Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CIC will impact every learner in Scotland • Active engagement • Advocate for our learners • Learning together and over time • Enquiring stance • Connecting to our practice 	<p>Introduce/reinforce the National Model of Professional Learning.</p> <p>As education professionals, we engage in professional learning to stimulate our thinking, deepen our understanding, and enhance our practice.</p> <p>The NMPL supports this by outlining the key principles and features of effective professional learning, helping us build capacity and foster collaborative approaches across our settings.</p> <p>The model encourages us to be critically informed and responsive to current educational contexts, ensuring our practice remains relevant and impactful.</p> <p>Explore the NMPL further here:</p> <p>The national model of professional learning National approach to professional learning Professional Learning Education Scotland</p> <p>See the full list of Professional Standards:</p> <p>GTCS - https://www.gtcs.org.uk/knowledge-base/articles/a-guide-to-the-professional-standards</p> <p>CLD Practitioners -</p> <p>https://cldstandardscouncil.org.uk/resources/competent-practitioner-framework/</p> <p>ELC Practitioners - Social Service Children and Young People SCQF 7 National Occupational Standards (NOS) Navigator (sssc.uk.com)</p> <p>Social Service Children and Young People SCQF 9 National Occupational Standards (NOS) Navigator.</p>

Facilitator Guide: Making Sense of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle

Session 1: Why are we embarking on the CIC

Slide
5



Take a moment to establish group protocols.

Ask participants to comment on anything they would like to add or amend.

Is there anything that participants feel is missing or anything they would like to remove?

The protocols on the slide are suggestions to be amended for your context.

Why establish group protocols

Effective professional learning goes beyond simply delivering information. It fosters a learning community where educators can learn with, from, and on behalf of one another. To achieve this, the facilitator of this learning should establish clear protocols and a positive learning environment at the outset. The general notes below will support the facilitator to help everyone feel comfortable participating and contribute to a rich learning experience.

1. Contract a Safe Space:

Co-create a Safe Space agreement with your group. This agreement outlines expectations for respectful communication and active listening. A safe space allows trust to flourish, fostering a collaborative environment where everyone feels comfortable sharing ideas and taking risks.

2. Shift from Top-Down to Collaborative Learning:

Move beyond the traditional model where one person imparts knowledge. Embrace a collaborative approach where all participants actively engage. This means learning with, from, and on behalf of one another. By leveraging the diverse perspectives within the group, gaining a richer understanding and creating a more impactful learning experience for everyone.

3. Shared Expertise and Recognition

Sharing Expertise: Those with experience can share their knowledge and insights.

Facilitator Guide: Making Sense of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle

Session 1: Why are we embarking on the CIC

	<p>Recognise Everyone's Contribution: Actively listen and be open to learning from the unique perspectives and experiences of colleagues. Build on each other's ideas to foster a collaborative environment where everyone feels valued, and their contributions are respected.</p> <p>4. Hold Space for Silence and Respectful Discussion:</p> <p>Hold space for silence after someone speaks or asks a question. It can be tempting to jump in to fill silence but allowing time for quiet can avoid interrupting thought and produce more thoughtful responses. Everyone deserves to be heard and understood.</p> <p>Adapt the time allocation based on the size of the group and the complexity of the topic.</p> <p>5. Schedule Regular Breaks:</p> <p>Schedule regular breaks throughout the session. This allows participants to process information, refocus, and return with renewed energy, leading to a more productive learning experience.</p> <p>6. Centre Learning in Real Life:</p> <p>Connect the learning to real-life experiences by encouraging participants to share relevant personal anecdotes or applications. This strengthens understanding and makes the learning more relatable and impactful for all.</p>
Slide 6	<p>Connector</p> <p>In groups or pairs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What does curriculum improvement mean to you?• Identify two features of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC) which are clear to you.• Identify two elements which are unclear.   <p>Connector Activity.</p> <p>This is an example of a simple connector activity. It is recommended that facilitators use a connector activity that allows participants to take part in an informal discussion.</p> <p>This is to ensure that participants are relaxed, focused and ready for an interactive workshop.</p> <p>If you use this connector, it will generate questions which you may wish to come back to at the end of the session, or in future sessions.</p>

Facilitator Guide: Making Sense of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle

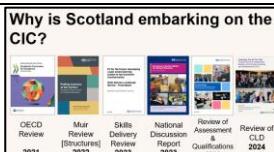
Session 1: Why are we embarking on the CIC

Slide 7	<p>Session aims</p> <p>To build a shared understanding of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• why Scotland is embarking on the CIC• the timeline for change• where we are now• what's coming next 	<p>Outline the aims of this session</p> <p>This session is about an introduction to a complex and long-term (10 years) programme of work. We will have further opportunities to explore the change in detail and to ensure we feel supported and ready.</p>
Slide 8	<p>Why is Scotland embarking on the CIC?</p>   <p>Endorsed Scotland's Curriculum (CfE)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establish a systematic process to update the curriculum• Ensure the curriculum remains relevant• Be clearer about the position of knowledge (and how this interacts with skills and understanding)• Improve coherence 3 – 18• Build capacity for curriculum design in schools and settings	<p>Why Scotland is embarking on the CIC</p> <p>This work originates in recommendations from the 2021 OECD review. This review endorsed Scotland's Curriculum (CfE) as an approach and made several recommendations, some included here. It highlighted the reactive nature of curriculum changes, leading to inconsistencies. As well as updating the curriculum now, the CIC is establishing an ongoing 10-year cycle to ensure that Scotland's Curriculum remains up to date.</p> <p>Facilitators guide participants through these insights and prompt reflection on their own experiences with CfE.</p> <p>This activity could be combined with some pre-reading, follow-up reading or jigsaw reading of Paper 1.</p> <p>Paper 1 seeks to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set out the background for undertaking pilot curriculum reviews in session 2023/24• Outline how the pilot curriculum reviews were carried out and how the approaches used will inform the Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC)• Share the key findings and learning identified through the pilot reviews• Make a case for evolution of the current technical framework• Stimulate thinking by exploring how the position of knowledge can be strengthened within CfE

Facilitator Guide: Making Sense of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle

Session 1: Why are we embarking on the CIC

Slide
9



Highlighting some other recent reports which include references to curriculum.

Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence into the Future (OECD, 2021)

The OECD's independent review of Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) endorsed Curriculum for Excellence as the right Curriculum for Scotland. It recommended strengthening the position of knowledge, building capacity in curriculum design, and improving 3-18 coherence. It identified the need for a systematic approach to reviewing and updating the curriculum.

Putting Learners at the Centre: Towards a Future Vision for Scottish Education (Scottish Government, 2022)

Professor Ken Muir's report's proposals included: a national discussion on the future of Scottish education; structural reforms including a new qualifications body, Qualifications Scotland.

Fit for the Future: developing a post-school learning system to fuel economic transformation. Skills Delivery Landscape Review – Final Report (Scottish Government, 2023)

Led by James Withers. Recommendations included: strengthening and joining approaches to skills in the post-school space, including in regional skills planning, funding, qualifications and pathways and a digital training record. (Note that Scotland's Learner Profile is now live and available to all schools and settings via My World of Work.

All Learners Matter: Our National Discussion (Scottish Government, 2023)

The National Discussion gathered views from children and young people, educators, parents, and communities across Scotland. It shared a vision and call to action, emphasising its main message that "All Learners Matter." It recommended reviewing the curriculum to ensure that it remains fit for purpose, reflects contemporary learner needs, and can be enacted in ways which ensure all learners in Scotland experience high quality, curricular linked learning experiences.

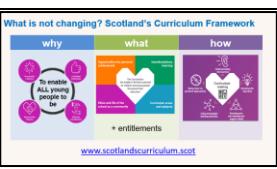
Facilitator Guide: Making Sense of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle

Session 1: Why are we embarking on the CIC

	<p><i>The Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment (Scottish Government, 2023)</i></p> <p>Led Professor Louise Hayward, this review recommended changes to assessment and certification in the senior phase. Central to the proposal was the creation of a Scottish Diploma of Achievement (SDA), which would recognise achievements across three areas: Programmes of Learning, Project Learning, and a Personal Pathway.</p> <p><i>Learning: For All. For Life. A report from the Independent Review of Community Learning and Development (CLD) (Scottish Government, 2024)</i></p> <p>Led by Kate Still, the Independent Review of CLD outlines 20 recommendations to strengthen CLD across Scotland. It highlights the central role of CLD in lifelong learning for all in Scotland.</p>
Slide 10	 <p>The CIC is a 10-year cycle. This approach was developed by Scottish Government, based on learning from international research and discovery work, and shared with Curriculum and Assessment Board in June 2023. The CIC consists of four interlinked phases: <u>About the Curriculum Improvement Cycle – Curriculum Improvement Cycle</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">Analysis – analysis of evidence and feedback from practice on how the curriculum is working at all levels and in all sectors (Early Learning and Childcare, schools and education settings, colleges, regional, national), studies on future trends including international evidence and research on specific issues. This will help identify areas for closer focus.Engagement and co-creation – planning, engagement, collaboration and processing of feedback to test draft workstreams. Importantly in the Scottish model in this stage the implementation strategy is also co-designed.Share, Learn and Adopt – local capacity building and professional development; development of support material; monitoring of experiences of educators and learners.

Facilitator Guide: Making Sense of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle

Session 1: Why are we embarking on the CIC

	<p>4. Mobilise, monitor and evaluate – mobilising the system around the approach and implementation. Once the new approach is mainstream, the cycle begins again in terms of monitoring and evaluation through inspectorate reports, research and feedback. This last stage (evaluation) is interlinked with stage 1 (analysis) thereby closing the review cycle.</p> <p>This cyclical model is designed to take approximately 10 years per full cycle, with the aim of creating a sustainable, evidence-informed approach to curriculum development. Each 10-year cycle would start and end with a national exercise similar to the National Discussion. We are currently in the co-creation phase (phase 2).</p>
Slide 11	 <p>This slide has the CIC Explainer Video (2 mins 15 seconds) embedded and should play automatically in Powerpoint presenter mode. It can also be accessed here: https://youtu.be/yMZ_tshgKwg and can be used as a short, independent pre-session task.</p>
Slide 12	 <p>As part of the discovery phase in developing the CIC, pilot reviews were held with groups of 3-18 practitioners in 6 Curriculum Areas. There were recurring themes and messages across these groups, including: declutter the curriculum, increase clarity around knowledge and simplify guidance.</p> <p>The co-design groups are working to address these issues.</p>
Slide 13	 <p>Key message:</p> <p>This is an evolution of Scotland's existing Curriculum not a complete restart.</p> <p>The next few slides clarify that the underlying structure of Scotland's Curriculum will remain and explain what the focus of the change will be.</p>
Slide 14	 <p>It is important to note that the core parts of Scotland's Curriculum Framework are NOT changing.</p> <p>The Four Capacities remain as the central purpose for Scotland's Curriculum.</p> <p>The Four Contexts for Learning will remain and will be strengthened.</p>

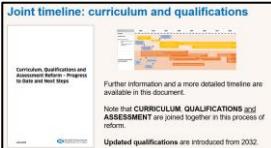
Facilitator Guide: Making Sense of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle

Session 1: Why are we embarking on the CIC

		<p>The 5 parts of Curriculum Making will also remain and will underscore the professional learning that will be planned for 2026/27 and 2027/28.</p>
Slide 15	<p>What is changing?</p> <p>Focus of change: the technical framework</p> <p>Experiences & Outcomes and Benchmarks will be phased out</p> <p>The new framework will be underpinned by a Know – Do – Understand approach</p> <p>It will clarify the knowledge and skills that will support the development of key conceptual understanding at each level.</p> 	<p>The focus of change is on the guidance and technical framework: i.e. the documentation that teachers and practitioners use to plan learning for and with children and young people.</p> <p>Experiences & Outcomes and Benchmarks will be phased out and they will be replaced by a new technical framework.</p> <p>The new framework will be underpinned by A Know–Do–Understand approach.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>At each level, it will clarify the knowledge and skills that will support children and young people in the development of key conceptual understanding.</p>

Facilitator Guide: Making Sense of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle

Session 1: Why are we embarking on the CIC

Slide 16	 <p>Who is working on this?</p> <p>Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC) project structure</p> <p>Over 1500 practitioners from across all 32 local authorities are involved in developing the new technical framework.</p> <p>The groups are organised into 13 projects covering all 4 Contexts for Learning, including the Curriculum Areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Early Learning and ChildcarePrimary schoolsSecondary schoolsAdditional Support Needs, Equalities and Gaelic <p>The open recruitment process included steps to strengthen representation by including perspectives and voices with expertise in Early Learning and Childcare, Primary schools, Secondary schools, Additional Support Needs, Equalities and Gaelic.</p> <p>Co-created website</p>	<p>There is a commitment to ensure this change is led by the profession and in a way that is transparent. Co-design groups will share emerging thinking (see next slide) so everyone has the chance to be involved. The groups were recruited through open recruitment and there will be further opportunities to become involved as the CIC progresses.</p> <p>Equity, inclusion, and learner engagement are at the heart of this work.</p> <p>The specific roles of each of the groups is unpacked in more detail in the 3 papers.</p>
Slide 17	 <p>When can we see it?</p> <p>CIC groups will share examples of emerging thinking during this session. This is emerging thinking only – it is NOT what the final curriculum guidance will look like.</p> <p>Please note so all teachers and practitioners have an opportunity to provide feedback during this co-creation phase.</p> <p>For first example, see the recent Maths & Numeracy Webinar (November 2025) and associated materials</p>	<p>Key message: the groups will share EMERGING THINKING for feedback during the rest of this session – this is not how the final framework will look. The final framework will also be packaged appropriately for practitioners working in different sectors.</p> <p>For a first example of emerging thinking, see the recent Maths & Numeracy webinar and associated materials:</p> <p>https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/glowblogs/cices/2025/11/25/cic-maths-webinar-25-november-2025/</p> <p>Encourage colleagues to use the feedback button on the CIC website to provide feedback on the emerging thinking documents.</p>
Slide 18	 <p>Timeline</p> <p>June 2026: Draft national guidance and draft technical framework available</p> <p>August 2026: Formal adoption of changes to Early, First, Second and Third level (e.g. current F1-F5; current S1-S6)</p> <p>August 2026: Formal adoption of changes to Fourth level and beyond</p> <p>Curriculum Review and Sector Mapping</p> <p>January 2027 - June 2028: Curriculum Development Phase</p> <p>January 2028 - January 2029: Curriculum Alignment Phase</p> <p>January 2029 - June 2029: Sharing and Adopting Phase</p>	<p>We are currently in the co-creation phase (phase 2) which will run until June.</p> <p>In summer 2026, the draft curriculum guidance and technical framework will be available for comment and feedback for a 6-month period. We then move into Phase 3 – the Sharing, Learning and Adopting phase. We have all of 2026/27 and 2027/28 to prepare for formal adoption of the refreshed curriculum.</p>
Slide 19	 <p>Joint timeline: curriculum and qualifications</p> <p>Curriculum, Qualifications and Assessment Reform: Progress to date and next steps</p> <p>Further information and a more detailed timeline are available in this document.</p> <p>Note that CURRICULUM, QUALIFICATIONS and ASSESSMENT are joined together in this process of reform.</p> <p>Updated qualifications are introduced from 2023.</p>	<p>This timeline comes from the Scottish Government's publication "Curriculum, Qualifications and Assessment Reform: Progress to date and next steps" (June 2025) (link in presenter notes).</p> <p>Supporting documents - Curriculum, Qualifications and Assessment Reform: progress to date and next steps - gov.scot</p>

Facilitator Guide: Making Sense of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle

Session 1: Why are we embarking on the CIC

		<p>Key message: curriculum and qualifications are moving together.</p> <p>Encourage reflection on readiness for change: What needs to happen locally between now and 2028?</p>
Slide 20	<p>Key messages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Over 1500 teachers & practitioners are co-creating the evolved guidance and technical frameworkThree groups will begin to share emerging thinking during 2025/26See Maths & Numeracy Webinar (November 2025) for a first example of thisDraft guidance and technical framework available summer 2026Professional learning and collaboration time over 2026/27, 2027/28 and 2028/29 to support enactment of the new guidance	<p>Reinforce these key messages which are in the Explainer document (November 2025): <u>FINAL Curriculum Improvement Cycle Explainer for Teachers and Practitioners - designed v.1</u></p>
Slide 21	<p>Practical next steps?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Have we signed up to the CIC bulletin? (4 per year)Have we read and discussed the 'Explainer for teachers and practitioners'?Who in our school, setting, or cluster is involved in a CIC project group, and how can their perspectives help us?Is there an opportunity for our team to discuss the CIC?What do we need to start thinking about now for next year? 	<p>This slide can be used either as a final summary or, along with the next slide and some of the optional activities, the basis of a longer discussion e.g. in a leadership team.</p>
Slide 22	<p>What does all this mean for us?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">What have we already been working on that will help with our readiness for change?What else might be important to start considering?Who in our cluster is involved and can help our thinking?What is our next step as a teamWhat do we need, as individuals and a team, to take that step? 	<p>Time to reflect</p> <p>This slide can be used either to support discussion as part of the session or, along with any of optional activities, as a basis for further dialogue e.g. in a leadership team.</p>
Slide 23	<p>Reflection</p> <p>Compass Points Reflection</p> 	<p>Time to reflect</p> <p>The compass tool can support and scaffold discussions about change.</p> <p>This slide can be used either to support discussion as part of the session or, along with any of optional activities, as a basis for further dialogue e.g. in a leadership team.</p> <p>Reflection</p> <p>N – Need to Know What questions do you have? What is unclear?</p> <p>W – Worries Do you have any concerns about what you have heard?</p> <p>E – Emerging What opportunities or positives do you see?</p> <p>S – Suggestions What suggestions do you have moving forward?</p> <p>Introduction</p> <p>Explain that the compass points represent different angles for thinking about an idea, plan, or piece of information.</p> <p>Set the Context</p> <p>CIC to date</p>

Facilitator Guide: Making Sense of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle

Session 1: Why are we embarking on the CIC

	<p>Individual Reflection (5 – 10 mins) Ask participants to respond to each prompt individually. This ensures everyone has time to think.</p> <p>Small Group Discussion (10 – 15 mins) In groups, share responses and look for common themes or contrasting viewpoints.</p> <p>Whole Group Debrief Collect key points.</p> <p>Highlight:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Questions that need clarification• Concerns to address• Opportunities to leverage• Suggestions for next steps <p>Possible Action Planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consider using responses to inform next steps.• Consider what are you already doing, what else do you need.
Slide 24	 <p><i>Thank You</i></p> <p>You may choose to add an evaluation</p>

Facilitator Guide: Making Sense of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle

Session 1: Why are we embarking on the CIC

Slide 25		<p>The following slides include OPTIONAL activities which may support or scaffold current work around curriculum design at school / setting level and / or inform thinking about preparation for next year.</p> <p>Note that there is no expectation on schools and settings to engage in CIC-related work this year, other than early awareness-raising. These suggestions are simply provided, based on feedback, as to activities that might help early sense-making and thinking about next year.</p>
Slide 26		<p>OPTIONAL activities which may support or scaffold current work around curriculum design at school / setting level and / or inform thinking about preparation for next year.</p>
Slide 27		<p>OPTIONAL activities which may support or scaffold current work around curriculum design at school / setting level and / or inform thinking about preparation for next year.</p>
Slide 28		<p>OPTIONAL activities which may support or scaffold current work around curriculum design at school / setting level and / or inform thinking about preparation for next year.</p>
Slide 29		<p>OPTIONAL activities which may support or scaffold current work around curriculum design at school / setting level and / or inform thinking about preparation for next year.</p>
Slide 30		<p>OPTIONAL activities which may support or scaffold current work around curriculum design at school / setting level and / or inform thinking about preparation for next year.</p>

Facilitator Guide: Making Sense of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle

Session 1: Why are we embarking on the CIC

Slide 31	<p>Engage with the emerging thinking</p>  <p>View the recording of the Maths webinar, review the examples of emerging thinking and provide feedback via the MS Teams poll.</p> <p>CIC Maths Webinar 25 November 2025 – Curriculum Improvement Cycle</p>	OPTIONAL activities which may support or scaffold current work around curriculum design at school / setting level and / or inform thinking about preparation for next year.
Slide 32	<p>What does all this mean for us?</p>  <p>Either as part of a session using the earlier slides, and / or following any of the activities above, hold a space for leadership team and / or teacher and practitioner colleagues to discuss:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What have we already been working on that will help with our next step as a cluster?2. Who else might be involved to start considering?3. Who in our cluster is involved and can help our thinking?4. What is our next step as a team?5. What do we need, as individuals and a team, to take that step?	OPTIONAL activities which may support or scaffold current work around curriculum design at school / setting level and / or inform thinking about preparation for next year.
Slide 33	<p>Optional individual sense-making activities</p>  <p>Any of these might work as optional individual tasks, in advance of or following the session. The short CIC explainer video can also be used during the session.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Read: Discussion paper 1: Building and A Case for ChangeWatch: CIC explainer videoListen: Background and Cases for Change PodcastDo: Familiarise yourself with the CIC blog and sign up for the newsletter.	OPTIONAL activities which may support or scaffold current work around curriculum design at school / setting level and / or inform thinking about preparation for next year.