

# Building Scotland's Curriculum:

a draft resource for discussion and further co-design

## Part 1: Introduction

First draft edition for consultation: June 2026

Feedback: September until November 2026

Updated practice guidance publication: January 2027

Formal adoption into practice: August 2028



## DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION AND FURTHER CO-DESIGN

***Building Scotland's Curriculum will be an interactive, digital resource that provides national practice guidance and supports curriculum making in schools and education settings.***

### **It aims to:**

- outline all policy relating to curriculum in one place
- build on the work undertaken for the refresh of the curriculum narrative in 2018/19 and for *Realising the Ambition: being me* in 2018/20
- build on the learning from the range of curriculum design activity that has taken place across Scotland since 2021
- replace the *Building the Curriculum* series
- support and strengthen curriculum making at school and setting level over the ten years of the CIC
- include provocations and practical activities to support professional learning and a shared understanding curriculum making.

**This is a first DRAFT for discussion and further co-design with Scotland's educators.**

**It is deliberately being shared as a draft document.**

We encourage leaders and educators to engage with this document and **provide feedback to ensure the final version is practical and is responsive** to their needs and those of the children and young people they work with.

This draft will be updated in September 2026 following initial testing with focus groups.

More **formal feedback** on this guidance will then be gathered until November 2026.

The publication of the finalised first edition of this guidance will be January 2027.

This guidance will continue to evolve over the ten years of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC) to support continuous improvement and in line with new approaches to inspection.

## Language Matters

As work progresses with the CIC it is important that everyone has a shared understanding of what is meant by the use of some key words and phrases.

To support this, Education Scotland (ES) worked with the Curriculum and Assessment Board (CAB) to produce a first glossary of terms related to the emerging work of the CIC. Further terms will be added to the next version of Language Matters as the work develops.

A number of these definitions are used and are highlighted throughout this guidance:

**Curriculum** in Scotland is defined as the totality of all that is planned and enacted for children and young people from early learning and childcare, through school and beyond. That totality is shaped by the purpose (the 'why') set out in the four capacities and a set of entitlements and can be planned for and experienced by learners across four contexts (the 'what'): opportunities for personal achievement; the ethos and life of the school/setting as a community (and with its community); curriculum areas and subjects and interdisciplinary learning.

**Curriculum making** – the development of practices, processes and policies – happens across different parts of the education system. Place based curriculum making which happens, for example, in early learning and community learning settings and schools involves work such as curriculum design and the development of pedagogical practices.

**Pedagogy** is curriculum enacted and manifested in and through the interactions, experiences and spaces and times of teaching, learning and assessment.

The narrative for **Scotland's Curriculum Framework** was refreshed in 2019 and hosted on a [dedicated microsite](#). It re-states the purpose ('why?') in the four capacities and the relevance of the four contexts to enable the 'what'. The key elements for curriculum making were identified in a new section to support the 'how'.

The **technical framework** for a curriculum is the set of guidance documents which educators use in order to plan learning for children, young people and adult learners.

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## 4. How do we enact our curriculum?

*This section will be the main focus of further development and co-design over the coming months after the publication of the full Draft KDU Model for each curriculum area in September 2027 . Significant work is currently underway to support educators in pedagogy and assessment. This includes practical tools to support and inform planning and day-to-day practice.*

*These will explored as part of the professional learning offer and feedback loop from September to November 2026.*

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## References

## 1. Introduction

This introductory section is the starting point for engaging with the Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC). It supports teams to explore the purpose of this guidance, what the CIC is, and an initial understanding of the main changes to Scotland's Curriculum.

Activities to support this section are available now.

### 1.1 Intended audience and purpose

This resource is intended to support leaders and educators in Scotland to strengthen approaches to curriculum design for children and young people aged 3 – 18.

It is primarily intended for local authority officers, leadership teams and middle leaders who lead curriculum design in schools and settings. It also aims to be accessible and useful for all of Scotland's educators.

*Realising the Ambition: being me* (Education Scotland, 2020) remains as the national practice guidance for early years (ages 0 to 8). This document, ***Building Scotland's Curriculum***, builds on what was learned from *Realising the Ambition's* approach to providing successful national guidance.

It brings together and outlines clearly the policy that schools and settings should consider in curriculum making, but to do so in a way that is accessible and is practically helpful in enacting curriculum. It makes links to, and will sit alongside, professional learning, practical tools and, ultimately, exemplification.

This work has been shaped by practitioners in Scotland through a process of co-design, and a key ask from the group was to provide actionable guidance that recognises the agency of teachers and practitioners.

The resource can be engaged with individually or used to inform professional dialogue or learning for groups and teams. It recognises the role that a range of educators and partners contribute to curriculum and is intended to encourage collaboration. The guidance sits alongside a broad range of existing and continuing Scottish education policies and aims to bring clarity about what these mean for curriculum design.

The guidance recognises the diversity of how and where children and young people access Scotland's Curriculum, including:

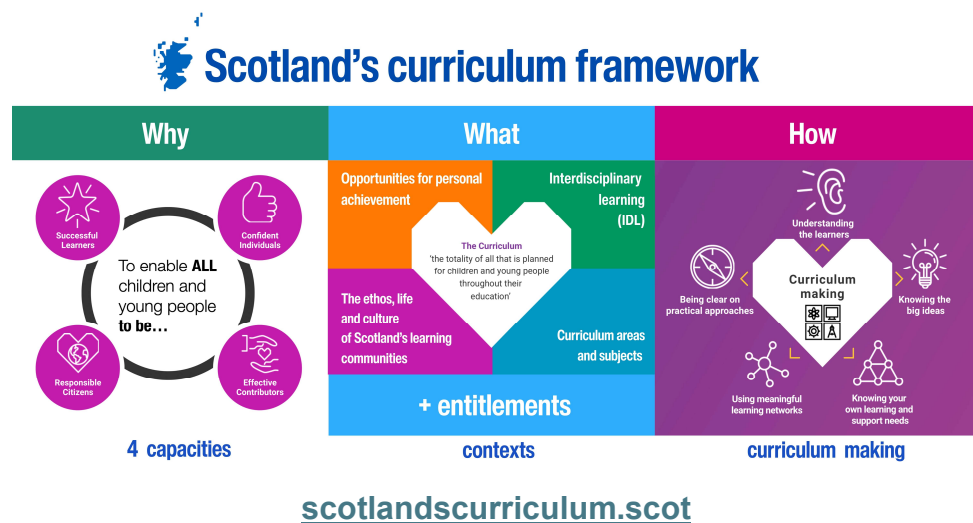
- Private, voluntary, independent and local authority early learning and childcare settings (ELC) including childminders
- Primary, Secondary and 3-18 schools
- Specialist provision and schools for children with complex additional support needs.
- Denominational schools
- Gaelic Medium Education schools and settings
- Community learning settings
- Residential and secure settings
- Colleges
- Work-based learning opportunities
- Digital opportunities such as e-Sgoil
- Home learning.

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As we continue to develop this resource, we will use the feedback to further explore the opportunities to reduce or enhance parts to suit the needs of specific sectors.

The resource is structured around Scotland's approach to curriculum making as a process:

- Why – the purposes of the curriculum
- What – children and young people learn
- How – the practical steps towards curriculum enactment.



Graphic showing the Why, What and How of Scotland's Curriculum Framework.

By January 2027, every section will include provocations and practical activities that can be used with minimal preparation, as well as signposting to further professional learning or resources.

Schools and settings are not expected to engage with the entirety of this resource at once but with each section at a time that suits their needs.

An annual professional learning offer from Education Scotland will also align with the structure set out in this guidance.

For 2026/27, this will include a professional learning offer for school leaders that will focus on sections 1-3 of this guidance to better support understanding of what's changing, curriculum purposes, and what matters in curriculum making. It will also include engagement with the updated Big Ideas Know-Do-Understand model.

Section 4 of this document, on how we enact curriculum, becomes the focus from session 2027/28 onwards.

From August 2028, this guidance, in its final form, will replace:

- Building the Curriculum 1: The Contribution of Curriculum Areas (2006)
- Building the Curriculum 3: A Framework for Learning & Teaching (2008)
- Building the Curriculum 4: Skills for Learning, Skills for Life, Skills for Work (2009)
- Building the Curriculum 5: A Framework for Assessment (2011)

Please note that *Building the Curriculum 2: Active Learning in the Early Years* has already been withdrawn.

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*Realising the Ambition: Being Me* (Education Scotland, 2020) remains the practice guidance for anyone who works with and for babies and young children across both early learning and childcare settings and in early primary school. However, this document will also support leaders and managers of early learning and childcare (ELC) settings in curriculum making.

This guidance builds on the foundations set within *Realising the Ambition: Being Me*, by better reflecting developmental stages and inclusive curriculum practice from 3-18. *Being Me* has also been incorporated into the language of the Four Capacities.

### 1.2 Overview of main changes

Curriculum in Scotland is defined as the **totality of all** that is planned for children and young people from early learning and childcare, through school and beyond.

That totality is shaped by the purpose (the **'why'**) set out in the four capacities and a set of entitlements. It can be planned for and experienced by learners across four contexts (the **'what'**): opportunities for personal achievement; the ethos, life and culture of the school/setting as a community (and with its community); curriculum areas and subjects and interdisciplinary learning.

Language Matters (2024)

Scotland has embarked on a ten-year programme to strengthen the curriculum. This is called the Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC).

The updated curriculum will start to be formally adopted in schools and settings from August 2028. It is being co-designed by teachers, practitioners, partners and children and young people. Over 1500 educators are involved, with a diverse range of expertise from across the 3-18 learner journey, including practitioners experienced in ELC, primary, secondary, community learning, Gaelic-medium education, the full range of Additional Support Needs and equalities.

Establishing this CIC process fulfils one of the key recommendations from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) 2021 review of Scottish education: to establish a systematic approach to curriculum review (OECD, 2021)<sup>1</sup>.

Other recommendations included: improving the position of knowledge within the curriculum, and how it relates to skills and understanding; building capacity for curriculum design within schools and settings; and addressing the disconnect between the broad general education (BGE) and senior phase.

Over the course of the ten-year cycle, the CIC aims to strengthen:

- Connections between curriculum purposes and practice
- All four contexts for learning, and the connections between these contexts
- The essential knowledge, skills and understanding that children and young people develop
- Clarity in the technical framework that educators use to plan learning, de-cluttering the guidance they work with
- The position of cross-curricular themes

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<sup>1</sup> [A series of discussion papers](#) outline the case for change and the process which has been undertaken to develop a new model for curriculum.

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- How the curriculum can be responsive to the wide range of additional support needs (ASN).
- Pedagogy and assessment, and how these work together
- 3 – 18 coherence and progression

Greater clarity in what learners need to know, do and understand, with progression made explicit, and learning made more relevant and engaging, creates the conditions for stronger learner engagement and a clearer sense of purpose. This can support stronger participation in learning, improved motivation and greater learner agency.

Over time, this can contribute to increased attendance, reduced disengagement and more positive behaviour. It also provides a foundation for more stable national standards, stronger professional confidence in judgement, improved quality and consistency of data, stronger progression into qualifications, and improved attainment over time.

### What has been developed so far?

The focus so far has been on evolving the technical framework.

**The main change is a deliberate move away from experiences, outcomes and benchmarks to a concept-based curriculum. This will be a Know-Do-Understand (KDU) model, informed by overarching Big Ideas.**

A concept-based curriculum will allow Scotland to balance clear national expectations about knowledge with the flexibility to contextualise learning to suit local needs. This model is explained further on [p.xx](#) and a sample of the updated model for each curriculum area has been released alongside this draft guidance.

Co-design groups have also begun to work on updated guidance and practical tools to strengthen Opportunities for Personal Achievement, the Ethos & Life of School/Setting as a Community (and with its community) and Interdisciplinary Learning.

### What work is still ongoing?

The CIC is entering a period of alignment. Between now and January 2027, the co-design groups will continue to work on:

- Whether any changes are required to the attributes and capabilities that sit under the four capacities to ensure they remain up-to-date and aligned with the emerging national approach to skills being developed by Scottish Government
- The full Big Ideas Know-Do-Understand model for each curriculum area, ensuring fourth level and SCQF Level 4 alignment
- De-cluttering and improving the position of ‘responsibilities of all’ and cross-curricular themes
- Developing pedagogy and assessment approaches required for the updated curriculum. This will include updating the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Cycle, and providing assessment principles and practice guidance 3-18.

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- Developing a holistic approach to Early level based on the content the Know-Do-Understand model across the curriculum areas
- Continuing to consider the CIC through the lens of the wide range of ASN represented in schools and settings
- Further work to explore what the Know-Do-Understand model means for practitioners who use a range of progression frameworks and guidance documents, including the ASN Milestones, to plan learning for children with complex needs.
- The entitlement to a senior phase (S4 – S6), which **includes** qualifications, for young people aged 15 -18 remains
- The principles of curriculum design continue to be helpful for educators and leadership teams
- All 8 Curriculum Areas remain
- The ASN Milestones remain
- The Curriculum levels from early to fourth in BGE and up to SCQF Level 7 in the senior phase remain, however there will be a stronger alignment between CfE 4<sup>th</sup> Level and SCQF Level 4.

**From summer 2026 onwards, the CIC will work alongside Qualifications Scotland to develop the curriculum for the senior phase, ensuring a coherent 3-18 curriculum.**

### What's not changing?

Much of what already exists to support curriculum making will remain in place, but the move to a concept-based curriculum will mean that schools and settings will want to revisit the key questions of Scotland's process for curriculum making: why, what and how.

### Specifically:

- The four capacities remain as the purposes of the curriculum
- Educators will still plan over the four contexts for learning
- The entitlement to a broad general education from early years until the end of S3 remains

### What is being withdrawn?

From August 2028, the Experiences and Outcomes and Benchmarks will be withdrawn. They will be replaced by a Know-Do-Understand model, aligned to CfE levels, to help guide learning and inform planning for learning, teaching and assessment.

The updated curriculum will provide a national articulation of progression from early level onwards and will remove the need for local progression pathways. Alongside the development of the senior phase curriculum in partnership with Qualifications Scotland, this will provide a coherent learner journey from 3 to 18.

### What happens next?

These changes are still in progress, and this draft (June 2026) of the resource hopes to encourage educators to get involved in the feedback loop which will take place between September and November 2026.

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### What should schools and settings do now?

#### 2026/27

Leaders and educators are encouraged to explore, reflect on and consider how this guidance might be meaningfully enacted from August 2028 onwards.

Educators should **not** begin using the draft KDU samples in curriculum making.

The suggested activity for the first part of 2026/27 is on using the provocations and activities to build a shared understanding of the CIC and of curriculum purpose (Sections 1& 2).

This period will also include the time to provide feedback on the draft KDU samples.

Once the final materials are available from January 2027, schools and settings will want to consider and explore the 'What': what does the updated curriculum mean for all four contexts for learning? (Section 3)

#### 2027/28

From session 2027/28, the focus will move into the 'How' (Section 4).

### What support is available?

Enacting curriculum change takes time. Schools and settings will be supported by:

- Activities to support professional dialogue and learning amongst leadership teams and with educators in schools and

settings (this first release includes activities for Sections 1 &2).

- A professional learning offer, led by Education Scotland, in partnership with local authorities.
- Dedicated time for head teachers and leaders to come together to develop a shared understanding of the change.

In addition to this Scottish Government is working with partners to explore additional in-service days.

The activities in this Guidance remain at the discretion of schools and settings to determine the most appropriate timing and the extent to which these are relevant to local needs.

#### **Provocations**

How much is understood about the Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC) across our cluster/learning community?

Who in our school, setting or cluster is involved in the CIC and can support our planning?

What are our priorities at this stage of the process?

#### **Professional Learning Activities:**

Activity 1: Exploring the change