

Building Scotland's Curriculum:

a draft resource for discussion and further co-design

Part 2: Why? Purposes of curriculum

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.

Contents

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Intended audience and purpose
- 1.2 Overview of main changes

2. Why? Purposes of curriculum

- 2.1 The Four Capacities
- 2.2 The curriculum entitlements

3. What matters?

- 3.1 Curriculum
- 3.2 Being Me: My opportunities to achieve
- 3.3 Being Us Together: The ethos, life and culture of our communities
- 3.4 Scotland's Big Ideas Model: Know-Do-Understand
- 3.5 Interdisciplinary learning
- 3.6 An inclusive, diverse and anti-racist curriculum

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.

- 4.1 Understanding our learners and our communities
- 4.2 Knowing the big ideas
- 4.3 Being clear on the practical approaches
- 4.4 Using meaningful learning networks
- 4.5 Knowing our own learning & support needs

References

2. Why? Purposes of curriculum

The first part of Scotland's approach to curriculum making as a process is to consider questions of purpose: why do we educate? The professional learning activities for this section are available now.

2.1 The Four Capacities

In Scotland, the purposes of the curriculum are outlined in the **four capacities**. These outline what the curriculum is for and influence the curriculum decisions we make.



Realising the ambition: Being Me (Education Scotland, 2020) encouraged us to think about the image of the developing child. This helps us to consider what Scotland's curriculum is trying to offer children and young people across the four capacities.

These are important for children and young people *now* as much as for any *future* world – note that the purpose of Scotland's curriculum is to enable children to *be* the four capacities, rather than become.

The following statements offer a starting point for considering the purposes of Scotland's curriculum, and how they relate to the children and young people we work with in our school or setting.

They do not attempt to describe an individual child or young person, but are intended to support reflection on the purposes of curriculum at school and setting level:

Being Me: as a Confident Individual

Curriculum making in Scotland's schools and education settings helps children and young people to understand themselves, to develop a sense of purpose, and foster belonging and the ability to navigate life with resilience and meaning. Curriculum making supports children and young people to be reflective, emotionally aware and capable of using their personal values and beliefs to make choices that support their wellbeing and fulfilment over time, such as developing self-awareness and making informed decisions about **careers and pathways** and with **money and finances**.

Being Me: as an Effective Contributor

Curriculum making in Scotland's schools and education settings develops children and young people's knowledge, skills and **creativity** to make a positive difference in their communities and in shared endeavour. It helps them develop collaboration and an **entrepreneurial** mindset, modelling how varying and adapting behaviours can solve new problems or complex challenges in ethical ways. Curriculum making fosters the initiative to improve our world.

Being Me: as a Responsible Citizen

Curriculum making in Scotland's schools and education settings helps develop children and young people's understanding of **social justice, rights and equalities**. It develops ethical awareness and responsibility towards others, society and the planet. It helps them to understand how the world around them works locally, nationally and globally, through **democratic values**. The curriculum includes diverse perspectives, values fairness and supports thoughtful participation in civic life. It helps them to understand their status as rights holders and global citizens, and nurtures commitment to **Learning for Sustainability**.

Being Me: as a Successful Learner

Curriculum making in Scotland's schools and education settings helps develop children and young people's curiosity, adaptability and motivation for lifelong learning, including continually evolving their **digital skills**. It demonstrates how they can engage with complexity, deepen their understanding built on knowledge and skills acquired

across curriculum areas and continue developing this in response to new opportunities. It supports children and young people to be well-informed and able to act in the world.

The changing world

Societal shifts are placing increasingly complex demands on our children and young people. They are expected to participate confidently in a world facing sustainability challenges, rapid technological change and growing concerns about social cohesion. We know that these pressures are having a profound impact on health and wellbeing ².

These changes affect our educators too. Considering the environmental, economic and social trends that we see in our own community, as well as in Scotland and globally, helps identify how our curriculum offer can be responsive to the changing world.

Equity

A well-designed curriculum ensures that all children and young people, regardless of background or circumstance, will develop their understanding of the world and have access to the shared and coherent knowledge and skills that empowers them to question, analyse, innovate and solve complex challenges throughout their lives.

² OECD, 2024; UNICEF, 2023; Scottish Government, 2023; Public Health Scotland, 2025

DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION AND FURTHER CO-DESIGN

Scotland's curriculum is a commitment to equity and social justice. It recognises that 'knowledge' is not limited to that which we have historically taught in formal education contexts in Scotland and accepts the validity of global perspectives. It has health and wellbeing at its core and should equip every child and young person with all that they need to shape a fairer, healthier and more sustainable future for us all.

The KDU model will allow Scotland to balance national consistency in the knowledge children and young people have access to, with the ability for educators to contextualise the curriculum to meet the needs of their learners.

Educators will consider what is important locally in the school or setting's community. (See also Ethos, Life and Culture on p. 23 and Place-based approaches on p. 44).

Provocations:

To what extent do we have a shared understanding of the purposes of our curriculum?

Where are the opportunities across our curriculum for children and young people to grow and develop across these capacities?

What economic, environmental and social trends do we see in our learning community, as well as in Scotland and the world?

Considering the learner journey in our setting, what's strong about our curriculum offer? What might we consider as an opportunity to strengthen?

Professional Learning Activities:

Activity 2: Curriculum purposes

2.2 Curriculum Entitlements

A number of 'non-negotiables' must be considered in curriculum making, coming from both statutory and policy commitments. These will continue to be updated, where necessary, within this Guidance.

All of Scotland's children and young people are entitled to a continuous and coherent educational experience from 3-18.

For many, this will be a typical journey from Early Learning and Childcare, to primary and then secondary school. Some children and young people will progress through their learning at different stages, for example with ASN milestones, or remaining within one level in one or more curriculum area for longer periods of time.

This places a strong emphasis on the importance of ensuring that the spaces, interactions, experiences and times of learning are appropriate for their age, stage, interests and motivations.

Beginning in the early years through nurturing, play-based and developmentally appropriate practices, children build the foundations for curiosity, communication, wellbeing and lifelong learning.

DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION AND FURTHER CO-DESIGN

As the broad general education (BGE) continues, children are offered experiences of learning, flexibly designed, within and across a wide range of contexts to support their development as individuals, contributors, citizens and learners. This breadth allows children and young people to develop knowledge, skills and understanding to guide their interest, enabling them to make informed choices when they begin the senior phase.

The senior phase should continue to offer learning across the different contexts and contribute to the development of the four capacities. It includes personalised pathways and the opportunity to achieve a portfolio of qualifications across the three-year span, including interdisciplinary project-based learning. These programmes of learning may include SCQF-rated qualifications, Qualifications Scotland national courses, a range of technical and vocational qualifications, industry and sector-led qualifications and achievement awards.

Throughout the 3-18 learner journey, there is a strong emphasis on opportunities for individuals to achieve and to develop an understanding of their own **skills**, strengths, interests, and the possibilities that lie before them.

A range of **skills frameworks** have been developed to support this, including [Skills Development Scotland's Metaskills framework](#):



The approach to skills taken in the updated curriculum will take account of the emerging national skills model which is currently under development by Scottish Government. An update on the national skills model will be included in the September 2026 version of this guidance.

These opportunities also involve a range of personal support, such as coaching/mentoring, career education, information, advice and guidance and connections to networks beyond a school setting. It includes the skills children with the full range of ASN will need to develop in order to access the curriculum and life. This contributes to increasing sustainable positive destinations and participation. These should be planned as a progressive entitlement across the learner

DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION AND FURTHER CO-DESIGN

journey, supporting exploration, skill development and informed decision-making.

All children and young people should experience a coherent programme of career-related learning, including opportunities to engage with employers, further and higher education, and community partners, ensuring equitable access to meaningful and inspiring pathways.

Learning for Sustainability, which includes outdoor learning, is an entitlement for all learners in Scotland's curriculum. Learning for Sustainability is how we care, hope and act for people and the planet. It is about making the world fairer – both now and in the future. The national ambition is for all settings and schools to be sustainable by the year 2030 – by effectively embedding Learning for Sustainability into their curriculum, culture, campus and community.

Responsibilities of all educators

All educators in Scotland continue to have responsibility for developing children and young people's:

- Mental, Emotional, Social and Physical Health
- Communication, language and literacy
- Numeracy

Work is being undertaken to explore updated definitions of these responsibilities, embed them fully in the KDU model and ensure that educators are supported in these responsibilities.

By the January 2027 release of materials, this work will be fully embedded with clearer, decluttered guidance available for practitioners.

Cross-curricular learning

An exploration of cross curricular learning was carried out in 2024/25. This involved around 500 educators participating in co-design sessions to explore joins and connections across a range of themes known to the system as sitting beyond the realms of curriculum area boundaries:

- Careers and pathways
- Creativity
- Democratic Values
- Digital Skills
- Entrepreneurship
- Learning for Sustainability
- Money & Finance
- Social Justice, Rights and Equalities.

This exploration identified what learning is important for children and young people within these themes. But is also identified that their position within the overall curriculum can be confusing.

Work is being currently being undertaken across the CIC to address these issues.

DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION AND FURTHER CO-DESIGN

By the January 2027 release of materials, this work will be fully embedded with clearer, decluttered guidance available for practitioners.

In Scotland, curriculum guidance is underpinned by statutory education legislation and national policy, providing a framework through which schools and settings meet their legal responsibilities to deliver positive outcomes for every child and young person in Scotland.

Statutory requirements

Updated guidance on statutory requirements is currently being reviewed and will be provided with the September update to this draft.

DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION AND FURTHER CO-DESIGN

Policy commitments:

- **Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)** – a wellbeing policy ensuring children and young people receive early, co-ordinated support across services
- **1+2 Languages** – promotes learning two additional languages alongside a child or young person’s home language from Primary 1
- All children and young people are entitled to high-quality learning in Health & Wellbeing, including regular physical education (2 hours in primary/2 periods secondary S1-S4) and progressive personal and social education that supports their mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing (MESP)
- **Developing the Young Workforce** – connects education with careers, vocational learning and employability
- **Learning for Sustainability** – the national action plan seeks to embed sustainability, climate awareness, global citizenship and outdoor learning across the curriculum, through an effective whole school, setting and community approach
- The **Anti-Racism in Education Programme, National Approach to LGBT-Inclusive Education** and **Gender Equality in Education Taskforce** support an inclusive, decolonised and diverse curriculum

Each of these commitments is intrinsically linked to Scotland’s ambition for inclusive learner journeys that meet the needs of individual children and young people. They are aligned with the professional standards of Scotland’s educators.

DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION AND FURTHER CO-DESIGN

Further information on statutory requirements and policy commitments can be found [here](#). See also Appendix A.

Provocations:

Why are some non-negotiables necessary for curriculum making?

To what extent does the curriculum experienced by children and young people in your school/setting reflect what is intended in the curriculum entitlements? *How do you know?*

How can we ensure that Responsibilities of All are authentically adding value across curriculum? Why do these matter to all areas?

Professional dialogue / practical activities:

Activity 2: Curriculum purposes