



# Scotland's Curriculum Improvement Cycle

## A second explainer for teachers and practitioners

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## 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. Over 1,500 teachers, practitioners and partners have been part of **co-creation groups** to design the curriculum. To find out more about the background to this work, see the first in the series of [Explainers](#).

### What is being shared now?

Two documents will be shared for review via the Curriculum Improvement Cycle [website](#) in June 2026:

1. An early draft of new guidance entitled *Building Scotland's Curriculum: a draft resource for discussion and further co-design* for initial feedback.
2. Draft Know-Do-Understand model samples for each curriculum area.

## Building Scotland's Curriculum: a draft resource 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 2019/20
- 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 of curriculum making.

This resource will 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, middle leaders and those who lead curriculum design in schools and settings. It also aims to be accessible and useful for all of Scotland’s educators.

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.

**This first draft is being shared for discussion and there will be a chance to provide feedback from the end of summer. The draft document will change based on this feedback.**

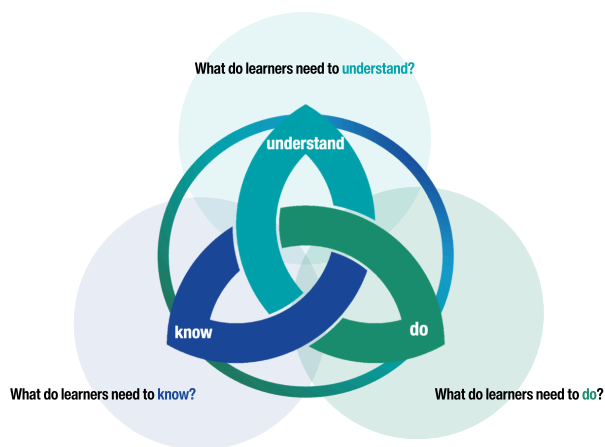
## Scotland’s Know-Do-Understand model

Scotland is moving to a Know-Do-Understand (KDU) model for its curriculum, informed by Big Ideas.

The Curriculum Improvement Cycle co-design groups first worked to identify their purpose and **Big Ideas** - the overarching understanding for each of the curriculum areas.

They then worked to identify the key **concepts** in their curriculum areas that underpin those Big Ideas.

From these concepts, they set out what children, young people and adult learners would need to **know** and be able to **do** in order to develop a deep **understanding**.



*Image 1 Scotland’s Know-Do-Understand model*

The learning is organised in **strands**, allowing teachers and practitioners to see the progression clearly from Early to Fourth Level.

Development of the Senior Phase of the curriculum will begin during the 2026/27 session and will be planned in partnership with Qualifications Scotland.



Both documents shared in June 2026 represent examples of the initial draft curriculum.

Work will continue over the summer to continue to further align and refine the work.

The final versions will be shared in January 2027, before being adopted from August 2028.

## What will be different?

When we move to our evolved curriculum from August 2028, we will no longer use Experiences and Outcomes or Benchmarks to plan learning, teaching and assessment. Instead, we will use the KDU model nationally, which will reduce the need for local progression frameworks. Below are examples of the current approach and the proposed new KDU model.

## Current

*Experience and Outcome: I can apply my understanding of factors to investigate and identify when a number is prime. MTH 3-05b*

*Benchmark: Writes a given number as a product of its prime factors.*

## Draft KDU model

<b>Understand:</b> For natural numbers greater than 1, the number of factors a number has determines whether it is prime or composite.	
<b>Know:</b> Prime numbers are natural numbers which have exactly two factors, themselves and one.  Composite numbers are the product of two or more prime numbers.	<b>Do:</b> Identify prime numbers using knowledge of factors.  Use the definition of prime numbers to reason about the classification of the number 1.  Express composite numbers as a product of prime factors and use these to perform calculations efficiently.
<b>Notes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Natural numbers are the set of numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 ...</li><li>• Work initially with prime numbers to one hundred.</li><li>• Counters and arrays may support the initial understanding of primes and composites. For example, prime numbers cannot be arranged as arrays with multiple rows and columns.</li><li>• Composite numbers may or may not have composite factors but will always be able to be expressed in terms of prime factors only.</li><li>• At this stage it would be useful to discuss and investigate the use of prime numbers in real-life and mathematical contexts.</li><li>• Digital tools exist for prime factorisation that may be useful to experience.</li></ul>	

# Understanding the samples

- The KDU model samples represent part of the initial draft curriculum.
- At the end of the summer, the full draft KDU model will be shared and we will ask for feedback on the KDU model content and the draft curriculum guidance.
- This feedback will further develop into the final curriculum and will be shared in January 2027.
- At this stage, we will move into Phase 3 of the *CIC*: *Sharing, Learning and Adopting* (see *image*).

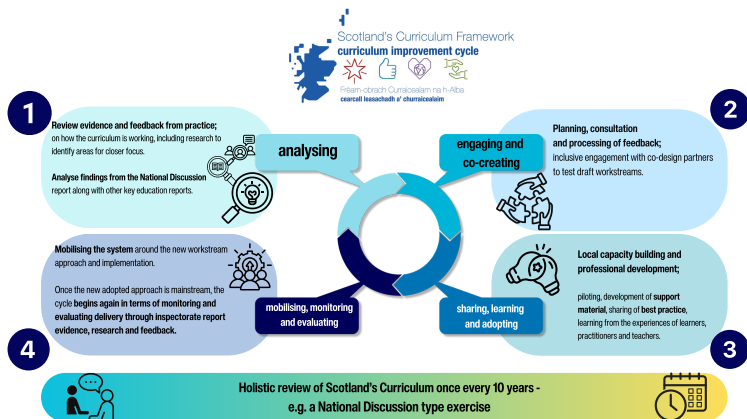


Image 2 The Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC) process

## Notes on the KDU model samples

This is just a sample from each curriculum area. At this stage, the purpose is to build familiarisation with a KDU model approach, rather than review content. When the full draft is shared at the end of summer 2026, there will be an opportunity to give feedback on the work.

### 1. Illustrative Big Idea

Each curriculum area has a number of Big Ideas identified by the co-design groups. These represent the overarching understanding and will sit across the entirety of the curriculum area. For this sample, an illustrative Big Idea has been chosen to show the link between the KDU sample and how it interacts with a Big Idea.

### 2. KDU model sample

As we are sharing samples from the different curriculum areas, some will have more content than others. Some of the differences in size will relate to the nature of the curriculum areas, and some will relate to the section of the KDU model that is being shared. It is important to note that although we are sharing one sample now, there are interdependencies across and between the strands within a curriculum area.

### 3. Sequencing

Some of the samples shared have sequenced progression statements within a CfE level. The Know and Do statements are presented in progression within an overarching Understand statement. Where you see this, the co-creation groups have identified a need for the learning to be sequenced progressively. This doesn't mean all sections of that curriculum area's KDU model will have sequenced learning. Sequencing will not be used by all curriculum areas.

### 4. ASN Foundation Milestones

Work is being undertaken 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.

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These are draft materials. The content, format and style are subject to change. It would not be appropriate to change current planning or tracking and monitoring systems in establishments at this stage.