

Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC)

Working Together to Make Change Happen

A Discussion Paper

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Historical status and subsequent development [October 2026]

This discussion paper was first published in March 2025 as part of the early development of Scotland's Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC). Its purpose was to share emerging thinking, evidence and early proposals for how collaborative working, engagement and professional learning could support curriculum improvement and the process of change. It was not intended to constitute a final implementation plan, a settled policy position or approved guidance for practitioners.

Since publication, the CIC has continued through further analysis, engagement, co-creation and refinement. The concepts, terminology, proposed approaches to collaborative working and managing change and illustrative examples contained in this paper should therefore be understood as a record of thinking at that point in time of the programme. Some proposals have since been refined, superseded or developed further.

Readers seeking the current approach should refer to the latest Curriculum Improvement Cycle materials that are available at www.scotlandscurriculum.scot. References within the original text to planned future activities, publication dates and programme developments have been retained where appropriate to preserve the historical context of the discussion paper.

A subsequent reference-integrity review has identified a number of bibliographic corrections, attribution clarifications and points where the supporting evidence or provisional nature of claims should be made more explicit. These are documented in the **change log** at the end of the document.

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Purpose

This is the third of three discussion papers which have been developed to inform the emerging work of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC) in Scotland. The first paper set out a case for making changes to the technical framework as a significant part of the work of the CIC. The second paper makes the case for evolving the current technical framework to one which uses a 'Know-Do-Understand' model.

- **Paper 1 -** Background and A Case For Change : Findings from the Pilot Curriculum Reviews 2023/24

- **Paper 2 -** Towards an Evolved Technical Framework.

This third paper begins to outline **how** the CIC will work in practice. It recognises the need to pay proportionally more attention to the how, for implementation of the why and the what, set out in the first two papers, to be successful. From inception of the CIC work in March 2024, attention has been paid to the design of processes, approaches and practices that will enable and facilitate the involvement of all key actors.

The paper seeks to:

- give an overview of the development of the CIC to date;
- share what is currently in the scope of the CIC programme;
- outline the practices, processes and approaches that are being used;
- consider what is needed to build capacity to support any changes emerging from the CIC; and
- identify the interdependencies.

An opportunity to provide online feedback on all three discussion papers will be available at the end of April 2025 via the CIC website[1].

The core partner organisations delivering curriculum and qualifications reform – the Scottish Government, Education Scotland and the Scottish Qualifications Authority – will publish a single combined timeline for this wider programme of work in summer 2025.

[1] www.scotlandscurriculum.scot

Language Matters: definitions

As work progresses with the CIC it is important that everyone involved in the process has a shared understanding of what is meant by the use of certain terms. To support this Education Scotland (ES) has 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. Definitions noted here are particularly relevant to this discussion paper.

The term **agency** refers to the capacity of practitioners to act but recognises the associated complexities. Agency is not something that people have, it is something that people achieve and occurs through the interplay of individual capacity, past experiences, the ability to envisage future possibilities and the context in which they work.

In the context of professional learning, **practitioner agency** is their capacity to act purposefully and constructively to direct their professional growth and contribute to the growth of their colleagues. Rather than responding passively to learning opportunities, practitioners who have agency are aware of their part in their professional growth and make learning choices to achieve their goals.

Capacity building is the process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that organisations and communities need to survive, adapt and thrive in a fast-changing world (United Nations, n.d.).

Co-design is a collaborative approach to designing and creating services (in this case the curriculum). Service users (e.g. children and young people, educators) and other stakeholders work together through a facilitated design process. Co-design methodology values the expertise and perspectives of all involved, ensuring solutions are tailored to meet real needs. Aligned with the Scottish Approach to Service Design, co-design emphasises inclusivity, empathy, and a shared understanding, aiming to create services that are effective, accessible, practical and sustainable for everyone involved.

The terms **'pilot study'** or **'pilot review'** refer to a mini version of a full-scale study (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). Pilot studies are useful to refine research instruments such as questionnaires and interview schedules, as well as for highlighting research gaps and identifying issues such as research validity (Sampson, 2004; van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). It is important to emphasise that the pilot reviews carried out by Education Scotland (ES) and described in this document were not intended to be full reviews of any of the curriculum areas.

A **place-based** approach builds on a shared understanding of the issues, relationships and interconnections in a place. It supports partners to work together with their shared assets to improve the overall quality of the lived experience for learners.

Service design supports curriculum design. It offers a way to explore a problem or challenge openly, collaboratively and with users, before a solution or service is decided.

The **technical framework** within a curriculum is used by educators to plan what children and young people will learn. In Scotland, this would include guidance such as the experiences and outcomes (Es&Os), benchmarks and progression frameworks, as well as approaches to moderation. This framework is designed to support educators in developing and implementing a curriculum which fully captures the skills, knowledge and learning which every learner should experience and attain. In Scotland, the technical framework sits alongside the statutory framework, policy framework and qualifications framework.

1. Designing the Curriculum Improvement Cycle

Scotland is now almost one year into putting a process in place that will enable the curriculum to be reviewed on a planned and ongoing basis. Practitioners and partners have been involved in the design and development of the emerging process from the start. The lack of a formal process of curriculum review has over time, led to a reliance on external reviews, often reacting to pressure or criticism in the political arena and thereby focussing on specific areas but not others. The need to have a process in place was identified by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in their external review published in 2021[2] and again by the National Discussion (Campbell and Harris, 2023)[3] that took place in 2022/23.

This section outlines work undertaken to develop and test the model ahead of the formal commissioning of the work - described as the Curriculum Improvement Cycle - by Scottish Government Education Reform Directorate in March 2024.

1.1 Developing the Curriculum Improvement Cycle

Following the publication of Curriculum for Excellence: into the future (OECD, 2021) the Scottish Government commissioned an independent rapid evidence review of several other countries, identified by the OECD, that had developed and implemented a curriculum review cycle. The countries included in the review were: Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Japan, New Zealand, Ontario (Canada) and Singapore.

The scope of the review included: policy contexts, timeframes, methodology and approaches used, curriculum emphases, leading agency(ies), involvement of stakeholders and outputs.

A summary of the main features commonly associated with curriculum review are shown in Figure 1.0 below.

[2] Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future – Published June 2021
[3] All Learners in Scotland Matter: the National Discussion on Education. Published May 2023.

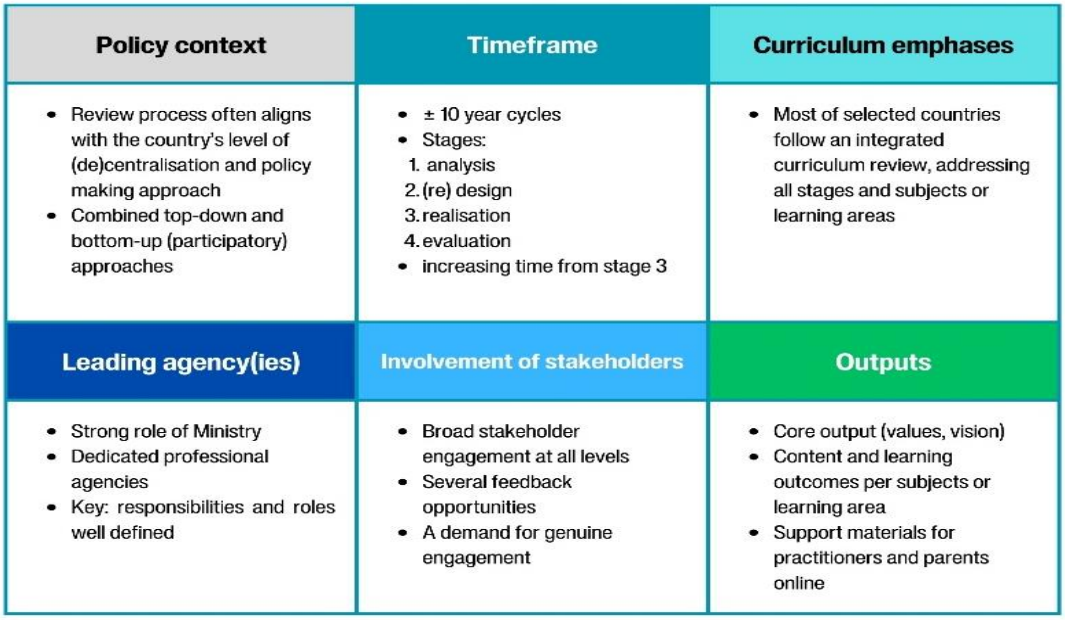


Fig:1.0: Features commonly associated with Curriculum Review

The review also allowed for discussions between and across countries, establishing links that continue to be supportive as the CIC develops. While the comparative examples were useful, it also became clear that every country and system is unique and carries out curriculum review in a slightly different way, meaning that there is no "one size fits all" approach. The differing approaches varied between countries like Japan, which had a top-down approach to review led by the ministry, to others, like Ireland, where the review was led by a dedicated curriculum agency. Some countries took an integrated focus, looking at all education stages at once, for example, reviewing 3-18 provision, with others looking at different stages or subjects at different points. A broad and inclusive evidence gathering process, with stakeholder engagement, underpins most approaches. The most common timeframe for review was ten years.

Between December 2022 and May 2023, the Scottish Government worked with a short-life dedicated co-design group, made up primarily of teachers, to consider the learning that had emerged from the review. Practitioners from across all local authority areas, curriculum areas and settings were invited to join the group. The purpose of the group was to develop a draft model of curriculum review for Scotland.

As well as the co-design group, additional engagement took place with existing forums between March 2023 to June 2023 including the Scottish Government Teacher Panel, Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES) Curriculum and Qualifications Group, Building Our Curriculum Self Help (BOCSH) Group and the Curriculum and Assessment Board (CAB[4]).

[4] **Membership of the Curriculum and Assessment Board (CAB) includes:** Association of Directors of Education, Association of Headteachers and Deputes in Scotland, College Development Network, Colleges Scotland, Community Learning and Development Manager Group, Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, Early Years Scotland, The Educational Institute of Scotland, Education Scotland, Professor Mark Priestley, University of Stirling, Professor Louise Hayward, University of Glasgow, National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers, School Leaders Scotland, Scottish Council of Independent Schools, Scottish Funding Council, Scottish Government, Scottish Secondary Teachers Association, Scottish Qualifications Authority, Skills Development Scotland and Universities Scotland.

1.2 A Working Model for Curriculum Review in Scotland

After careful consideration of evidence, a model for reviewing the Scottish Curriculum was developed and proposed to the Curriculum and Assessment Board (CAB) in June 2023. The model consists of four distinct but interlinked stages:

Analysis – analysis of evidence and feedback from practice on how the curriculum is working at all levels (Early Learning and Childcare (ELC), schools, colleges, regional, national), studies on future trends including international evidence[5] 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, children and young people.

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.

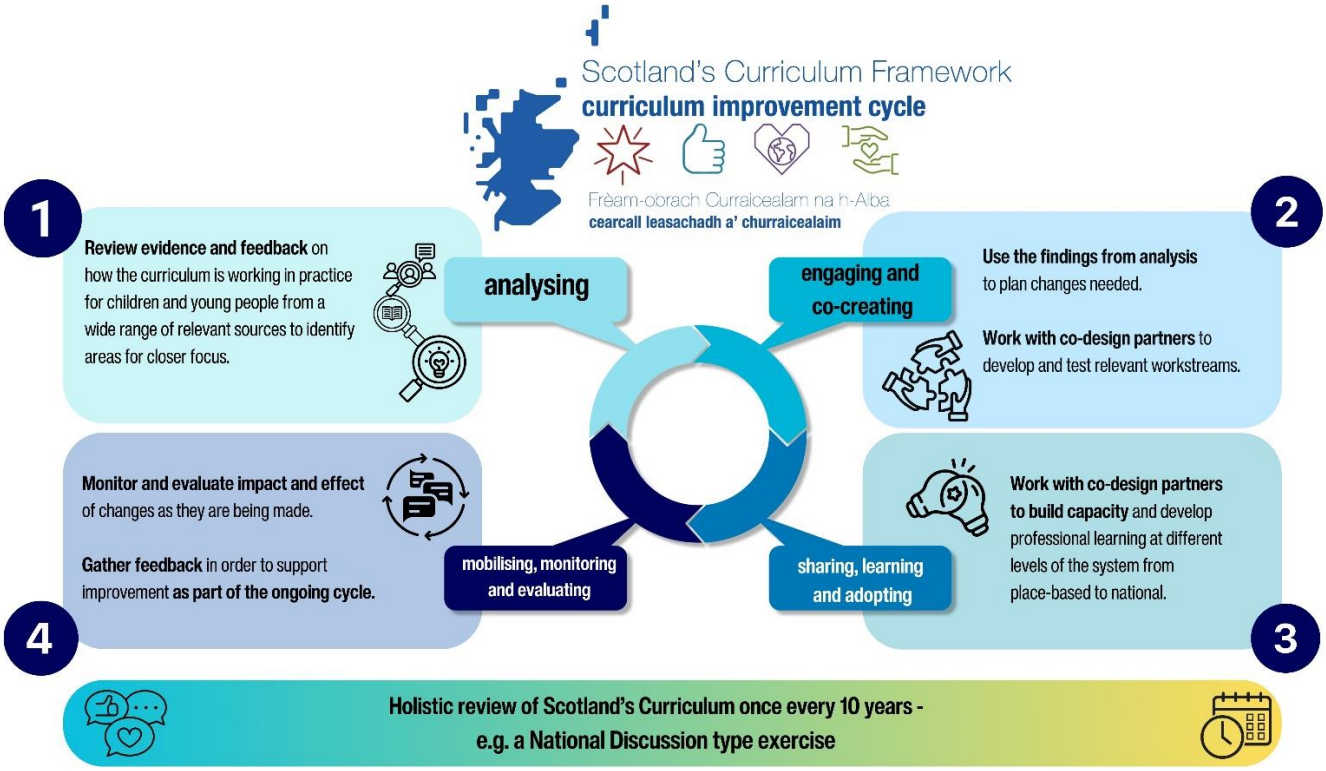


Fig: 2.0: Curriculum Improvement Cycle (Source: *Education Scotland 2024)*

[5] **International evidence could include:** PIRLS - Progress in International Reading Literacy Study; PISA - Programme for International Student Assessment; and TIMSS - Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

It is envisaged that a cycle within the Scottish model will take around ten years to complete and that each review cycle will start with an exercise similar to the National Discussion on Scottish Education (Campbell and Harris, 2023) that took place in 2022/2023. This means that the first year of the current cycle was 2023/2024 and an exercise like the National Discussion – which prioritises the voices of children and young people - should follow in 2033/2034. It should be further noted that children and young people will be involved in each stage of the CIC.

The model was underpinned by the following set of criteria.

Criteria	Detail
Collaborative and Coherent	The review process itself is broad and collaborative, involving all layers of the system and strengthening/consolidating cohesion between each part. The review process will take account of the initiatives being taken forward at local and regional level, as well as any structural reform work at a national level, supporting a strategic direction and vision at national level that is complementary rather than conflicting.
Ambitious	The review process itself is bold and able to be radical as needed; it celebrates what is working well, identifies what needs to be better and identifies what specifically needs to be done to improve.
Realistic	The review is proportionate and realistic about what can be delivered by the system, creating changes which are sustainable and specifically consider the potential for streamlining.
Engagement	A bottom up approach, where children and young people themselves are involved in every stage of the curriculum review, in particular those who experience more challenges in the system (based on evidence), alongside teachers, lecturers, early years practitioners, CLD practitioners, parents and families, employers and other key stakeholders in a manageable way and ensuring there is sufficient capacity to allow this to happen.
Clarity	The intention and purpose of the curriculum review process is well understood by those directly involved with it and impacted by it.
Scope	The review systematically tackles cross-cutting themes and issues, the four contexts for learning, including individual curriculum and subject areas, transitions, and takes account of geographical differences.
Approach	The review process is planned and will identify the key steps, but agile enough to be responsive and flexible to allow change if needed.
Implementation	Accountability for the output of every review cycle is well articulated and understood by all stakeholders across the education system including how it will be practically implemented. The support infrastructure is appropriate, and time is built into the process to allow the system to implement any improvements.

Evaluation	The implementation of the improvement cycle is evaluated, ahead of the next cycle, to generate lessons learnt.

1.3 Testing the model

In session 2023/2024, ES led a series of pilot reviews (fig 3.0) to test how the model could work in practice. The **four-stage structure** - **1)** Analysing; **2)** Engaging and Co-Creation; **3)** Sharing, Learning and Adopting; and **4)** Mobilising, Monitoring and Evaluation - was considered along with the **criteria** to develop practices, approaches and techniques that would be needed to support a full review process. The alternative approaches taken by other systems covered in the analysis were also considered by the teams responsible for the first phase of the pilot reviews.

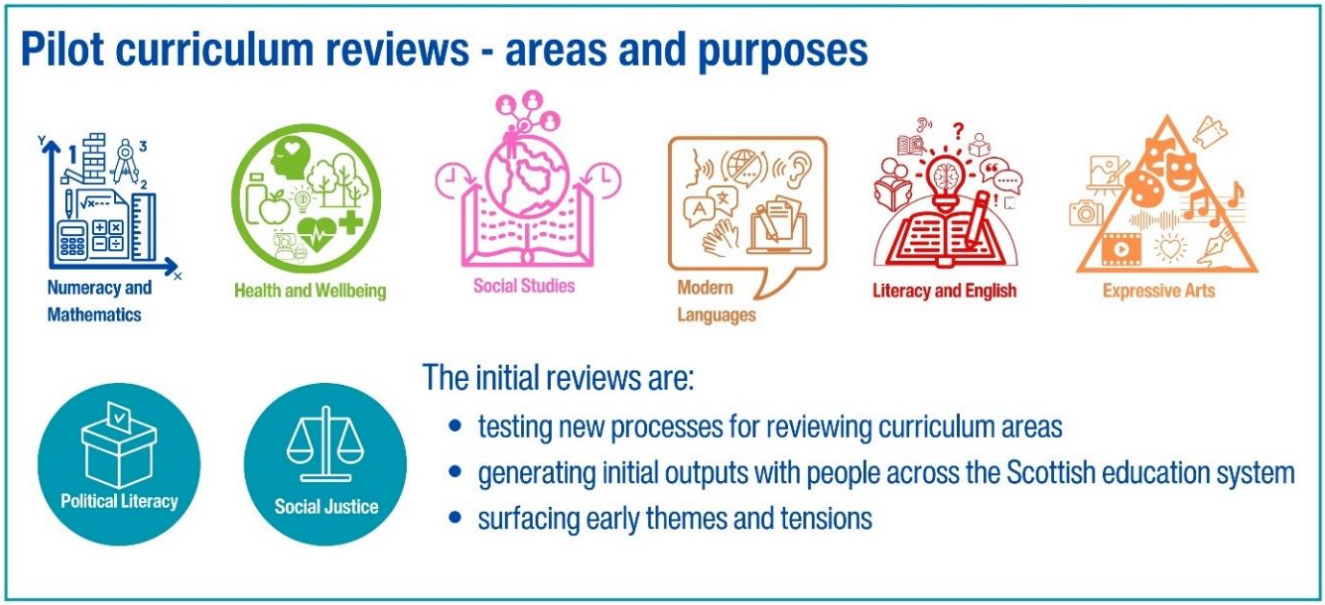


Fig:3.0: Summary of Pilot Curriculum Review 2023/2024.

The pilot reviews are discussed in detail in the first ES discussion paper of this series – Background and A Case For Change : Findings from the Pilot Curriculum Reviews 2023/24. The main points in relation to the criteria for the curriculum review process are summarised again here. They focus on the types of **engagement** and the intention to be **collaborative** and **realistic**.

- **Open and Inclusive Recruitment:** participants should be recruited through an open and inclusive process to ensure diverse perspectives and representation from educators across all levels of the system
- **Practical Challenges:** such as the availability of practitioners from specific sectors and difficulties faced by local authorities in releasing practitioners for full participation should be considered
- **Utilise Mixed Methods of Engagement:** the preferred method of engagement is in-person, enabling co-design workshop activities and constructive dialogue; in-person events should be supplemented with regular online activities, provided

that tasks are suitable for an online environment and participants are fully engaged
- **Co-Design Approach:** co-design methodologies should be the primary approach, where children and young people, educators and stakeholders collaborate through a facilitated design process, valuing the expertise and perspectives of all participants
- **Mixed Development Groups:** groups should be diverse and comprise 3-18 practitioners with both subject matter and sectoral expertise to ensure comprehensive discussions that integrate theoretical and practical perspectives.

Learning from the work done to design a model for curriculum improvement and the subsequent testing through the pilot reviews, along with what is known to work from research, professional learning and service design, has helped to shape what is now emerging as a Curriculum Improvement Cycle in practice.

2. Building the CIC programme

This section outlines how the CIC is developing in practice and gives an update on progress to date. The structure for the CIC is set out in figure 4.0. Recognising the **scope** set out in criteria identified in 1.2, four main areas of work currently sit within the programme. They are Governance and Communications; the Curriculum Framework; Contexts for Learning and Cross Curricular. Commentary on a selection of work from each of these areas is included in paragraphs 2.1 to 2.4 below.

The overall programme is supported by system partners and stakeholder work, the CAB, reference and advocacy groups. The CIC programme sits within the wider Educational Reform structure. Commentary on each of these is included in paragraph 2.5 below.

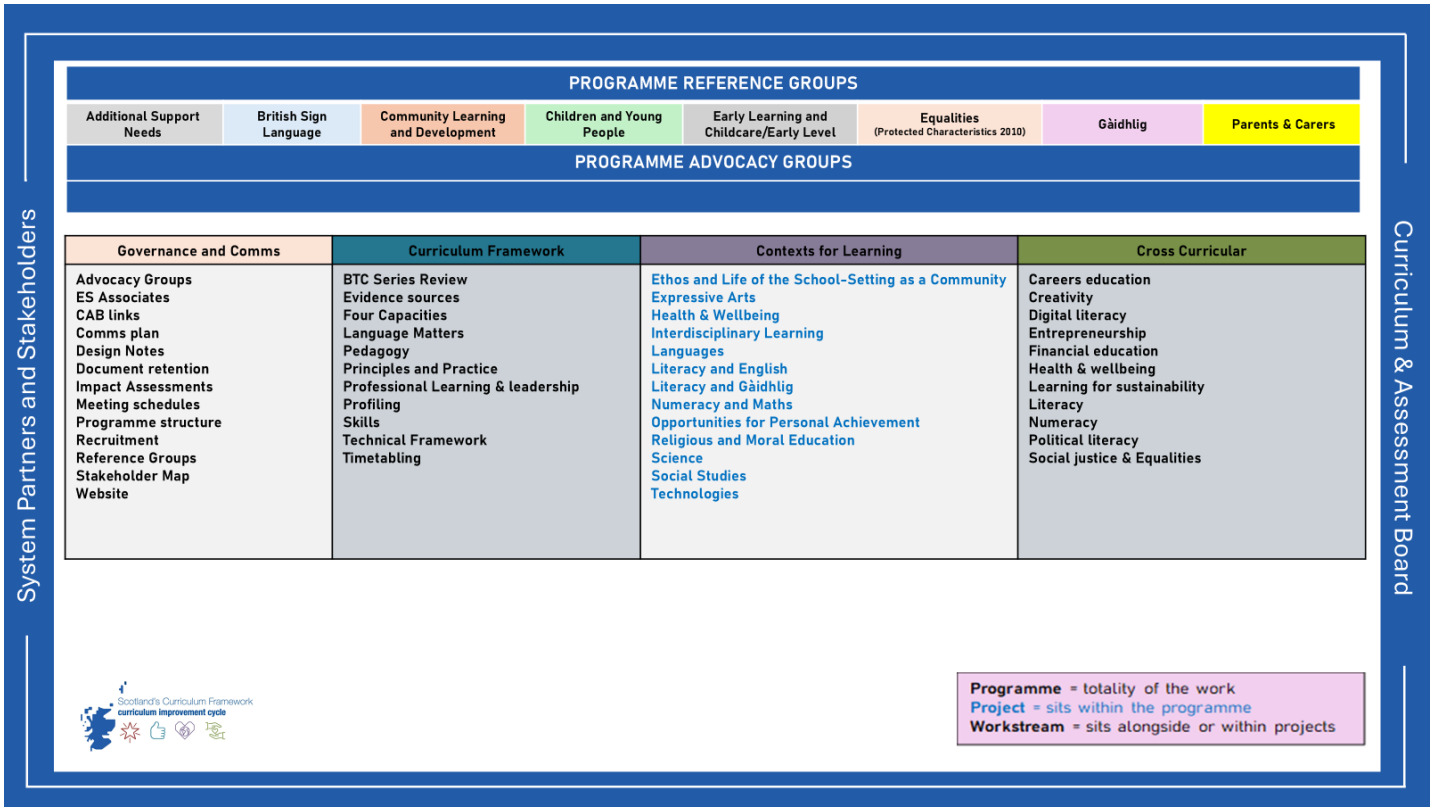


Fig:4.0: High Level Curriculum Improvement Cycle Programme Structure – March 2025.

2.1 Governance and communications

Advocacy is the strategic effort to influence and mobilise others, amplifying voices to drive action and positive change. It will be a key driver of the success of the CIC. Communication, stakeholder and public engagement are essential components of any advocacy strategy. The following advocacy, communication, and stakeholder engagement activities are currently underway:

- **CIC Website**: launched in October 2024, the CIC website provides up-to-date information and shares the ongoing story of the CIC; it will transition to the Education Scotland web estate in Autumn 2025
- **CIC Newsletter**: first published in October 2024, the termly newsletter provides key updates on the CIC, including recommendations on what to read, listen to, and watch; at the time of publication (March 2025), the CIC newsletter had over 25,000 subscribers
- **CIC Engagement Events**: since November 2024, Education Scotland has carried out a significant range of engagement activities to raise awareness of the CIC. These have included contributions to conferences (including professional association and local authority headteacher events) and a series of open webinars; ES has also carried out its first engagement events with children and young people as part of its exploratory work into a number of cross-curricular themes
- **Informing children and young people:** developing a range of communications and resources, accessible by a range of children and young people, empowering them to understand and access the CIC process
- **CIC Stories**: co-design is embedded throughout the lifecycle of the CIC, ensuring that those closest to children and young people play a central role in the co-creation of the strengthened curriculum. To help stakeholders understand this new way of working, since December 2024, Education Scotland's external communications (primarily via social media) have highlighted a series of CIC stories: these showcase the voices of practitioners who have been actively involved, sharing their experiences through written and video content
- **CIC Stakeholder Forum**: in February 2025, Education Scotland initiated the process of establishing a dedicated stakeholder forum with key organisations[6] involved in or affected by the CIC; one of the forum's aims is to work in partnership to shape CIC communication and advocacy activities from August 2025 onwards.

These activities represent examples of work to date and will continue to expand and evolve over time. Education Scotland has recruited a dedicated CIC Advocacy and Stakeholder Manager who will oversee this work.

Alongside the existing core staffing within Education Scotland, a number of National Advisers are being **recruited** for 23-month secondments to support the work of the CIC. Each National Adviser will be assigned to a specific curriculum area and seconded from their substantive role in schools and settings. This approach ensures

[6] Initial organisations are members of the Curriculum and Assessment Board (CAB). Additional organisations will be approached from April 2025.

that the CIC maintains a central facilitation team with practical and up-to-date school and educational experience.

During academic year 2023/2024, ES developed a model for Education Scotland Associates (ESAs). In January 2025, over 40 ESAs were recruited from a range of backgrounds and sector experiences to support CIC activities. ESAs are expected to contribute up to 15 days per year to CIC work, complementing the efforts of ES core staff and seconded National Advisers. The number of ESAs is expected to grow over the course of the CIC.

2.2 Curriculum framework

Scotland's Curriculum Framework (Scottish Government, 2019a) is the basis for the CIC work. This includes the purpose, the 'why', as set out in the four capacities; the 'what' as presented by the four contexts for learning; and the key elements for curriculum making as identified in the 'how'. Current features of the initial design / architecture, such as the curriculum levels and the eight curriculum areas, will remain. National Practice Guidelines (such as Realising the Ambition: Being Me) will be adopted into the CIC as will commitments already made to UNCRC.

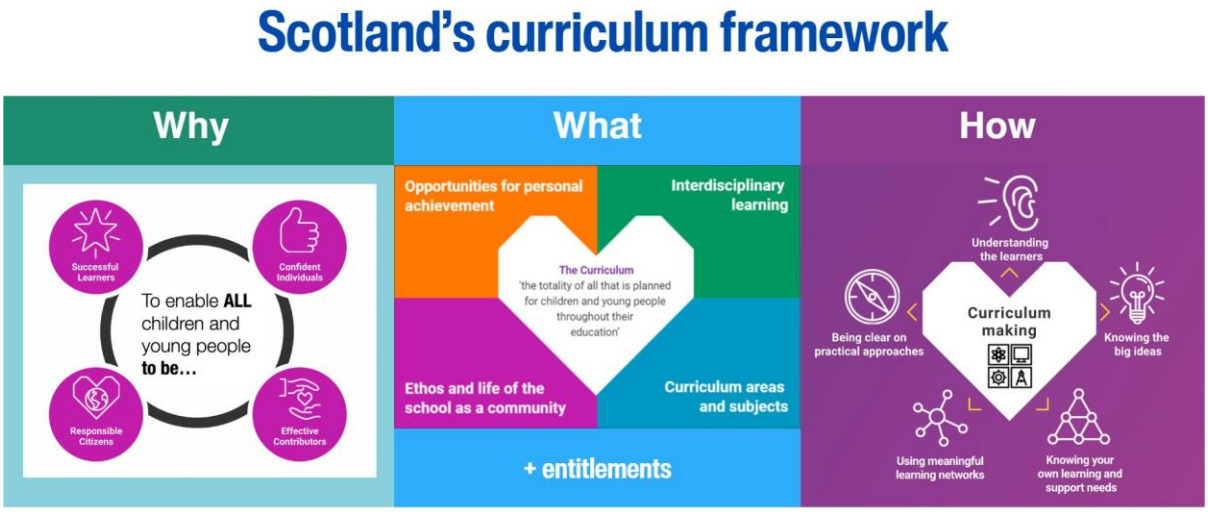


Fig:5.0: Scotland's Curriculum Framework (Scottish Government, 2019a)

The main focus of CIC work will be to evolve the **technical framework** to provide greater clarity on the role and purposes of knowledge in developing understanding. In summary, this would mean moving from the current use of experiences and outcomes and course specifications (linked to qualifications) to identify what children and young people will learn, to a **Know-Do-Understand model** (figure: 6.0) as described in section 4 of Towards an Evolved Technical Framework.

The case for change to the current technical framework and the proposed changes are made in the first two papers of this series:

- **Paper 1 -** Background and A Case For Change : Findings from the Pilot Curriculum Reviews 2023/24

- **Paper 2 -** Towards an Evolved Technical Framework

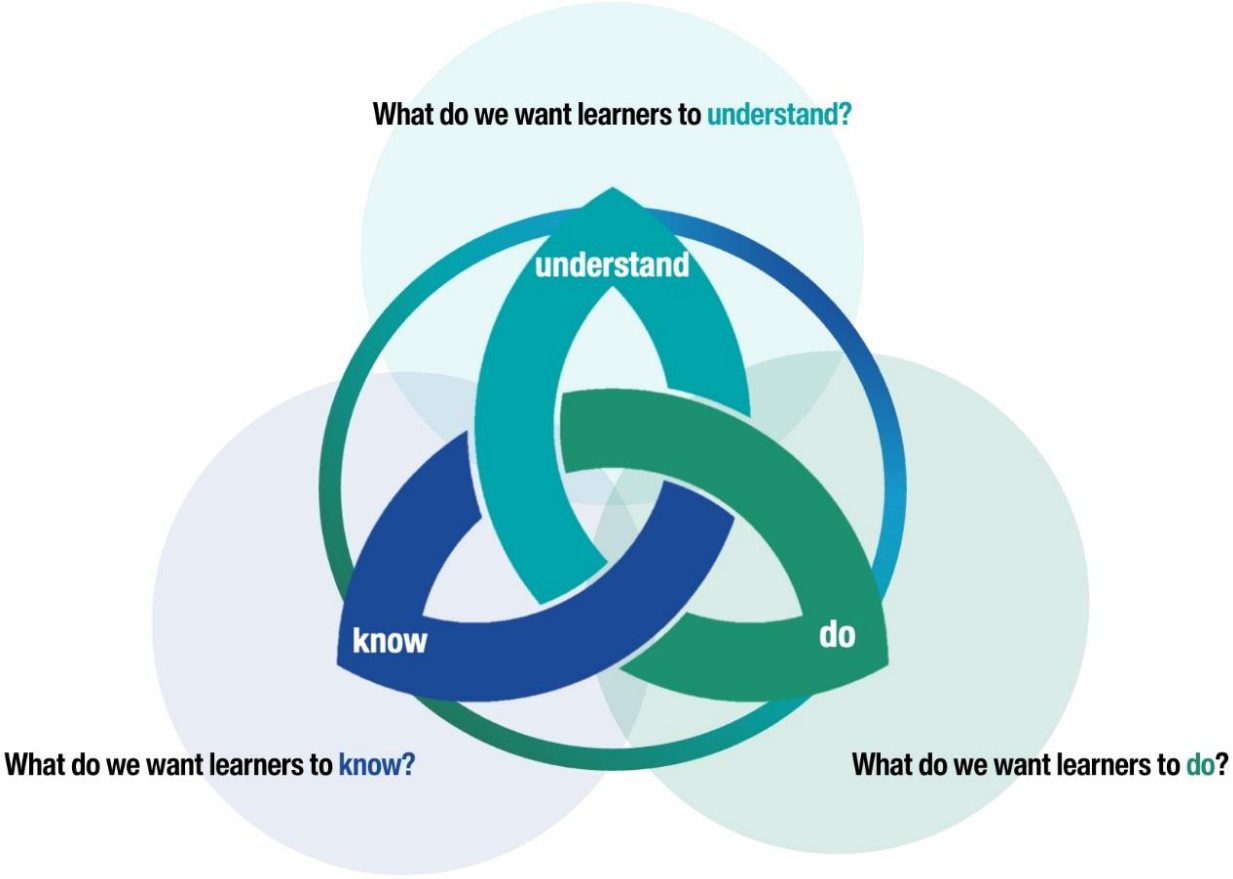


Fig:6.0: The proposed **Know – Do – Understand (K-D-U)** Framework (Source: Education Scotland, 2024)

The CIC presents an opportunity to rationalise the current five **Building the Curriculum**[7] documents and supplementary advice notes into one document. An analysis of the Building the Curriculum series was carried out in 2024 and involved research into the initial intent, design and span of the series, alongside feedback from current practitioners across all sectors on their current use and relevance. The findings from this initial work will be used to inform any new revised and streamlined documentation.

Evidence and feedback from recent reports such as the National Discussion (Campbell and Harris, 2023) and from ongoing work point to a strong conviction that

[7] **NOTE:** The approaches introduced in Building the Curriculum 2 have been updated and strengthened in the current national practice guidance Realising the Ambition: Being Me (Education Scotland, 2020) which replaces Building the Curriculum 2.

the **four capacities** set out the right purpose for Scotland's curriculum. A thought paper on the capacities, 'Exploring the Four Capacities', was commissioned by Education Scotland to offer insight and provocation and was published in October 2022. As changes are being made to contexts for learning and to cross-curricular expectations, any suggested updates to the attributes and/or capabilities of the capacities will be tracked and used to inform any new revised and streamlined documentation.

The current **level structure** ('early', 'first,' 'second', etc) will remain but long-standing issues relating to fourth level need to be resolved. The eight **curriculum areas** will remain, but the groupings of some subjects within these areas can be reviewed. This includes, for example, Food and Textile Technology and Business Studies.

The opportunity to redefine the relationship between the contexts for learning and cross-cutting expectations/themes including those currently referred to as 'responsibility of all' will be included in the work. There is also the opportunity to work towards a clearer alignment of **skills** across the curriculum. Confusion arising from the use of terminology will be worked on in the **Language Matters** workstream. An example would be the use of the term Health and Wellbeing to define both a curriculum area and a cross-cutting 'responsibility of all.' Early work with practitioner groups identified how this work could develop as part of the CIC. The first working glossary was published in December 2024, **Language Matters.**

Several pieces of work from the initial OECD 2021 action plan have been carried forward into the CIC. These include the work started in October 2022 on **Innovative Timetabling**[8] and in November 2022 on **Profiling Achievements.** A group of just over thirty practitioners with experience in using timetabling to support and enable curriculum innovation meet regularly to share approaches, methods and models to empower and increase capacity within the system. The profiling achievements co-design group of 85 practitioners and partners worked with ES and Skills Development Scotland (SDS) to develop a national digital profiling tool. The tool was made available for testing in January 2025.

2.3 Contexts for learning

As set out in the programme structure – figure 4.0 – thirteen projects have been identified to support each of the four contexts for learning: opportunities for personal achievement; the ethos and life of the school as a community; the eight curriculum areas and interdisciplinary learning (IDL). The project structure is described in section 4.

Of the thirteen workstreams, five have moved into stage 2 of the curriculum improvement cycle model – **engaging and co-creation.** They are numeracy and maths, literacy and English, literacy and Gàidhlig, health and wellbeing and science. The other projects will move into stage 1 – **analysing** from April 2025.

[8] Innovative Timetabling: Realising Parity in the Senior Phase

One outcome from the analysing stage for each project will be the development of an **evidence paper** to underpin each context (including each curriculum area) and its place in Scotland's Curriculum. The evidence paper will include recent and historical information and draw on a wide range of sources. This could include overviews of relevant policy and/or strategy documents, significant reports and research from partners, academic research and key messages from networks, performance data, inspection evidence, and feedback from children and young people. Evidence papers will be published on the CIC website.

There are currently **principles and practice papers** for each of the eight curriculum areas. These will be reviewed and streamlined as the work progresses. In addition, there is now an opportunity to underpin each of the other three **contexts for learning** (opportunities for personal achievement; the ethos and life of the school as a community and interdisciplinary learning) with principles and practice papers. This will help to outline the contribution of each context (along with the curriculum areas) to the development of the capacities for children and young people.

2.4 Cross-curricular

In April 2024, a list of 11 cross-curricular expectations were identified as requiring further exploration. Some such as health and wellbeing, literacy and numeracy, had been seen as being the 'responsibility of all' over a long period of time, whilst others such as political literacy or social justice, equalities and inclusion, were in the process of being refreshed or developed. Participants in the pilot curriculum area reviews had identified the need to look at the relationships and overlaps each of these presented with the four contexts for learning and to clarify the complexity and potential overload this caused. Further examination of the issues identified and discussed are set out in section 5.4 of Background and A Case For Change : Findings from the Pilot Curriculum Reviews 2023/24 (Education Scotland, 2024a) and section 5 of Towards an Evolved Technical Framework (Education Scotland, 2024b).

In May 2024, work began to explore cross-curricular areas, drawing on the best practice developed in the ongoing political literacy, social justice and equalities work. Stakeholders and academics working in each of the areas were invited to participate in a series of co-design sessions with practitioners. The practitioner group included those who had experience and expertise in the cross-curricular area of focus from across sectors, as well as those with no experience of the area under review, to provide objective perspectives. There were between 40 and 50 participants in each co-design group with practitioners making up approximately 70% of the group. The overall purpose of the design sessions was to identify **why,** or if, each area has relevance going forward; **what** the related Big Ideas (understanding), knowledge and skills are, and **how** and where these are developed and learned across the contexts for learning. A graphic illustration of the sessions is included in Annex B. Since May 2024, approximately 500 participants have taken part in the co-design sessions across the 11 co-design groups. Discussions about the emerging work have taken place with over 500 children and young people. It is anticipated this initial exploration work will conclude in June 2025.

2.5 CAB, Reference and Advocacy Groups

As the work of the CIC develops, it will be important to coordinate and calibrate outputs to ensure that what is being proposed is **ambitious**, **coherent** and **realistic.** In addition to the formal governance structure within the Education Reform programme, support and challenge for the overall programme comes from the **CAB.**

The full CAB Board meets quarterly and provides a platform for engaging a range of key system level stakeholders to help inform and endorse key steps in programme design. In between the quarterly meetings and to support the development of the CIC work, a representative sub-group of CAB (fig: 7.0) meets through a series of design sprints to work through specific workstreams as needed. The work developed through the design sprints is shared at full meetings of CAB for feedback and agreement.

Feedback and commentary will be sought on a regular basis from **Reference Groups**[9] (see fig: 4.0) with specialist knowledge to ensure that statutory obligations and policy expectations are being met. This includes, for example, the needs and interests of those with additional support needs (ASN) or with protected characteristics as defined in the Equality Act 2010. Co-design sessions and consultation with children and young people will take place with national third sector organisations with expertise in this work.

Advocacy Groups will include those who work closest to children and young people and who will be able to enact system changes emerging from the CIC work to happen at local level. Ongoing work, with a range of system partners and stakeholders, will be developed and strengthened to support the CIC. Current partnership working with the **ADES** and their Curriculum, Assessment and Qualifications (CAQ) group on the national Professional Learning and Leadership programme for curriculum design will continue and be expanded. In addition, in April 2025, joint work will begin with ADES CAQ to explore more detailed options for stage 3 – sharing learning and adopting – of the CIC.

Further work will also be undertaken to understand the role and potential of **existing networks.** Scotland has a remarkably rich and diverse landscape of education networks, from formal structures like Royal Societies and subject associations to grassroots professional learning communities and digital practitioner forums. Local, regional, and national networks with strong links to the CIC could serve as the connective tissue linking educators, policymakers, researchers, and communities. In doing so, they contribute to what Chapman and Fullan (2007) describe as a "*Networked Learning System* - a collaborative framework that not only supports educators but also fosters sustainable systemic change through collaborative enquiry".

[9] **Initial CIC reference groups will include:** Additional Support Needs; British Sign Language; Community Learning and Development; Children and Young People (inc: UNCRC); Early Learning and Childcare / Early Level; Equalities: Protected Characteristic 2010; Gàidhlig; Parents and Carers (see fig:4.0).

CAB CIC Sub-Group



Fig:7.0: Organisations supporting the work of the CIC as part of the CAB Sub-Group. (Source Education Scotland)

3. Placing co-design at the heart of the CIC process

This section, with its related annexes, gives a flavour of the approaches being used in the CIC work. The commitment to **engagement and co-creation** is built into the four-stage curriculum improvement model. Engagement is described in the CIC criteria as “a bottom up approach, where children and young people themselves are involved in every stage of the curriculum review, in particular those who experience more challenges in the system (based on evidence), alongside teachers, lecturers, early years practitioners, CLD practitioners, parents and families, employers and other key stakeholders in a manageable way and ensuring there is sufficient capacity to allow this to happen.”

As the work of the CIC progresses, co-design approaches will be central. Co-design seeks to ensure that the curriculum is shaped collaboratively with those who facilitate it (teachers and practitioners), experience it (children and young people and their parents and carers) and benefit from it (wider society, including employers, community groups, and the public at large). Authentic co-design extends beyond consultation - it means designing policy and implementation ***with*** educators, children and young people, and communities, not ***for*** them.

3.1 What is Co-Design?

Co-design is a collaborative approach to designing and creating services (in this case the curriculum). Service users (e.g. children and young people, educators) and other stakeholders work together through a facilitated design process. Co-design methodology values the expertise and perspectives of all involved, ensuring solutions are tailored to meet real needs. Aligned with the Scottish Approach to Service Design (SAtSD), co-design emphasises inclusivity, empathy, and a shared understanding, aiming to create services that are effective, accessible, practical and sustainable for everyone involved.

The **Double Diamond model** (Design Council, 2005; 2019) which underpins SAtSD outlines four key stages:

- **Discover:** gaining insights and understanding user needs
- **Define:** narrowing down to a clear problem statement
- **Develop:** exploring possible solutions through iteration
- **Deliver:** refining and implementing the proposed solution

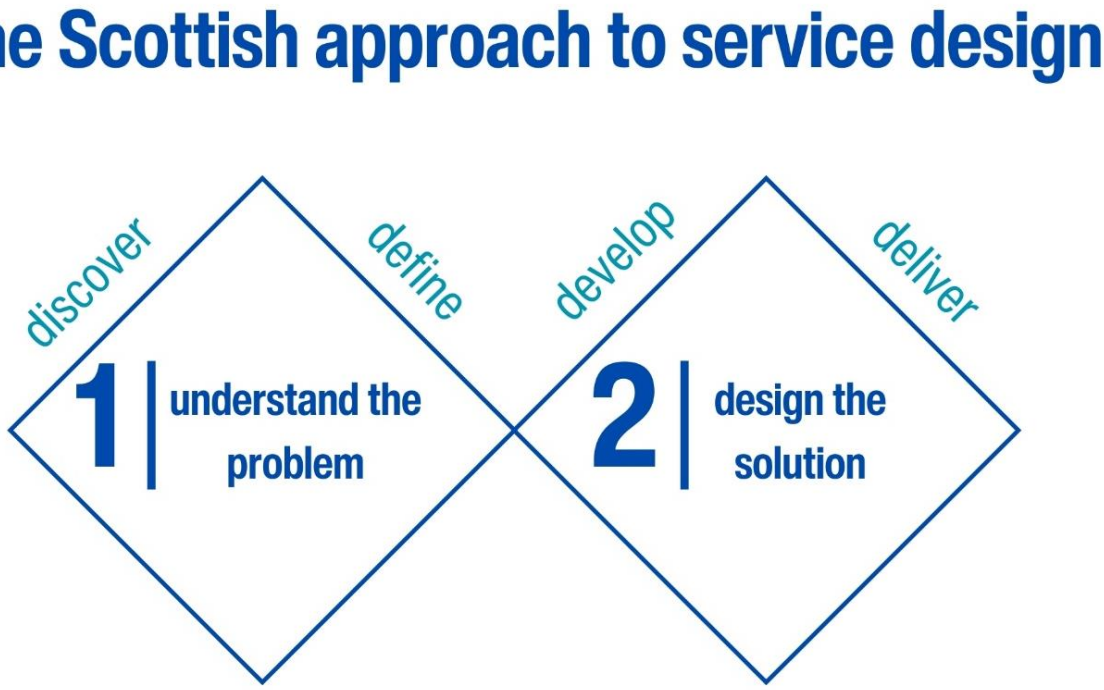


Fig:8.0: Figure 8.0: The Scottish Approach to Service Design, drawing on the Design Council's Double Diamond framework

3.2 Maintaining the Integrity of the Co-Design Process

Co-design, when done authentically, requires time, patience, and a commitment to collaboration. One challenge identified with the use of co-design in the CIC is in maintaining the integrity of the process to ensure it does not become diluted, exaggerated or misrepresented. To maintain integrity, there will be a need to continually refine and clearly articulate what co-design means and what it enables within the context of the CIC. Capacity building is built into the work as it develops. Participants are supported to develop a shared understanding of the core practices, principles, and tools being used and their own roles in the overall process. This capacity-building effort helps prevent misunderstandings and ensures that all voices, regardless of background or role, are heard and valued. Lessons learned from the work to date show that it is important to consistently reaffirm with all participants the core principles of co-design so they do not lose track of what can be achieved. Participants are asked to ‘trust the process,’ and it is openly acknowledged that any design process can feel ‘messy’, but that active participation and engagement with the process will ultimately bring clarity and direction (Fig: 9.0).

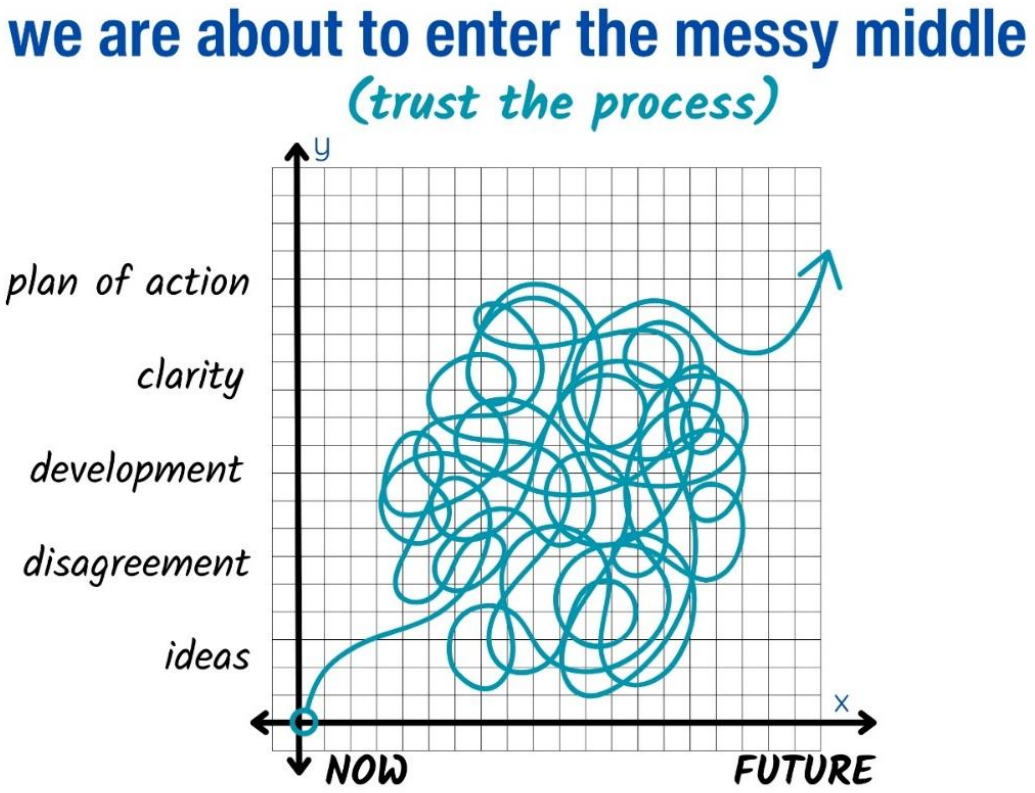


Fig:9.0: Trusting the Process by Exploring the Messy Middle (Source: Education Scotland, 2024)

3.3 Developing capacity in co-design

ES has worked with, and learned from, a wide range of partners to develop capacity in using co-design approaches and will continue to do so. Partners have included the Service Design Academy, Skills Development Scotland (SDS), NoTosh Ltd, and We Are Snook. Early learning came from the collaborative work on curriculum that was stimulated by the opportunities presented by the Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) programme from 2014 onwards, and from the work commissioned by CAB in 2018 to refresh the curriculum narrative. In early 2020, for example, collaboration groups used service design approaches to share learning and co-author two thought papers published in August 2020: Interdisciplinary Learning: ambitious learning for an increasingly complex world (Education Scotland and NoTosh, 2020a) and Learner Pathways: A key to successful curriculum design (Education Scotland and NoTosh, 2020b). The views of over 600 children and young people helped to shape work which explored the four capacities in 2022 (Education Scotland and NoTosh, 2022). A short case study outlining the recent work of the Profiling Achievement group is provided in Annex A to help illustrate the involvement of practitioners, partners, children and young people in this ongoing co-design work.

In session 2022/2023, a short life co-design group shaped the model proposed for a Curriculum Review Cycle in Scotland – outlined in Section 1. The pilot curriculum reviews that were discussed in the first paper of this series – Background and a Case for Change: Findings from the Pilot Curriculum Reviews 2023/24 – presented a further opportunity to trial and evaluate different co-design approaches and

methodologies that could be used in a full curriculum review cycle. In preparation for the anticipated start of a review cycle, early work took place to test which approaches would be most effective in reviewing individual curriculum areas. An example from the pilot review for Expressive Arts is outlined in the next paragraph. Work also took place to ascertain which approaches worked best in the exploration of cross-curricular areas such as social justice, rights and equalities, and political literacy. A snapshot of the process developed for reviewing the cross-curricular areas is included in Annex B.

Over 150 educators and stakeholders signed up to participate in the initial national Expressive Arts review pilot review held on 31st January 2024. Participants self-selected following communication via social media and national subject networks. In the session itself, participants worked on the **discover** stage of the design model to come to a shared understanding of issues. Activities included reviewing the relevance and contribution of the expressive arts to the four capacities. This was followed by exploration of each subject area – Music, Art & Design, Drama and Dance – and reviewing these to consider the knowledge, skills and attributes required for a future orientated expressive arts curriculum. A working group analysed the outputs from the initial event to ascertain what next steps could be.



Fig:10.0: Co-Design methodology was further developed during the pilot curriculum reviews

Co-design approaches are being used in the work now underway on the four contexts for learning. The project structure is described in the next section. It allows collaboration and core groups to apply the different stages of the design model as needed. The collaboration group might, for example, undertake activities which open the **discover** stage - to understand the problem - and the core group to take this further into the **define** stage.

Further information on co-design approaches and related tools can be found on the ES website[10].

[10] Curriculum Co-Design | Resources | National Improvement Hub

4. Reviewing the contexts for learning

This section outlines the structures and processes that are being put in place to support the main area of CIC work. During 2024/2025, work began on each of the four contexts for learning: opportunities for personal achievement; the ethos and life of the school / setting as a community; curriculum areas and subjects and IDL. Thirteen projects below were set up to support the review process.

Ethos and life of the school / setting as a community;	Expressive Arts	Health & Wellbeing	Interdisciplinary Learning (IDL)	Languages
Literacy and English	Literacy and Gàidhlig	Numeracy and Maths	Opportunities for Personal achievement	Religious and Moral Education[11]
Science	Social Studies	Technologies		

The structure of the projects has been developed over a period of 18 months and considers learning from the pilot curriculum reviews (2023/2024), exploration of the cross-cutting themes (2024/2025), learning from legacy national response groups for literacy and numeracy (2022 - 2024), feedback from CAB (June 2024) and ongoing links with review teams from other countries (including British Columbia, Finland, New Zealand and Wales). The initial national engagement events were attended by between 60-100 participants, and it was recognised that this group was too large to follow up on outputs requiring more intensive work. This resulted in the development of a **core group** recruited from participants involved in the national events. These groups ranged from approximately 20 to 30 participants. The national groups, since renamed as **collaboration groups**, would remain as the main consultative body with which the core group would engage as they developed proposals and responded to actions.

Each project structure (fig 11.0) is made up of:

- a collaboration group
- a core group
- a steering group
- a critical friends' group

Commentary on each of the groups within the project structure is given in paragraphs 4.1 to 4.4 below.

[11] Includes Religious and Moral Education (non-denominational) and Religious Education in Roman Catholic schools.

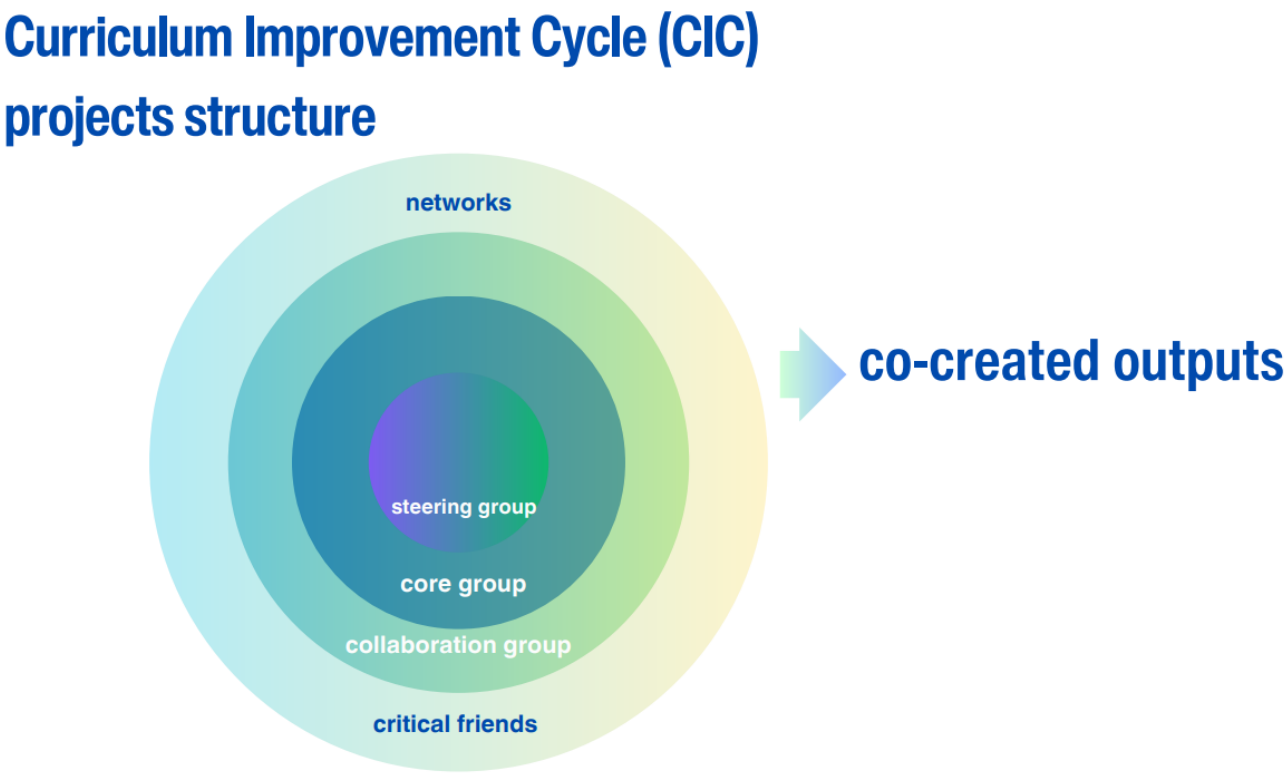


Fig:11.0: Contexts for Learning Project Structure (Source: Education Scotland)

4.1 Collaboration Groups

Collaboration groups are made up of approximately 100 participants. Where possible, the ratio of practitioners to other participants is 3:1 respectively. This is to allow for practitioner representation across local authorities, sectors, roles, and experience and, as needed, specific representation within contexts and curriculum areas.

Some collaboration groups have evolved naturally from existing groups. Maths, for example, was the first curriculum area to be set up as a project within the CIC and evolved from the existing National Response to Improving Mathematics (NRIM) review groups. An open recruitment call for participation for health and wellbeing, literacy and English, literacy and Gàidhlig and science was made in October 2024. This included the option to volunteer as a critical friend. A second open recruitment call for the remaining contexts for learning was made in January 2025 (fig: 12.0).



Fig:12.0: Recruitment for the second phase of Collaboration Groups took place in January 2025.

A collaboration group will meet face to face twice yearly and online as appropriate. Participation in the collaboration group includes a commitment to professional learning.

The role of the collaboration group is to:

- identify what works and what is not working in their area of focus;
- explore options and possible solutions to areas needing change or improvement;
- gather feedback on emerging proposals;
- sense check and test possible solutions;
- engage in sharing, learning, adopting; and
- be advocates for the overall CIC work.

On the recommendations of CAB (June 2024), collaboration groups will refresh membership by at least 25% every 24 months. This has been built into the model to ensure that fresh voices are always part of the CIC, whilst simultaneously ensuring the overall collective wisdom of the group is maintained.

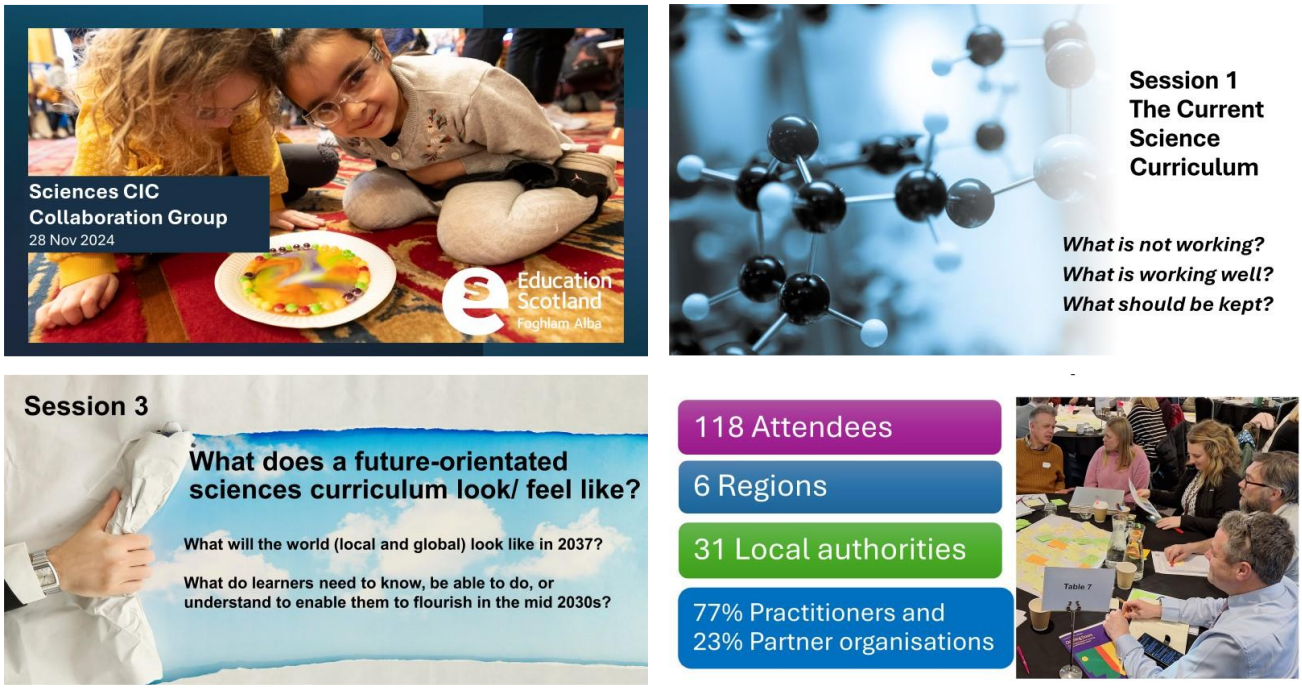


Fig:13.0: Example of Collaboration Group activities (Source: Initial Science Collaboration Group, November 2024).

4.2 Core Groups

A core group is made up of 15-30 participants initially drawn from the collaboration group. The core group will work closely with the relevant ES lead team including seconded national advisers[12]. The group will work through the stages identified in the CIC: analysing; engaging and co-creating; sharing, learning, and adopting; and mobilising, monitoring, and evaluating.

The core group will have an initial 4-day Core Group Workshop which will include training on statutory obligations related to areas such as ASN, Gàidhlig, Equalities and UNCRC (see Reference Groups – Fig: 4.0). The core group will commission short life working groups to work on specific workstreams as needed. They will identify all relevant networks and be responsible for updating and engaging these networks. Initial work will include the co-creation of an underpinning evidence base (analysing stage) to support any proposed changes.

The role of the core group is to:

- develop the options and possible solutions identified by the collaboration group;
- analyse and respond to feedback from collaboration, critical friends and steering groups; and
- comment and give feedback on relevant papers emerging from the overall CIC work.

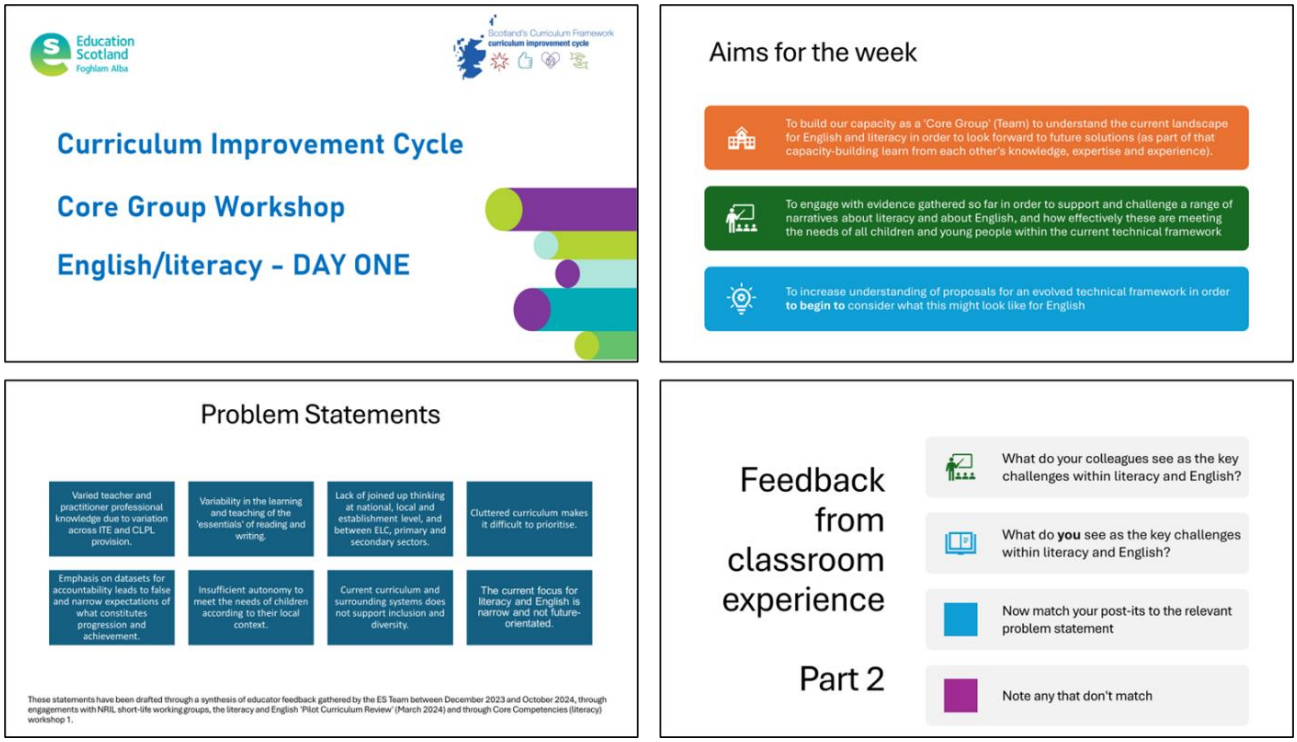


Fig:14.0: Example of Core group activities. (Source: Initial English and Literacy Core Group, November 2024)

[12] A **National Advisor** is an education professional who has been seconded to ES from their school or setting through an open recruitment process. Secondments last no more than 23 months to ensure that ES maintains a high percentage of staff who are involved in the CIC who have recent school or setting experience. Initially, National Advisors have been recruited to support the work to review the Contexts for Learning (including curriculum areas).

4.3 Steering Groups

The steering group will develop a coherent response to the implementation of change, emerging from the CIC, drawing on their shared resources and capabilities. The steering group will be co-chaired by ADES, ES and SG and will be made up of 10-15 participants from local and national government as well as representation from initial teacher education (ITE) (through the Scottish Council of Deans of Education). The co-convening arrangements are designed to ensure that the funders of the CIC - (Scottish Government), the facilitators of the CIC (Education Scotland) and the primary implementors of the CIC (Local Authorities) are all appropriately represented.

The Steering Group will meet five times a year. Meetings will take place remotely and in person as required. Additional meetings may be convened where the Chair and other members of the group consider it appropriate for discussion of issues.

The role of the group is to:

- create the enabling environment
- give /source strategic advice and direction
- provide support and challenge
- be advocates for the overall CIC, supporting and championing the work
- ensure a coherent response for each of the four phases of the CIC
- provide oversight and coordination of the overall work
- identify issues emerging from the overall work
- agree approaches to evaluation and monitoring

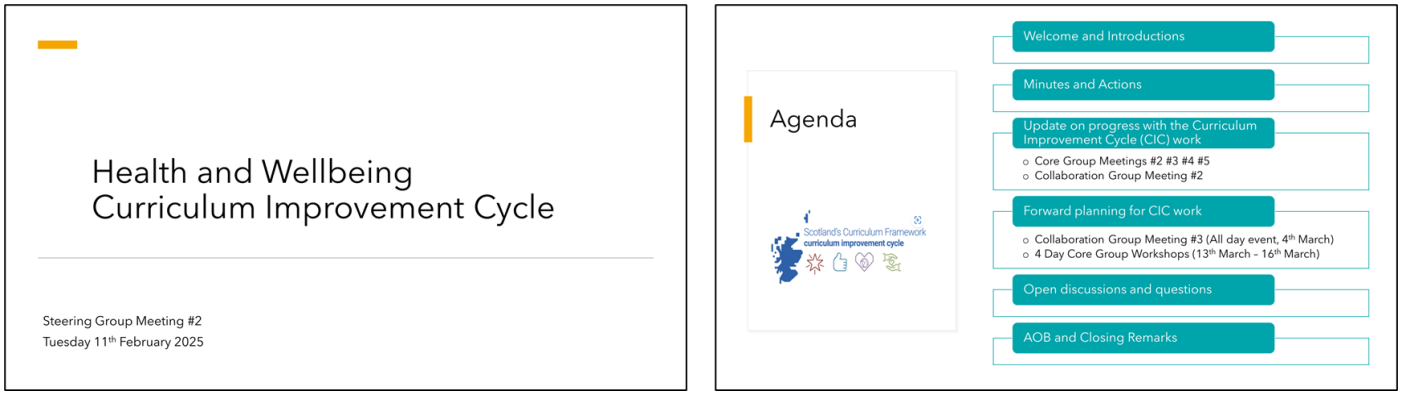


Fig:15.0: Example of Steering Group Agenda. (Source: HWB Steering Group, February 2025)

4.4 Critical Friends

Critical friends will sit outside the collaboration and core groups to offer feedback and commentary as the work develops. Critical friends will include practitioners, stakeholders and partners, employers and academics who volunteered or could not be involved directly in the collaboration and core groups. Critical friends provide an opportunity to seek wider complementary perspectives, to those represented in the collaboration group. Their feedback and commentary can be drawn upon at any time during the work.

The role of the group is to:

- serve as a sounding board for ideas, proposals and approaches
- review and evaluate proposals, frameworks, and processes critically to identify areas for improvement
- provide an external lens to challenge assumptions and ensure innovative, evidence-based approaches

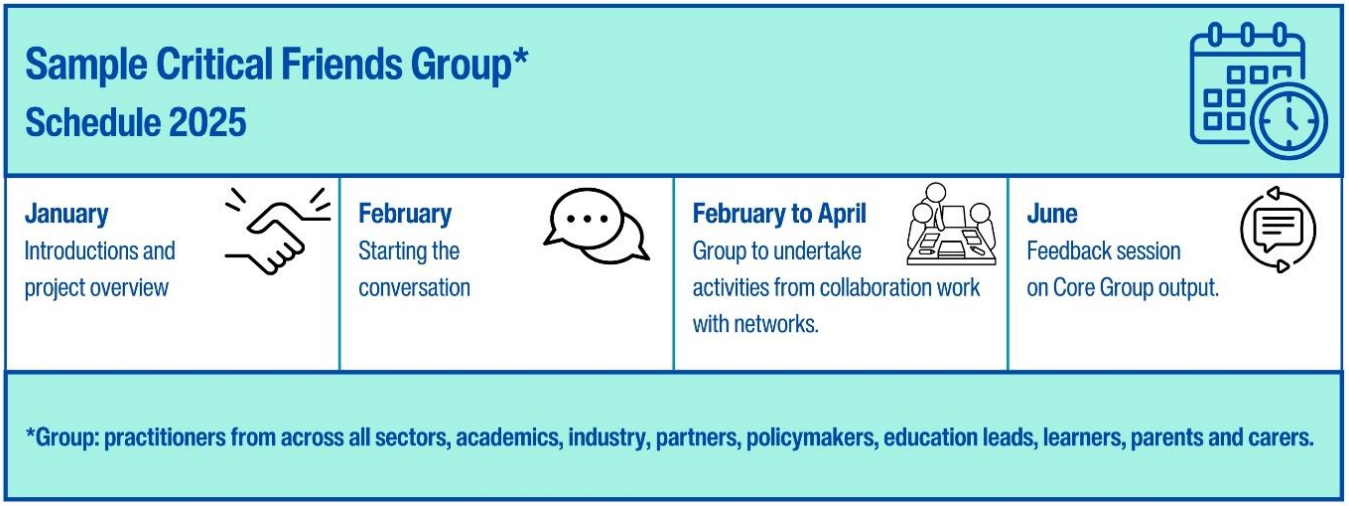


Fig:16.0: Sample Critical Friends Group Schedule from 2025

The overall project structure (Fig: 11.0) will be monitored as it develops and matures to ensure it is achieving what is needed. For example, as it develops, the opportunities to build collective capacity across the system will become apparent.

5. Building Capacity and Transformative Professional Learning

This section begins to look at what is needed to support stage 3 of the CIC – sharing, learning and adopting. It recognises the need for all partners to work together to build capacity and develop professional learning at different levels of the system, from place-based to national. The success of the CIC will depend on the opportunities for, and the ability of, educators and leaders to engage meaningfully with change. As Fullan and Quinn (2015: p57) highlight, sustainable change requires, "a common knowledge and skills base across all leaders and educators in the system, focusing on a few goals and sustaining an intense effort over multiple years." Leading and engaging with the change associated with the CIC will require capacity building at all levels of the system.

5.1 What is capacity building?

Capacity-building is defined as "the process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that organizations and communities need to survive, adapt, and thrive in a fast-changing world" (United Nations, n.d.). In the context of education, this means not only equipping educators with the necessary knowledge and competencies, but also creating the conditions that support professional learning, collaboration and innovation. Fullan and Quinn (2015: p56) argues that "capacity building is a key lever for developing coherence as knowledge and skills are being developed, the collaborative culture is deepened, shared meaning is clarified, and commitment reinforced". Priestley et al. (2016) caution against the use of the term 'capacity building', suggesting it can be misleading if it implies that agency is solely dependent on an individual teacher's capacity, rather than on the dynamic interaction between teachers and their working environments. This interplay between what educators bring to their roles and the conditions that enable or constrain their professional agency is central to meaningful capacity building. Capacity building does not occur in isolation; it is influenced by the culture, structures, and resources within educational systems. The need for Scotland to continue investing in curricular capacity building was confirmed by the OECD in 2021.

5.2 What is transformative professional learning?

Transformative professional learning goes beyond acquiring new skills. It fosters a fundamental shift in how educators think, feel, and engage with their practice. Mezirow (1991) describes it as a process where individuals critically examine their assumptions, leading to meaningful perspective shifts. This type of learning reignites purpose and passion, making professional development both valuable and rewarding. It extends beyond cognitive development, engaging emotional and social dimensions (Illeris, 2017). It encourages curiosity, creativity, and lifelong learning by deepening educators' understanding of their learners' needs and potential. Sachs (2016) emphasises that transformative professional learning is key to developing agency, enabling educators to become active agents of change within classrooms and communities. A central premise of transformative professional learning is its role

in shaping educators who think critically, act ethically, and seek justice (Mockler, 2005). Beyond improving pedagogy, it plays a crucial role in broader educational and societal transformation. Transformative professional learning challenges educators to examine power structures in education, questioning who holds decision-making power and whose voices are prioritised in curriculum development.

5.3 Capacity Building and the CIC

Since the start of academic year 2024/2025, Education Scotland's Professional Learning and Leadership programmes and activity in ES have been adapted and developed to align with the professional learning needs required to underpin and support the effective implementation of the CIC. The national leadership offer has traditionally included programmes and resources for practitioners, middle leaders, school leaders, and system leaders. The current offer is set out in Annex C. As the need for shared and collective leadership develops in the move from stage 2 of the CIC - engaging and co-creating, to stage 3 - sharing, learning and adopting, a staged approach will be required to build capacity at different levels across the system (see Fig 17.0).

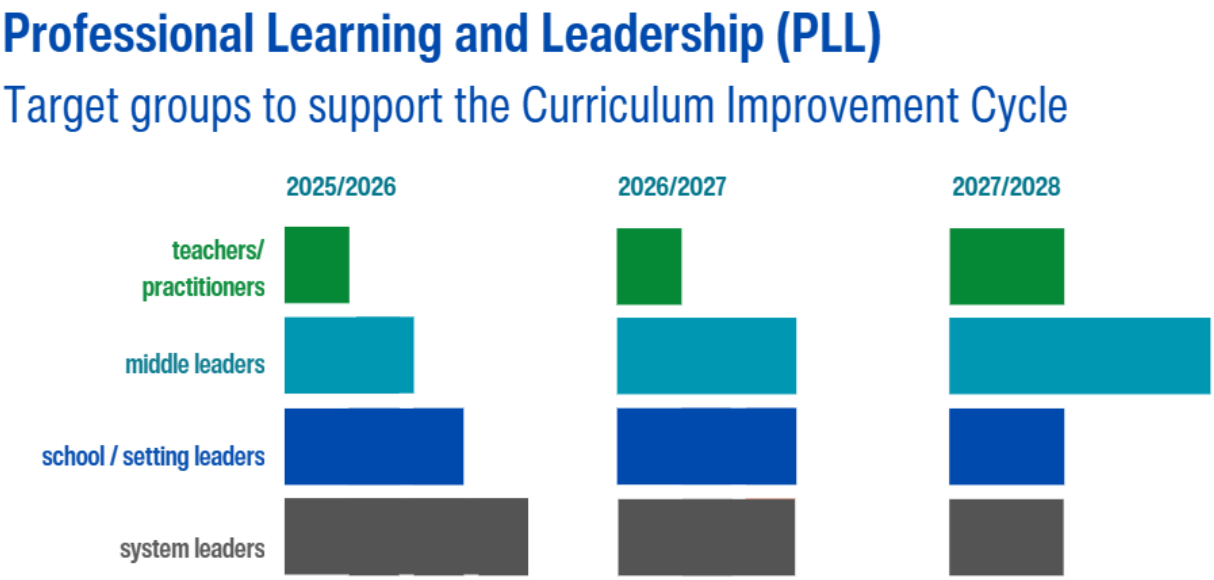


Fig: 17.0 – Targeting PLL support for the CIC – proposed approach, March 2025

In preparation for stage 3 of the CIC - sharing, learning, and adopting - the ES **Leading Professional Learning Programme** has been expanded. It will continue to grow in the coming years to build local capacity in leading professional learning and create the conditions that will enable practitioners to engage in high-quality professional learning on the CIC within settings, schools, and clusters.

From academic year 2025/2026, **Leading the How of Change** and **Connected and Collaborative Systems Leadership** will evolve to focus specifically on the CIC in its widest sense. It will prioritise setting/place-based and system leaders in the early

stages, it will prioritise to foster a culture of collective learning and ensure alignment between professional learning and system goals**.**

Other elements of the current national offer will be reviewed and adapted to meet the needs of the CIC. The Professional Learning and Leadership offer is underpinned by the national model of professional learning with **enquiry** embedded throughout (Fig: 18.0). Enquiry is the thread running through the national leadership programmes: as a specific focus in enquiry projects, for example collaborative enquiry, practitioner enquiry or strategic change initiatives, or through taking an enquiring stance, for example, using appreciative enquiry approaches.

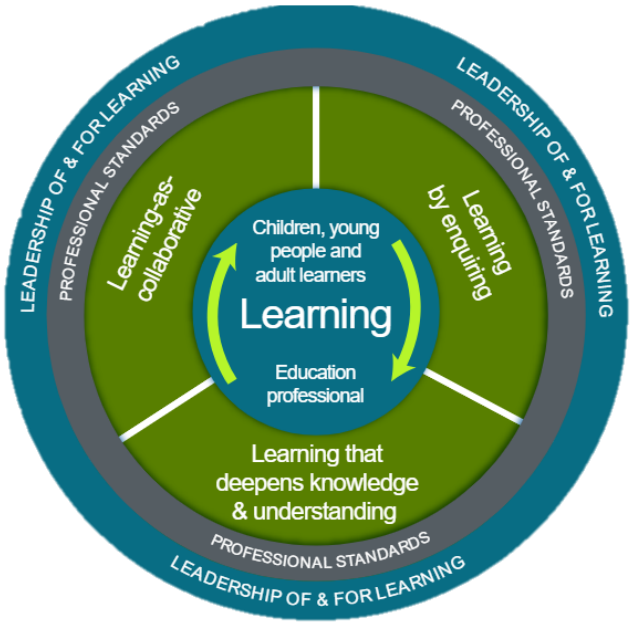


Fig: 18.0 – Scotland's National Model of Professional Learning, co-created in 2018.

5.4 Barriers to Capacity Building

Despite its critical role in educational improvement, capacity building is frequently obstructed by systemic barriers. As plans for professional learning develop, it will be important to recognise and address these. Barriers include performativity measures, time and workload constraints, a range of differing staff contracts across sectors, fragmented professional learning opportunities, cultural and structural barriers and language. Ball (2003) argues that **performativity** fosters a culture of fear, competition and compliance, which can lead to professional devaluation and limit educators' willingness to engage in reflective and experimental approaches to teaching. In the Scottish context, Priestley et al. (2013) extend this critique by highlighting how such pressures undermine agency**,** restricting educators' ability to make professional judgments about their own learning and practice. This results in a transactional approach to professional development, where practitioners engage in “tick-box” professional development rather than the collaborative, inquiry-driven learning necessary for meaningful capacity building. The OECD (2021) warns that

misaligned accountability structures risk diminishing Scotland's ambitions by constraining professional discretion and innovation.

Across Scotland, practitioners report significant difficulties in balancing teaching, assessment, and administrative responsibilities alongside professional learning. Data gathered and presented within the SERA Research Education Bulletin article 'Scotland's National Model of Professional Learning' highlighted that "school and setting leaders - can't protect the time to engage in learning online and prefer out-of-setting learning but this isn't possible due to competing pressures, including depleting budgets" (Mccaffery, 2024: p.22). In relation to **professional learning opportunities,** Muir (2022: p.47) highlighted the "plethora of providers, with little co-ordination and coherence across the offerings and patchy provision in some areas".. **Cultural, structural** and **language barriers** further compound these issues. The lack of a collaborative professional learning culture, for example, will limit opportunities for meaningful engagement.

As planning with partners for Stage 3 of the CIC develops over the 2025/2026 session, it may be helpful to consider the model developed by Kennedy (2014a; 2014b). This model presents professional learning as a spectrum, ranging from transmissive approaches (such as training to administer an EpiPen or fire evacuation procedures), to malleable approaches (such as studying to achieve a credit or standard), through to transformative approaches (such as collaborative enquiry or network-based learning) – see Fig. 19.0. Kennedy does not present this spectrum as a hierarchy, but rather as a means to support purposeful decision-making when designing professional learning, with a focus on intended impact. While each model within the spectrum may have a role to play in supporting implementation of the CIC, it will be essential to move beyond 'training', 'deficit', or 'cascade' approaches, and to prioritise the design of professional learning that enables deep perspective shifts – ultimately leading to transformative change.

Further information and background reading on capacity building and transformative professional learning can be found on the ES website[13].

[13] The national model of professional learning in action | National approach to professional learning | Professional Learning | Education Scotland

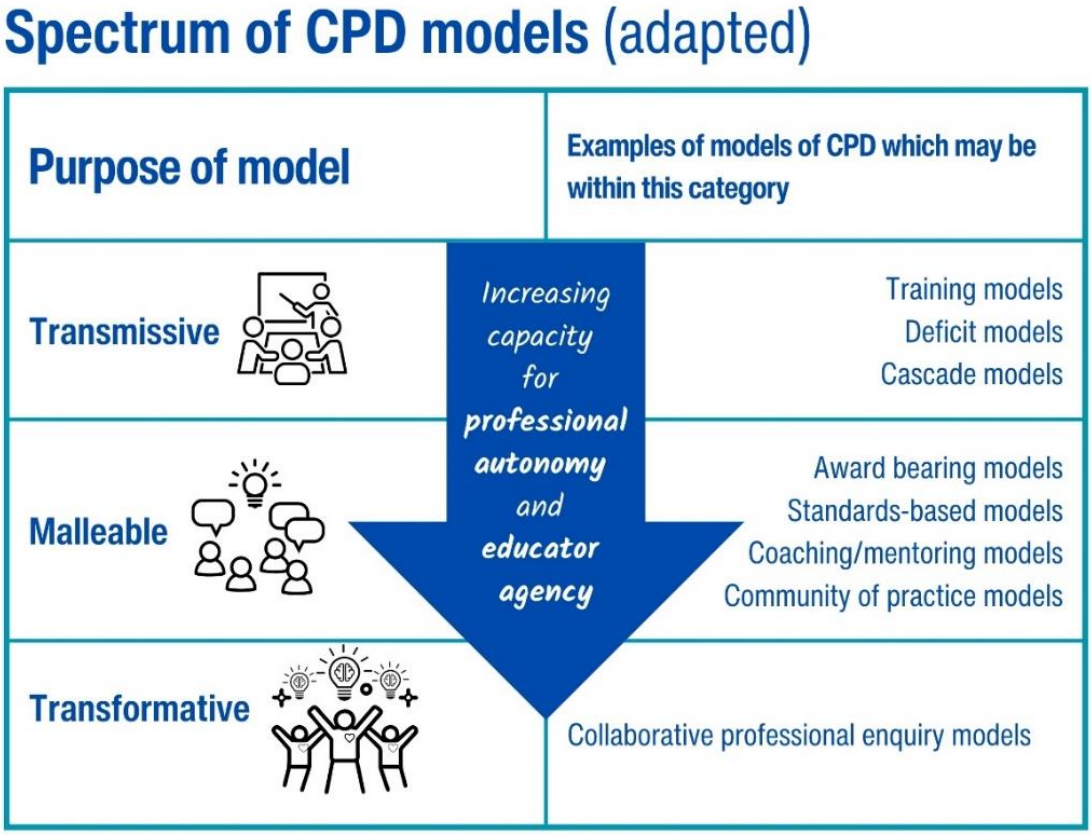


Fig: 19.0 – Spectrum of Professional Learning Models (adapted from: Kennedy, 2014b)

6. Mapping the Interdependencies

This section identifies the interdependencies that will be essential to consider as the CIC progresses towards its implementation stage (stage 3: sharing, learning and adopting). Successful implementation of the CIC cannot happen in isolation. It will require careful consideration of the wider system interdependencies that collectively shape the totality of all that is planned for children and young people from early learning and childcare, through school and beyond. System interdependencies refer to connections and interactions such as curriculum, assessment, qualifications, professional learning, and policy that needs to work cohesively to support meaningful change. The effectiveness of the overall **curriculum reform and associated reform of qualifications and assessment will depend on doing the right things, in the right order, at the right time.**

Misalignment between key components can result in unintended consequences, including perverse incentives that undermine the intended goals of reform. For example, if high-stakes assessment practices continue to perpetuate 'teaching to the test', while the curriculum shifts towards conceptual learning approaches, this may ultimately hinder the development of conceptual understanding.

6.1 Policy alignment

Developing a clear process for policy alignment and sequencing is essential. Curriculum, assessment, qualifications and other educational policies, along with wider policies that impact education, will be developed in tandem and across government to ensure coherence and drive system change. These interconnected policies function as part of a broader educational ecosystem. If just one component is misaligned, it can disrupt the balance of the entire system, creating confusion and inconsistency for practitioners, learners and policymakers alike. Mechanisms for on-going dialogue and co-operation across policy areas are being put in place under the umbrella of Education Reform and specifically focussed on assurance that curriculum and qualifications reform will deliver shared outcomes. A systematic mapping of interdependencies planned for spring 2025, will help identify connections between curriculum reform and other areas of the wider system, potential points of misalignment, risks and opportunities to align policies, practices, and resources.

6.2 Future Qualifications

A 3-18 curriculum should inform the assessment and qualifications system. The current position is that the content of national qualifications largely determines the senior phase curriculum. While National Course specifications were never designed to be a teaching syllabus, it is, however, clear from the various reviews of qualifications and assessment[14] that teaching is heavily focussed on the content of the course specifications, ultimately encouraging "teaching to the test". As highlighted in the 2023 Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment

[14] Reviews include: OECD (2021); Stobart (2021) and Hayward (2023)

(IRQA), an assessment system that dominates the curriculum can undermine the development of critical thinking, creativity and broader educational goals. Curriculum should inform the assessment and examination system, not the other way around (Hayward, 2023). Similarly, Stobart (2021) explores the need for "constructive alignment" between curriculum, pedagogy and assessment to avoid the negative backwash effect of rote learning driven by high-stakes testing. When high-stakes assessment dictates the curriculum, learning can become focused on narrow exam requirements, particularly in the secondary school broad general education (BGE).

To resolve this, a 3-18 curriculum should be put in place to support a smoother gradient of learning and broaden teaching and learning in the senior phase, beyond the achievement of qualifications. If the Know-Do-Understand model proposed in Towards an Evolved Technical Framework is agreed, assessment approaches must adapt to reflect this work. Timelines for the CIC must therefore align with the qualification design and development process. For example, the end of the CIC's stage 2 - engaging and co-creating - will need to align with the wider qualification design and development process.

6.3 Digital Learning and Teaching Strategy

As Scotland's new digital strategy for school education evolves, it must be designed to complement the work of the CIC. External reviews commissioned as part of the reform process identified the need for effective integration of digital technology into teaching and learning as essential in preparing learners for the future. The OECD (2021b) highlighted the transformative potential of emerging digital technologies to enhance teaching, learning and assessment, while the OECD (2021a) emphasised the importance of equipping learners with the knowledge, skills and dispositions required to thrive in rapidly changing social, economic and technological contexts

It is also increasingly difficult to imagine future qualifications that do not make greater use of digital technology, particularly through the adoption of computer-aided assessment. Stobart (2021) suggests the development of a senior phase qualification system that blends teacher assessments with digital examinations. However, for this to become a reality, adequate funding will be required across all aspects of the system including assessment development within Qualifications Scotland. All centres will need appropriate hardware, robust infrastructure, and reliable connectivity. Equitable access to technology - regardless of geography or local resources - was also a key theme in the National Discussion on Scottish Education (Campbell and Harris, 2023). Participants highlighted the need to embed digital competencies across the curriculum to prepare learners for the demands of a modern society and the evolving workplace.

6.4 New Frameworks for Inspection and Review

Any new inspection framework will need to take into account the emerging developments of wider education reform including the CIC, along with the principles and practices of the evolved curriculum. Inspection evidence will feed into both stage 1 - analysing - and stage 4 - mobilising, monitoring and evaluation – of the CIC to ensure inspection evidence informs the ongoing cycle of curriculum improvement. In April 2024, His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education (HMIE) in Scotland announced that there would be a review of school inspections. Following extensive stakeholder engagement, the review will result in development of a new quality framework, and revised enhanced approaches to school inspections (Education Scotland, 2024c).

6.5 National Performance Measures

As the CIC starts to explore and review the four contexts for learning (including literacy and numeracy) consideration will need to be given to any potential changes to current performance measures. Since 2021, a number of the external reviews[15] commissioned by SG as part of the wider education reform process, have highlighted the importance of alignment of performance measurement frameworks to reflect the ambition of Scotland's curriculum. Collectively, these reports advocate for a recalibration of Scotland's national education performance measures to align with aspiration of the CIC.

Importantly, future performance measures, like any future inspection framework, must incentivise the system to achieve the aspirations of the curriculum and not create unnecessary barriers and bureaucracies that are counterintuitive to the aims and purpose of Scotland's Curriculum. This will also provide an opportunity for national and local government to work together to agree a single set of national performance measures that can be used for improvement purposes.

6.6 Framework for Teacher Education and Development in Scotland

As the curriculum evolves through the CIC, the proposed new Framework for Teacher Education and Development in Scotland must also evolve to ensure that teachers are fully equipped to design and facilitate high-quality learning experiences that align with the curriculum's aims and purpose. Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes will need to adapt in line with changes emerging from the proposed evolved technical framework (for example, the Know-Do-Understand model) and also in strengthening understanding of curriculum making (including place-based approaches). OECD (2021) highlights the importance of aligning teacher preparation with curriculum design, recommending stronger partnerships between Higher Education Institutes and schools to bridge theory and practice more effectively.

[15] **Reviews include:** OECD (2021); Stobart (2021); Muir (2022); Campbell & Harris (2023); Withers (2023) and Hayward (2023).

Induction, as the second component of teacher preparation, is central to achieving the Standard for Full Registration and requires a refresh as the curriculum evolves. The Strategic Board for Teacher Education (Scottish Government, 2024b) noted that, while the Scottish Government funded induction programme plays a vital role in supporting early career teachers, there is a risk that the scheme is increasingly viewed as a staffing solution rather than a structured phase of professional learning. Moving forward, induction should be more explicitly positioned as a continuation of ITE, including professional learning opportunities focused on the conceptual knowledge and skills prioritised by the CIC, as well as the wider principles of curriculum design. Embedding curriculum-informed professional learning across all stages of a teacher's career, from ITE, through induction and into ongoing development, discussed in Section 5, can ensure that the education profession remains adaptive and ready to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing landscape.

6.7 Wider Skills Policy Landscape

Clarifying the role and purpose of skills will be a key area of work in the CIC process. The proposed changes to the technical framework provide an opportunity to explicitly identify and clarify the skills learners are developing at key points in their learning. The development of skills, however, cannot occur in isolation. Using a Know-Do-Understand model will link skills with related knowledge and understanding. The development of skills for learning, life and work has been an ongoing feature of curriculum development in Scotland for many years, presenting both challenges and opportunities. Skills 4.0: A Skills Model to Drive Scotland's Future (Skills Development Scotland, 2018) supported practitioners to make links with the purpose of the curriculum and between learning, life and work. Other models and frameworks have developed over time. More recently, Withers (2023) in *Fit for the Future* stressed that Scotland's future prosperity depends on a skills system that responds dynamically to changing skills needs. This calls for curriculum-linked skills development to be informed by labour market intelligence and wider economic strategies.

There will also be a need to establish clear and meaningful links with wider policy objectives, particularly the Scottish Government's emerging skills planning reforms. These reforms aim to provide national leadership for a new approach to skills planning, while also strengthening regional arrangements by bringing together employers, colleges, universities, and other partners. The goal is to ensure the system is responsive to both regional and national skills requirements. A key focus will be the creation of a flexible and agile skills system that supports Scotland's transition to a net zero economy and aligns with the needs of emerging industries (Withers, 2023). Achieving this will require strong collaboration between education, industry, and policymakers - an integrated approach which, if successful, will equip learners with the skills needed to thrive in a dynamic economic and social landscape.

7. Conclusions and next steps

This discussion paper provides an overview of the design, development and processes that are now in place to support the CIC since its inception in March 2024.

The core partner organisations delivering curriculum and qualifications reform – the Scottish Government, Education Scotland and the Scottish Qualifications Authority – will publish a single combined timeline for this wider programme of work in summer 2025.

Education Scotland will continue to work with partners on the following activities to support the next stages of curriculum and qualifications reform and the implementation of the timeline for change:

- develop an outward-facing communications strategy to raise system awareness of the CIC **from April 2025;** drawing from discussion papers 1–3, scale the communication strategy to include bespoke communications for key stakeholders, including children and young people and wider public / Scottish society, **from October 2025**

- develop Programme Advocacy Groups to champion curriculum improvement, amplify key messages, and facilitate engagement with a wider audience across the education system **from May 2025**

- building on the work started in **November 2024,** strengthen our skills and capacity to develop and test new ways of informing, involving and listening to children and young people

- complete the exploratory work with the established co-design groups on cross-curricular expectations and integrate this work into the 13 Contexts for Learning Projects **by August 2025**

- develop and formalise project structures (Collaboration, Core, and Steering Groups) for each of the Contexts for Learning Projects **by September 2025**

- progress five Contexts for Learning Projects (English and literacy, Gàidhlig and literacy, health and wellbeing, mathematics, and science) into Stage 2 - Engaging and Co-creation - of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle **by May 2025**

- progress the remaining Contexts for Learning Projects *(e*xpressive arts; interdisciplinary learning; languages; life and ethos of the school as a community; personal achievement; religious education; social studies; and technologies*)* into Stage 2 - Engaging and Co-creation - of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle **by September 2025**

- develop and test Programme Reference Groups to provide structured opportunities for stakeholder input, ensuring continuous feedback and refinement of CIC activities **from May 2025**

- collaborate with CAB members to extend stakeholder participation, including employer groups, academics, professional associations and other key contributors, to ensure broad representation and diverse perspectives in CIC activities **from June 2025**

- work with partners and stakeholders (including CAB) to strengthen the enabling environment for the implementation of CIC outcomes, ensuring alignment with policy, resourcing, and professional learning frameworks **from May 2025**

- work with ADES CAQ to develop practices, tools and resources to enable and support sense-making activities for session 2025/26 **from April 2025**

- explore the feasibility of place-based collaborative models, building on existing 3-18 clusters, considering how local networks can support curriculum design and implementation in contextually relevant ways **from May 2025**

- work with SCQF and SQA to align the ongoing reform of qualifications and assessment with the CIC from **March 2025**

- work with HMI to establish how evidence from thematic and other inspections will support the Curriculum Improvement Cycle from **March 2025**

- work with SDS and SG to align skills development within the CIC with the emerging Skills Strategy from **August 2025**

- develop and implement a monitoring and evaluation programme to support the CIC **by March 2026**

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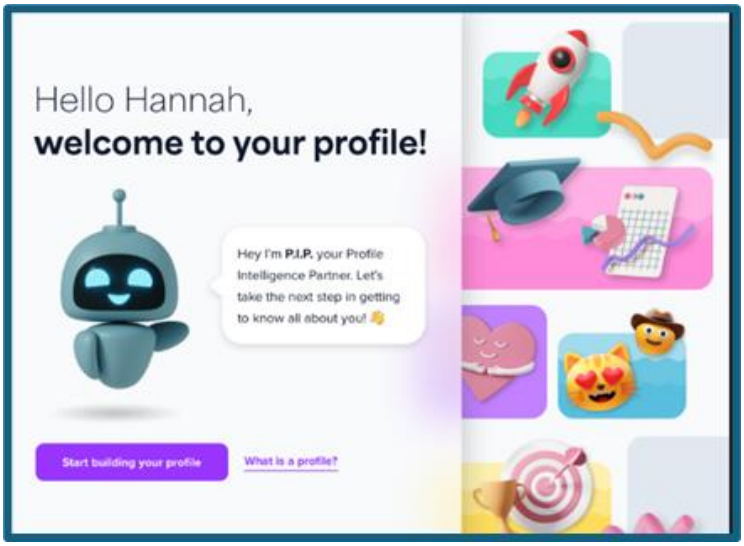
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Annex A

Learner Profile: **An emerging national approach**



A national co-design group of practitioners and partners used a service-design approach to develop and begin to enact a new national approach to Learner Profiles and Profiling.

Discover

The co-design group includes practitioners, who work on a daily basis with children and young people in 3-18 education settings including ELC, primary and secondary schools, colleges, universities, and in the workplace. It includes classroom practitioners as well as senior leaders and representatives from national organisations and the third sector. The group explored questions around purpose, language and processes of profiling, and considered innovative practice from Scottish and international contexts. They spent time 'sense-making', talking with and questioning each other on the approaches and pedagogy that made profiling meaningful for young people, as well as talking through perceived barriers and practical solutions. Participants took the key questions and themes back to their own contexts to discuss with fellow colleagues, young people and partners to work through the collated user research.

Define

The co-design group determined that a national approach should include two elements: a digital Learner Profile to capture evidence of achievements, meaningful learning and skills (the 'Profile'), supported by human-led processes and actions ('Profiling').

Develop

The group agreed that none of the commercial tools currently available fully met neither the needs of learners, nor of the aspirations of Scotland's curriculum andwith this in mind, went on to develop a concept for a portable digital learner profile that would follow the young person throughout their learner journey.

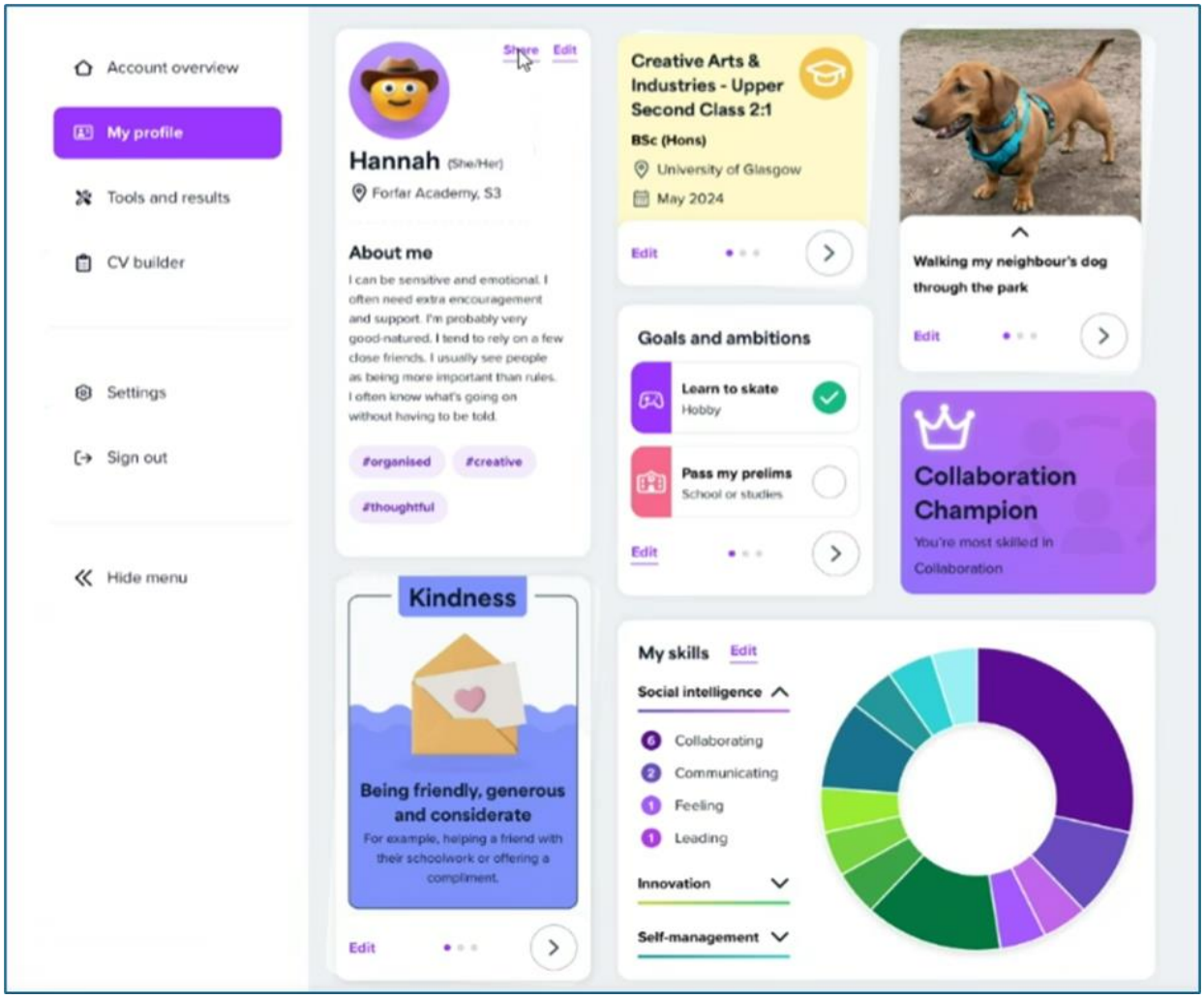
Skills Development Scotland offered to build the main components of the group's proposed concept to be hosted on their 'My World of Work' platform; this involved the commissioning of a service design organisation to explore key themes in more detail. One hundred children and young people contributed their views and ideas, before the draft of the profile was user tested by a significant number of children, young people and practitioners.

Deliver

An initial 'Early Experience' of the Learner Profile has been produced and will continue to evolve in response to user feedback. The national co-design group consider they have an important role to play in the enactment – as opposed to the 'delivery' or 'implementation', of a national approach. This has started with co-design participants exploring the initial release with groups of children and young people. Education Scotland and Skills Development Scotland research teams will work with a number of specific settings to undertake joint research on children and young people's reactions to the first release and how it impacts on processes in educational settings.

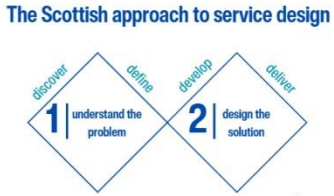
Co-design participants have taken on an advocacy role in their own places, supporting other colleagues to engage in discussions or reflections about their practice, and to begin using the new tools with children and young people. The project leads from ES and SDS have met with senior officers from almost every local authority for a discussion on the journey so far and have shared the emerging approach with groups of head teachers and leaders.

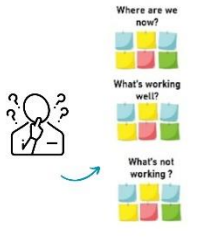
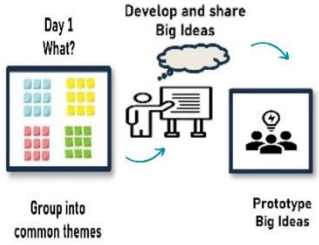
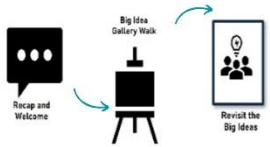
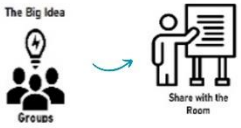
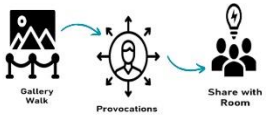
This approach of engagement, rather than top-down instruction or expectation, has created the space to find joins and alignments with local priorities, and to build a coalition of support around the change. The co-design group will continue to function as a national community of practice, becoming a space for shared challenges and problem-solving, as well as influencing the next steps in the digital development.


Account overview
My profile
Tools and results
CV builder
Settings
Sign out
Hide menu
Share
Edit
Hannah (She/Her)
Forfar Academy, S3
About me
I can be sensitive and emotional. I often need extra encouragement and support. I'm probably very good-natured. I tend to rely on a few close friends. I usually see people as being more important than rules. I often know what's going on without having to be told.
#organised
#creative
#thoughtful
Kindness
Being friendly, generous and considerate
For example, helping a friend with their schoolwork or offering a compliment.
Edit
Creative Arts & Industries - Upper Second Class 2:1
BSc (Hons)
University of Glasgow
May 2024
Edit
Goals and ambitions
Learn to skate
Hobby
Pass my prelims
School or studies
Edit
Walking my neighbour's dog through the park
Edit
Collaboration Champion
You're most skilled in Collaboration
My skills
Edit
Social intelligence
Collaborating
Communicating
Feeling
Leading
Innovation
Self-management

Annex B

Co-design: cross curricular work



Day 1 understand the problem	Day 2 understand the problem	Day 3 moving towards designing the solution	Day 4 moving towards designing the solution
		first:  then: 	first:  then: 
Day 1 outline • Provocations from research, stakeholders and data • Knowledge capture of current practice • Discussion on 'why', 'what' 'how' and looking ahead to 2030	**Day 2 outline** • Analysis of day one evidence • Individual groups developing Big Ideas from emerging themes • Sharing proposals • Whole group working towards a consensus around an initial prototype	**Day 3 outline** • Reflect on prototypes emerging from all 11 groups • Develop and refine own Big Ideas **Between sessions 3 and 4 the views of children, young people, and critical friends were gathered to help inform and shape the next iteration** **Day 4 outline** • Rationale: agree the 'why' and develop the 'how'	

Annex C

Education Scotland's current National Professional Learning and Leadership offer includes:

- **Into Headship** – Scotland's national programme for aspiring headteachers, providing essential knowledge, skills, and understanding for leading a dynamic school community
- **In Headship** – A postgraduate programme for new headteachers, supporting continued development of leadership capabilities
- **Leading the How of Change** – A programme for headteachers and those holding the GTCS Professional Standard for Headship**,** equipping them with the skills to lead change effectively
- **Connected and Collaborative Systems Leadership -** A programme for school and system leaders responsible for curriculum and pedagogical developments, quality improvement, and system-wide collaboration
- **Middle Leaders Leading Change -** A programme for those in middle leadership roles, aims to support participants to develop knowledge, skills and confidence in using coaching and change models and explores self-awareness to improve leadership
- **Aspiring to Middle Leadership -** A programme for those aspiring to middle leadership to develop their understanding of the roles of middle leadership and the skills required to carry out the main aspect of these roles
- **Building Racial Literacy -** A programme to promote anti-racism, ensure that practitioners are racially literate and confident in leading anti-racism, including decolonising the curriculum
- **Leading Professional Learning -** A programme which supports its participants to cultivate a whole school/setting, cluster or local authority approach to fostering a culture of impactful professional learning (further details below)
- **Curriculum Design –** Co-designed with ADES and targeted at senior leaders this programme uses Scotland's Curriculum Framework to build capacity in the 'how' of curriculum design and curriculum making
- **Enquiry in Education –** Open access resources designed to support practitioners to develop a leadership of learning through an enquiring approach
- **Coaching in Education –** Open access resources to build knowledge and understanding of coaching in education

Document Change Log

V1.0	December 2024	Original discussion paper published as part of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC).
V1.1	September 2026	Removed the unsupported Kennedy (2017) book reference and replaced it with the relevant Kennedy (2014) publications.
V1.2	October 2026	Added a historical context statement to clarify the original purpose, status and provisional nature of the March 2025 discussion paper.
	October 2026	Undertook a reference-integrity review, correcting bibliographic details, clarifying academic attributions and reviewing quotations against original sources.
	October 2026	Made targeted textual and editorial amendments to improve accuracy, clarity and consistency while preserving the original thinking and intent of the discussion paper.