

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
Rùnaire a' Chaibineit airson Foghlam agus Sgilean

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Education, Children and Young People
Committee
Scottish Parliament
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Dear Convener,

In my statement to Parliament on 19 September which outlined the Scottish Government's next steps on qualifications reform, I confirmed that I would write to the Education and Skills Committee to provide further detail on progress with the Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC).

Curriculum should drive qualifications. That is why qualification content will be updated to reflect curriculum improvements, not least to ensure alignment and strong progression between the broad general education (BGE) and Senior Phase (S4 to S6). It will also provide an opportunity to realise the links with the national skills framework, which is being further developed by Scottish Government following the recommendations of the Review of the Skills Delivery Landscape.

Aims and Objectives for the Curriculum Improvement Cycle

As set out to Parliament on 4 June 2024, *"the primary purpose and focus of Scotland's national education agency will be to lead curriculum design, delivery and improvement"* which includes leadership of the CIC to improve and strengthen our 3-18 curriculum. Led by Education Scotland, the CIC introduces a systematic approach to ensure that Scotland's curriculum remains relevant, forward looking, clarifies the role of knowledge and ultimately supports high quality teaching, learning and progression. The Cycle builds on the many strengths of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) while taking steps to de-clutter and clarify where we know improvements are needed. The CIC which has been initiated is not a one off event, rather a continuous cycle of improvement as recommended by the OECD.

Progress since last update

On 31 October 2023 I wrote to the Committee in relation to the 2021 OECD report. Within that letter, I referred to the initial work undertaken to develop the overall approach and methodology for the CIC. I referenced the review of best practice from other countries in terms of curriculum improvement approaches as well as the "pilot curriculum reviews" led by Education Scotland to test and determine the best way in which to meaningfully engage with teachers, educators, young people and other stakeholders when taking forward this work.

The culmination of that work, as tested and endorsed by the Curriculum and Assessment Board, is the approach to the CIC being adopted as set out at Annex A.

I announced in December 2023 that Maths and Numeracy will be the first curriculum area to be reviewed as part of the CIC with an updated curriculum framework due to begin to be tested with teachers and practitioners by the end of December, followed by Literacy and English. **I can confirm that work to update all eight curricular areas will begin in academic year 2024/2025, albeit that work will be at different stages of development dependent on the curricular area**, as per the 'plan on a page' at Annex B.

I am clear that we need subject specialists to lead the curriculum improvement work alongside sector specialists. To that end, Education Scotland has seconded in a number of curriculum area National Advisors from schools to lead work on specific curriculum areas. These National Advisors, as well as being subject matter experts, also have departmental or school leadership experience.

In May 2024 a former principal mathematics teacher and headteacher Andy Brown was seconded in to work alongside Education Scotland to update the maths curriculum. In July, a week-long "maths summer school" took place, with a follow up two day session in September, which saw a group of teachers and practitioners come together in person to expedite work and thinking on an updated maths curriculum framework. The next step will be to test the outline of an updated maths curriculum with a wider group of teachers, practitioners and stakeholders, with the aim being to publish a revised draft high level maths framework for further testing from December 2024 onwards.

As set out in Annex B, there are now a number of active CIC workstreams and the Curriculum and Assessment Board¹ (CAB) has actively inputted and been kept updated on all progress to date. CAB has discussed the strengths and key areas for improvement in our curriculum framework including how the current framework addresses knowledge and skills, how it supports progression and how to ensure important cross-curricular themes such as Learning for Sustainability and digital literacy are securely embedded in the curriculum.

Evolving the Technical Framework

Independent reports (such as the one undertaken by the OECD in 2021), the National Discussion as well as feedback from teachers and practitioners have pointed to the need for Scotland to evolve CfE's technical framework (including the Experiences and Outcomes) to explore if it could evolve in a way that would better support progression, clarity and streamlining. Having reviewed technical frameworks which underpin the curriculums of high performing jurisdictions around the world, and having engaged widely with stakeholders, the consensus is that there are models which could be adapted for our own purposes that would support better clarity, including entitlements

¹ **Membership of the Curriculum and Assessment Board (CAB) includes:** Association of Directors of Education, Association of Headteachers and Deputies 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.

of what learners should know, be able to do and by when. This evolution of CfE's technical framework will be taken forward as part of the CIC programme of work.

Approach to Implementation

Clearly an improved curriculum only makes a difference to children and young people if it translates to positive changes and improved pedagogy, teaching and learning in our classrooms. Effective implementation of updates to the different curricular areas will be key, with support and professional learning for teachers and practitioners being of critical importance. With phased implementation beginning from August 2026 (as per Annex B), we have the time to plan to get it right, assuming sufficient resources are available in future financial years.

Communication Plan

As I referenced in my statement to Parliament, Education Scotland will soon commence system-wide communications, proactively sharing information with teachers, educators, young people and other key stakeholders about the Curriculum Improvement Cycle. Communications will continue to be clear that the CIC provides an opportunity to evolve and improve Curriculum for Excellence (not replace it) and will also reinforce the ambitions underpinning the CIC, which include:

- Clarity on the role and purposes of knowledge, including entitlements of what learners should know, understand and be able to do and by when.
- A genuine 3-18 'framework', including alignment and consistency with the Senior Phase, Realising the Ambition and clarity on progression.
- A level of adaptability and flexibility to acknowledge the differing nature of subjects and to support the 'futureproofing' of the curriculum.
- A clearer position in terms of cross curricular themes (eg: Learning for Sustainability, Careers Education, Social Justice, etc.) which serves to properly embed content and declutter where appropriate rather than it being seen as an 'add on'.

For the first six months, communication activity will take place in a number of phases. These phases (or campaigns) have been designed to share information with the system in a logical and appropriate order to help a diverse audience make sense of the complexity of the task at hand and the general direction of travel for the CIC.

Phase One (October to November) will focus on introducing the system to the CIC including the background to it, the high-level case for change and the evolution of the technical framework. This messaging and direction of travel was tested with CAB who were supportive of the approach.

Phase Two (November to December) will focus on preparing the system for the draft updated high-level maths framework which is due to be published in December 2024 with testing beginning in January 2025.

Planning is currently underway for Phases 3-6 (January to April 2025) including the communication of realistic timelines for qualifications reform linked to updated curriculum content with joint curriculum improvement and qualifications reform

planning currently underway following the publication of the Government's response to the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment.

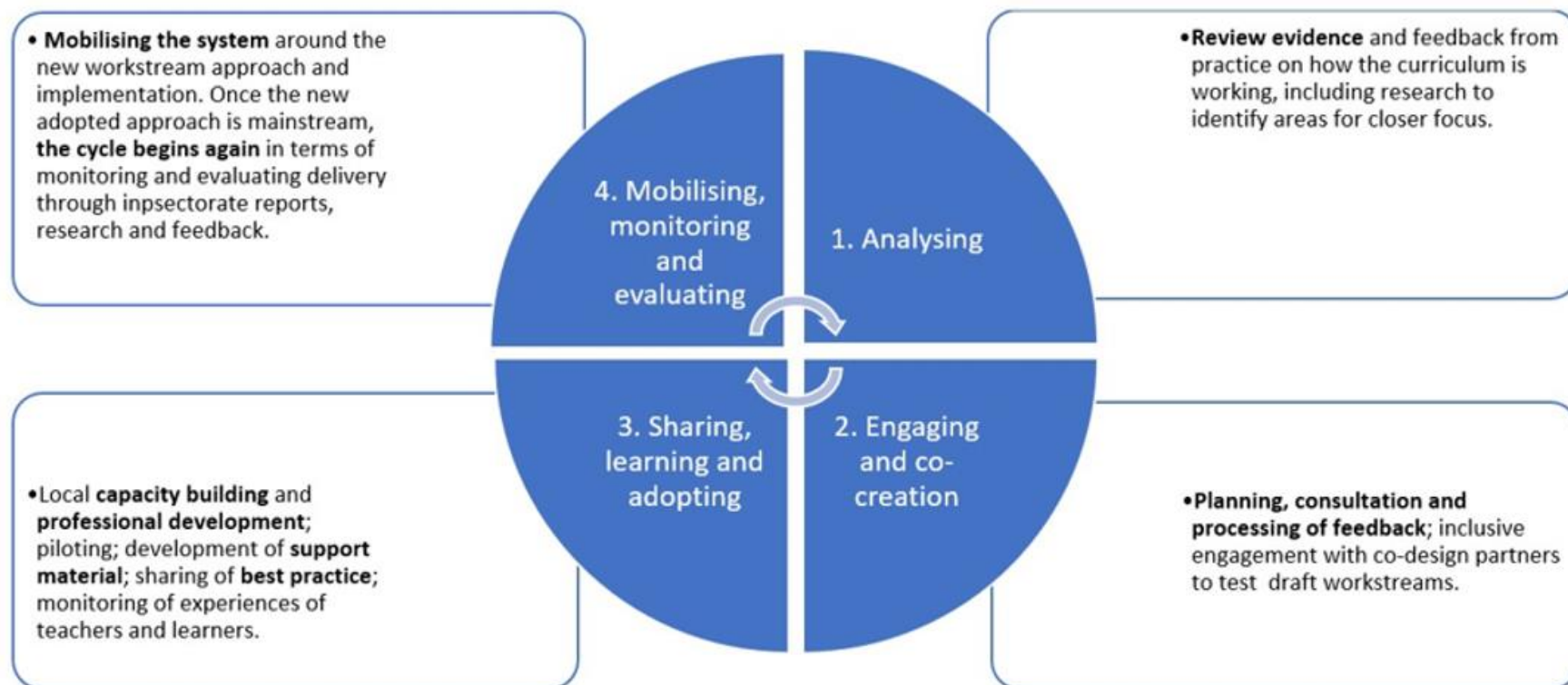
I hope that this provides a helpful update on this important package of curriculum improvement work as linked to wider reform including the reform of our national bodies to support the changes and improvements that are required.

If the Committee would find it helpful, Education Scotland and Scottish Government officials can provide an additional private briefing session to share further detail on the emerging work, and to enable some Q&A and discussion to help inform the process.

Yours sincerely,

JENNY GILRUTH

ANNEX A - Curriculum Improvement Cycle: approach



ANNEX B – Curriculum Improvement Cycle plan on a page

