



# TransformED

TRANSFORMING TEACHING AND LEARNING

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## 03 CLEAR PATH FORWARD

Understanding the implementation roadmap

## 03 CURRICULUM REFORM

Building Clarity, Coherence and Confidence

## 04 ASSESSMENT WITH PURPOSE

What's next for assessment in Northern Ireland



## A New Direction for Success: The Qualifications Policy Framework

Teachers know better than anyone that qualifications shape the rhythm of the curriculum in the upper years of secondary education.

Earlier, this month, the Minister of Education published the [TransformED Qualifications Policy Framework](#).

The new framework provides a refreshed, evidence-based structure for GCSEs and A levels that aims to support deeper learning and reduce content and exam overload. The structure of the new framework for CCEA Qualifications is set out as follows.

### GCSEs

- Most GCSEs limited to two written exam papers unless more are genuinely required.
- Content reduced where appropriate to

support deeper learning and secure understanding.

- English Language, Mathematics and Single/Double Award Science are remaining modular, with other GCSEs moving to a linear structure.
- Modular unit assessments may be taken in any series across the two-year course.
- Grading remains on the nine point A\* – G alphabetical scale.
- Non-exam assessment will be used only where it is essential to assess practical skills.
- English Language and Modern Languages retain a graded speaking and listening component.
- Science GCSEs will require pupils to carry out prescribed experiments, with understanding of these practical skills then assessed as part of the written papers.

### A levels

- New two-year modular structure made up of three units.
- One designated unit may be taken in Year 13 (worth 30%), with the remaining 70% assessed in Year 14.
- Alternatively, all units may be taken in Year 14 if schools prefer a linear model.
- AS levels will no longer be offered as a separate qualification.
- Content reduced where appropriate to support deeper learning and subject mastery.
- Grading continues on the A\* – E scale.
- Non-exam assessment to be used sparingly and only where essential to assess practical skills.
- Modern Languages retain speaking and listening assessment.



Welcome to the fourth edition of TransformED Magazine. In this issue, we focus on curriculum, assessment and qualifications reform, what is changing, why these changes are happening, and what they mean for your classroom.

Over recent months, there have been significant developments across the TransformED Reform Programme. These include publication of the new policy framework for GCSE and A level qualifications, the findings of the Independent Review of Key Stage Assessment, and continued progress on the development of a new Northern Ireland Curriculum.

In this edition, we break down the TransformED implementation roadmap, explore the new qualifications framework, and highlight the key findings from the Independent Review of Key Stage Assessment. We also look ahead to the forthcoming publication of the new curriculum framework.

TransformED is not a quick fix or a passing initiative. It is a long-term reform programme, grounded in evidence, shaped through consultation, and designed to strengthen the core of teaching and learning.

As we move into the next phase, the Department will continue to publish resources, host events, and expand professional learning opportunities through the TransformED platform.

I also look forward to connecting with many of you at the TransformED 'One Year On' Conference in May, an important opportunity to share insights, build understanding and continue this journey together.

Paul Givan  
Education Minister

- Science A levels will require pupils to carry out prescribed experiments, with understanding of these practical skills then assessed as part of the written papers.

Above all, the new framework is designed to be fair, balanced and sustainable. We know that nothing drives higher standards more than pupils spending quality time learning with skilled, knowledgeable teachers. When young people have the space to enjoy their subjects, explore ideas in depth and build secure understanding, they thrive and they carry that confidence with them into further study, training and employment.

In recent years, however, Key Stage 4 and post-16 have become increasingly dominated by dense content and frequent high stakes exams. This has added pressure for learners and left less room for the kind of deep, meaningful learning that helps knowledge stick.

The new framework aims to change that. By streamlining content and reducing unnecessary assessment, it restores valuable time for rich learning experiences. It is designed to ease stress, support wellbeing and help young people reconnect with the curiosity and confidence that comes from truly understanding a subject, not rushing through it.

This shift marks a move toward a system that values real learning, gives pupils the room they need to grow, and helps teachers focus on what matters most: strong foundations, secure understanding and opportunities for every learner to succeed.

Controlled assessment and coursework in CCEA qualifications will be reduced or removed, except in subjects where they are essential for assessing core practical skills, such as technology, PE and art.

Consultation feedback from school leaders and teachers highlighted that current arrangements are highly workload intensive. Evidence also shows that excessive coursework can shift teaching away from deep learning, while studies by Ofqual have raised concerns about authenticity, inconsistent controls and uneven support, all of which can advantage some pupils over others.

By reducing non-essential coursework, the aim is to promote fairness, protect teaching time, and ensure assessments reflect genuine individual learning, especially at a time when take home tasks can be easily produced or enhanced with AI tools.

## ONE YEAR ON... BUILDING ON SUCCESS



One year on from the 2025 TransformED School Leaders' Conference, we are planning an ambitious week of events that will bring together educators, system leaders and international experts with a shared focus on improving outcomes for every pupil.

On **Tuesday 12 May** there will be a literacy-focused event '**Strong Foundations – Building On Success**' for primary school literacy coordinators. Featuring expert input from Jennifer Buckingham, the event will explore the 'non-negotiables' of effective literacy instruction while showcasing real examples from schools on their own journeys, highlighting successes, challenges and key learning aligned with the new Framework.

This year's TransformED Leaders Conference – **One Year On** will take place on **Thursday 14 May** in the Tullyglass Hotel. Bringing together school leaders, policymakers and leading international experts, including Daniel Willingham and Carl Hendrick, this flagship event will reflect on progress to date while setting a clear, evidence-informed direction for the future.

Completing the week's programme, there will be an event for Vice Principals and Senior Leaders on **Friday 15 May – TransformED – Implementing Reform in the Classroom**, that will provide an invaluable opportunity to translate strategy into action. Focused firmly on classroom impact, this half day event will delve into what reform looks like in practice.

**Save the date and look out for more information and registration details in the coming weeks.**



# A CLEAR PATH FORWARD

## UNDERSTANDING THE TRANSFORMED IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP

Across Northern Ireland, teachers and school leaders are asking the same practical question: “What exactly is happening and when?”

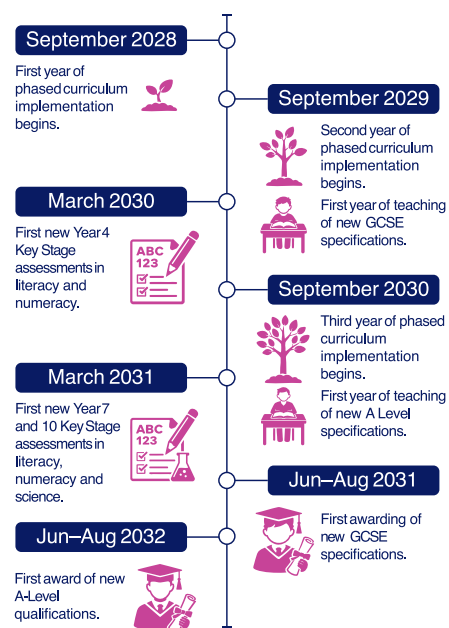
The **TransformED** Implementation Roadmap was published to answer that question with clarity, stability and confidence. It sets out a carefully phased timeline for curriculum, assessment and qualifications reform over the next five years and beyond, making sure every school has the time, space and support to prepare well. The roadmap is available at [Roadmap Milestones](#).

The roadmap begins with the introduction of the new statutory curriculum from

September 2028, phased over three school years. This deliberate phasing reflects direct feedback from teachers who want time to prepare, collaborate, train and embed change gradually.

Newly designed GCSEs will follow with first teaching from September 2029 and revised A levels from 2030, making **TransformED** one of the most carefully paced reform programmes internationally.

What matters most is that no school is expected to rush. **TransformED’s** timeline has been designed around professional learning, resource development and predictable sequencing, giving every school the opportunity to lead change confidently.



# CURRICULUM REFORM

## Building Clarity, Coherence and Confidence

Curriculum reform is now moving into its most important and exciting phase, with work on drafting the new statutory curriculum nearing completion.

An extended 16-week public consultation is expected to launch in late May, giving schools, teachers, parents and partners the opportunity to shape the final framework.

As one of the core strands of the **TransformED** Programme, curriculum reform represents perhaps the most significant change ahead and the Curriculum Taskforce is now close to concluding its work.

The need for renewal is clear. The current Northern Ireland Curriculum is almost twenty years old: high level in nature, broad in expectation, and lacking the subject specific clarity and sequencing that modern classrooms require.

These gaps have led to inconsistency, inequity and mounting workload, with many teachers having to design content from scratch without a clear progression pathway.



The new curriculum aims to change that. It will provide a clearer, more coherent and better sequenced framework for every subject, ensuring that essential knowledge and skills build logically year on year. This strengthened structure will be supported by high-quality resources, exemplification materials and professional learning, enabling teachers to plan with confidence and reducing unnecessary workload.

Crucially, a well sequenced and well supported curriculum does not constrain teachers, rather it empowers them. By putting strong foundations in place, it frees time for creativity and responsive, expert teaching.

This reform is about creating the conditions where teachers can focus on what matters most: rich learning experiences, secure understanding and opportunities for every child to thrive.

# Assessment with Purpose:

## The Independent Review of Statutory Assessment

A new chapter in Key Stage assessment has also arrived for schools in Northern Ireland, with the publication of the Independent Review of Assessment report, 'Supporting Progress for Every Child'.

The Review was led by a highly respected panel – Tim Oates CBE, Dr Mick Walker and local educationalist, Garry Matthewson – and marks an exciting step forward in the **TransformED** strategy. It focuses on how assessment can better support learning, teaching and pupil progress.

At the heart of the Review is a proposed new statutory assessment framework for Years 1–10 focussed on literacy, numeracy and science.

One of the most reassuring aspects of the Review for teachers is its strong focus on reducing workload. Instead of the previous, time consuming teacher led assessments, the Review recommends a series of short, low stakes, curriculum aligned checks at key points in learning.

These assessments are designed to be quick to administer and easy to use, giving teachers reliable information without adding pressure. Most importantly, this approach frees up valuable time for what matters most: teaching, learning and nurturing young minds.

### What's Included in the New Pathway?

The proposed framework introduces a series of clear, well timed checkpoints that help teachers spot learning needs early and track pupils' progress consistently throughout their school journey:

- Baseline check in Year 1
- A Year 2 phonics check
- Short annual reading fluency checks in Years 3–5
- A multiplication check in Year 5
- Literacy and numeracy assessments in Year 4
- Literacy, numeracy and science assessments in Years 7 and 10



These new checks will replace the current Levels of Progression with scaled scores, making it much easier to compare progress from year to year and to have more meaningful conversations about standards, progress and value added.

These assessments are designed to support learning, not to create pressure. They are low stakes, require no revision or preparation, and will not be used to rank schools. Instead, they are intended to give teachers clear information so they can step in early when support is needed, and to give parents a straightforward picture of how their child is progressing.

### Grounded in Evidence, Designed for Classrooms

The Review is firmly rooted in international best practice and shaped by extensive engagement with the profession. Over recent months, teachers, school leaders and practitioners across Northern Ireland have contributed through school visits, surveys and

the call for evidence ensuring the final recommendations reflect real classroom experience and professional insight.

Crucially, the proposed approach is both purposeful and manageable. It strengthens core foundations in literacy and numeracy while giving teachers and families reliable, easy to understand information about progress.

Parents have been clear that they want straightforward, dependable updates on how their children are doing. The Review responds to this by proposing assessments that provide a clear picture of each child's learning journey, not just at one point in time, but year on year. This will create a more consistent and cumulative view of progress across the whole education system.

The Education Minister will now consider the Panel's recommendations and publish a detailed response in the coming days.



# SUPPORTING TEACHERS, STRENGTHENING LEARNING

**TransformED** sets out a clear and practical path for improving education, with a strong focus on supporting teachers and enhancing pupils' learning experiences.

At the heart of the reforms is a commitment to careful, phased implementation, giving schools the time and space they need to prepare, adapt and succeed.

Reducing workload is a central priority. Changes across the curriculum, assessment

and qualifications are designed to remove unnecessary pressures, allowing teachers to focus more on teaching and less on administration. A clearer, more structured curriculum will provide greater clarity about what to teach, significantly cutting down on planning time.

Assessment will be simpler, more consistent across year groups, and designed to provide useful information without adding to teacher workload. This shift aims to strike the right balance between accountability and practicality in the classroom.

Professional learning will play a key role at every stage, ensuring teachers feel confident and well-supported throughout the transition. Importantly, these reforms are grounded in evidence and shaped by direct feedback from teachers, reflecting real classroom experience.

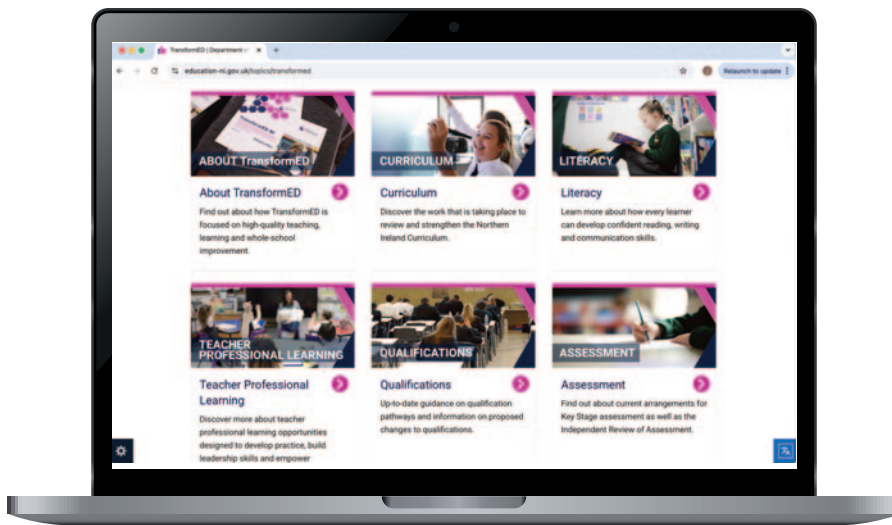
Ultimately, **TransformED** is about creating the conditions for deeper, more meaningful learning. By focusing on clarity, consistency and support, the reforms aim to benefit both teachers and pupils – building a stronger, more effective education system for the future.

## Seven Pledges for TransformED

- 1 TransformED** will improve conditions for teaching and learning  
Prioritising what is taught, how it is taught and how progress is measured.
- 2 TransformED** delivery will be phased and staged  
Implementation will be carefully planned, paced and monitored to ensure it is manageable.
- 3 TransformED** reforms will reduce workload  
Releasing teachers to spend more time teaching, engaging and inspiring.
- 4 TransformED** will be a plan for Northern Ireland, guided by best practice  
Looking outward at what works and building on our strengths.
- 5 TransformED** will give Northern Ireland a life changing curriculum  
An ambitious, well-structured, carefully sequenced progression pathway for every child.
- 6 TransformED** is a pathway for knowledge and skills  
Developing creativity, collaboration and critical thinking within a coherent knowledge structure.
- 7 TransformED** is a pathway to equity  
Entitlement to high-quality learning, consistent expectations and opportunities for all.

# TransformED

## INFORMATION HUB



A **TransformED Hub** has been created on the Department of Education's website to provide educators, school leaders and stakeholders with a wide range of resources and information.

It explains the core **TransformED** strategy, explaining how reform across curriculum, assessment, qualifications, school improvement, teacher professional learning and tackling educational disadvantage will be delivered.

It features dedicated sections offering up-to-date guidance on curriculum work, literacy development, qualifications pathways, assessment arrangements, support for tackling educational disadvantage and whole-school improvement approaches. There's also direct access to a growing library of resources and videos designed to help schools explore and understand **TransformED** priorities.

By bringing all **TransformED** updates and resources into one accessible space, the hub provides teachers with a central point to stay informed and engage with the changes shaping education in Northern Ireland.

[CLICK HERE](#) to visit the hub.

## RESOURCE PACK

To support **TransformED** Development Days, the Department has developed a **TransformED** Resource Pack. The pack covers key aspects of **TransformED**:

- An introduction and overview of **TransformED**
- Explaining Curriculum Reform
- Global Learning for Transforming Curriculum
- Unpacking the Literacy Framework for Primary Schools

Each resource includes a short overview of the topic, a video presentation with an accompanying slide deck, additional supporting materials and suggested reflection questions. Optional further reading is also provided for those who wish to explore particular areas in more depth.

[CLICK HERE](#) to access.



## Literacy Webinars now online!

A series of Literacy Webinars are available at the **TransformED Hub**.

Each session focuses on practical, high-value aspects of literacy teaching, drawing on the research base outlined in the Literacy Framework, covering foundational skills, reading fluency, writing development and disciplinary literacy. This series is designed for teachers, leaders, SENCOs, literacy coordinators and anyone supporting pupils' reading, writing and oracy development.

Currently available:

- Why the Science Behind Literacy Teaching and Learning Matters with Dr Geraldine Magennis-Clarke.
- Establishing Foundational Skills Through Explicit, Systematic Phonics Instruction with Hamish Rae, Kingspark Primary School.
- Connecting Phonics and Spelling Instruction Throughout the Primary School and Beyond with Ryon Leyshon, Victoria Primary.
- Whole Class Guided Reading in Practice with Jamie Parker, Greystone Primary.

**More webinars are planned for coming weeks on Oral Reading Fluency, Differentiating Provision and Reading for Pleasure.**



Department of  
**Education**  
www.education-ni.gov.uk

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QUESTIONS | COMMENTS | FEEDBACK  
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