

7.4

Secondary schools in Northern Ireland

Governance, policy and curriculum

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Introduction

This unit provides an overview of education in the context of Northern Ireland (NI) and addresses key issues that make schooling in NI different from elsewhere in the United Kingdom (UK). The unit begins by focusing on the distinctive nature of education in NI, followed by a detailed description of the structure and governance of education, where key legislation and policies are discussed. This unit also addresses the structure of the Northern Ireland Curriculum (NIC) and highlights advancements in terms of curriculum development, interpretation and implementation. The unit also focuses on the teaching profession in NI where the structure of initial teacher education (ITE) is addressed as well as induction and early professional development (EPD). Finally, the unit deals with the future of education in NI, which at the time of writing faces many opportunities and debate, with the publication of the Independent Review of Education, the Curriculum Review and the introduction of the Transforming and Learning Strategy (TransformED NI). Throughout this unit, there are set tasks designed to encourage you to reflect and critique your progress during ITE and beyond. The completion of these tasks will allow you to maximise the learning to be gained from engaging with this unit.

OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit you should be able to:

- describe the distinctive features of the structure and governance in Northern Irish schools;
- understand the structure of the NI school curriculum;
- have a clear understanding of the standards for ITE and the expectations and demands of induction and EPD.

Check the requirements of your ITE programme to see which relate to this unit.

The 'distinctive' nature of Northern Ireland education

It could be argued that most schools in NI are divided by religion and academic ability. The total number of post-primary schools in 2024/2025 is 190. Just over one-third (66) of post-primary schools are grammar (selective) schools and the remaining (124) are non-selective schools (Department of Education Northern Ireland (DENI), 2025a). The total number of schools has fallen from 238 in 2000, mainly accounted for by a drop in the number of non-selective schools. The number of pupils in all NI post-primary schools is 156,889, reflecting a year-on-year increase over the past decade.

The NI education system has many differences from other jurisdictions in the UK. The history of NI has been dominated by repeated attempts to manage the 'troubled' relationship between the Protestant majority and the Catholic minority (Gallagher, 2007), which resulted in the emergence of a parallel school system. The development of this parallel school system dates back as far as the 1920s when the island of Ireland was partitioned. Failure of the churches to agree to pursue a largely secular form of education meant that a segregated education system emerged, with Protestants attending state-funded schools and most Catholics attending voluntary schools which received partial government funding. Catholic schools now receive 100 per cent funding, but in the past these schools were receiving as little as 60 per cent, often forcing them to offer only the cheaper (Arts) subjects; science being too expensive. In 1981, the first Integrated school (see later in this unit under 'Integrated schools') opened and currently there are 70 Integrated schools in NI, 47 schools in the primary sector, 21 in post-primary and 2 Integrated nurseries. The pupils attending Integrated schools make up approximately 7 per cent of the school population.

As was the case with Integrated schooling, the 1989 Education (Northern Ireland) Order placed a duty on the DENI to encourage and facilitate the development of Irish-medium Education (IME). In Irish-medium schools, pupils are taught most subjects through the medium of Irish, which is the second language of most of the pupils, whilst English is taught through English. This form of education has been described as Immersion Education and is now firmly established as a successful and effective form of bilingual education. Currently, 2 per cent of pupils in NI are educated in an Irish-medium setting.

In 2008, the then Education Minister Catriona Ruane abolished the 11+ transfer test, insisting that continued selection at 11 was unfair and that a move to a comprehensive secondary school system was required. Despite the passage of time, academic selection still exists. DENI did abolish the assessment structure, but the majority of grammar (selective) schools wanted academic selection to remain, and initially decided to set their own admission tests. Two consortia emerged - 'each broadly aligned with the two sides of the traditional, sectarian divide' (Roulston and Milliken, 2021, p. 2). The Post-Primary Transfer Consortium (PPTC), representing mainly Catholic grammar schools, and the Association for Quality Education (AQE), catering for Protestant/British tradition grammar schools, established two totally different transfer procedures (Roulston and Milliken, 2021), with young people speaking of 'sitting the Protestant test or the Catholic test' (Norton, 2017). However, a significant change to NI's transfer test system occurred in 2022 with the creation of the Schools Entrance Assessment Group (SEAG), which represents approximately 60 schools, comprising of Controlled, Voluntary Grammar and Integrated Schools. SEAG was established to administer a single common entrance exam, replacing the two separate tests previously organised by AQE and PPTC. This marks the most substantial shift in post-primary transfer arrangements since the state-run 11-plus exam ended in 2008 after about 60 years. The new common test is available to all post-primary schools in NI that use academic selection for part or all of their Year 8 admissions. In 2025,

approximately 12,500 primary school students participated in the inaugural common transfer test. The issue of academic selection is addressed in greater detail later in this unit under the section 'New Decade, New Approach'.

The *New Decade, New Approach* document (Northern Ireland Executive, 2020), which outlines the priorities of the reconvened Assembly (after a three-year suspension), has delivered an independent review of education, which included a review of post-primary transfer arrangements. However, with previous attempts at addressing this issue having brought about little change (Clarke and McFlynn, 2021), only time will tell if the recommendations from this review will be actioned.

Educational underachievement

A review undertaken by the Centre of Research in Educational Underachievement (Harris et al., 2021) identifies key Areas of Educational Underachievement in NI:

- **Socio-Economic Disparities:** There is a clear link between socio-economic background and educational performance. Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially those eligible for Free School Meals (FSMs), consistently underperform compared to their more affluent peers. Poverty and deprivation negatively impact academic achievement and student engagement in learning.
- **Community and Identity:** The issue of underachievement disproportionately affects working-class Protestant boys. Cultural identity and community factors, such as limited role models and historical distrust of educational authorities, contribute to lower educational aspirations within certain communities.
- **Gender Differences:** Boys, particularly from working-class Protestant backgrounds, are at greater risk of educational underachievement. This is influenced by traditional gender roles, less engagement with literacy and societal expectations.
- **School Quality:** There is significant variability in school quality across NI. Schools in deprived areas face challenges such as low parental involvement, higher absenteeism and a lack of resources. Additionally, the expectations set by teachers and the quality of school leadership play crucial roles in student success.
- **Early Years Education:** Early childhood education is critical in addressing educational underachievement. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds often start school with lower levels of literacy and numeracy. However, access to high-quality early years education remains inconsistent across NI.
- **Special Educational Needs (SENs):** Pupils with SEN have higher rates of underachievement, particularly when there is insufficient support.
- **Educational Segregation:** The segregated education system in NI contributes to underachievement by perpetuating social division and limiting opportunities for shared educational experiences.
- **Parental Engagement:** Parental involvement is a major factor in educational success, but socio-economic barriers can impede engagement. This is especially true in working-class communities where educational engagement is typically lower.

These findings underline the complex interplay of socio-economic, cultural and systemic factors contributing to educational underachievement in NI. Addressing these challenges will require targeted interventions across these key areas.

Northern Ireland schools

The education system in NI consists of several different types of schools under the control of management committees who are also the employers of teachers: Controlled Schools, Catholic Maintained Schools, Other Maintained (Irish-medium Schools), Integrated Schools, Voluntary Schools and Independent Schools. Each school type has an arrangement for control and management.

Controlled Schools

Controlled Schools in NI are under the management of the school's Board of Governors and the employing authority is the Education Authority (EA). Controlled schools are non-denominational and comprise nursery, primary, non-selective post-primary schools, grammar schools and special schools. According to figures from the Controlled Schools Support Council for 2023/2024, there are 545 controlled schools which accounts for 49 per cent of the total number of schools registered in NI. In terms of religious breakdown, 58 per cent of pupils in controlled schools are Protestant, 11 per cent are Catholic and 31 per cent are 'other'. Post-primary controlled schools continue to operate under the guise of academic selection. The grammar schools are populated mostly by children of the middle classes who typically instil the values of education in their children from an early age and who can 'afford to purchase extra tutoring for their children who most benefit from the grammar school system' (Clarke and McFlynn, 2021, p. 135). Moreover, they understand and articulate well the arguments for segregation, protecting the established power base in society and government. The resulting inequality of provision between some secondary and grammar schools is ignored and perpetuated by formula funding which favours the grammar sector.

Catholic Maintained Schools

Catholic Maintained Schools in NI, make up over 40 per cent of all schools in NI, each managed by Boards of Governors nominated by trustees, along with parents, teachers and EA representatives. The employing authority of teachers in these schools is the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) whilst the funding authority resides with the EA. Catholic grammar schools do not belong to CCMS, therefore it only employs teachers for non-selective secondary schools. There are 351 primary and 56 post primary Catholic Maintained Schools. In 2016, CCMS restated its opposition to the continuance of Academic Selection. The council reinforced its message that education should be inclusive, and we should strive to give children the best start in life, stating:

There is a strong evidence base to show that selection at eleven does not add value to an education system. None of the high performing systems around the world has academic selection at eleven. ... In the United Kingdom, the gap between the highest and lowest achieving pupils is second widest in the western world. In the UK it is widest in Northern Ireland. This illustrates that selective education maintains barriers for children from disadvantaged backgrounds rather than breaking them down.

(CCMS, 2016, p. 1)

CCMS (2016) proceeded to highlight the number of pupils receiving FSMs in grammar schools (13.9 per cent) compared to non-selective schools (39.9 per cent) as evidence of 'bias towards those who have the greater advantage' (p. 1).

Other maintained

Another type of school that falls into the category of Maintained is the *Irish-Medium School*. Irish-medium schools 'seek to extend the availability of Irish-medium Education (IME) to parents who wish to avail of it for their children'. They 'welcome children from all faiths and backgrounds' (Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, 2020) and do not select pupils on their academic ability.

There are currently 28 IME primary schools and two post-primary schools in the province, and an additional 10 Irish-medium units attached to English-medium host schools (DENI, 2025a). The governance of IME schools falls to each Board of Governors, which has authority to appoint teachers, although the employing authority for non-teaching staff is EA. IME schools are supported by Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (the Trust Fund for IME), which was established by DENI in August 2000 with the remit to promote IME.

Integrated Schools

Pupils attending *Integrated Schools* make up approximately 7 per cent of the school population. Integrated schools are defined as schools where

The education together, in an Integrated school, of:

- a. *those of different cultures and religious beliefs and of none, including reasonable numbers of both Protestant and Roman Catholic children or young persons;*
- b. *those who are experiencing socio-economic deprivation and those who are not; and*
- c. *those of different abilities.*

(Northern Ireland Executive, 2022)

Some Integrated schools reserve a percentage of pupil places for a 'grammar stream entry'. For example, in Lagan College, the first Integrated school established in NI, academic selection accounts for 35 per cent of pupil intake. Integrated schools are supported by the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE).

Voluntary schools

The majority of NI's traditional grammar schools fall under the category of *Voluntary Grammar Schools* (50) where pupils are admitted on the basis of their academic ability. The other 16 grammar schools belong to the controlled sector (noted earlier). Approximately 15 per cent of the running costs of voluntary grammar schools are met by fees charged to parents and from legacy investments. Each Board of Governors is designated as the employing authority. The voluntary grammar sector is supported by the Governing Bodies Association Northern Ireland. These schools consist of both Catholic and Protestant schools, and both single-sex schools and co-educational schools.

Independent Schools

NI also has 13 *Independent Schools*, mainly established by independent Protestant churches. They are not grant aided. Independent schools set their own curriculum and admissions policies and are funded by fees paid by parents and income from investments. Each independent school must be registered with DENI and is inspected regularly by the Education and Training Inspectorate.

School curriculum in Northern Ireland

Although a revised curriculum is anticipated, the NI curriculum introduced in September 2007 remains the current framework at the time of writing. It is designed 'to empower young people to achieve their potential and to make informed and responsible decisions throughout their lives' as individuals, contributors to society and the economy and environment (CCEA, 2007a).

The 'Big Picture' of the NIC at Key Stage 3 (see Figure 7.4.1) was designed to help schools see how all the curriculum components come together to provide a planned, coherent learning experience for pupils (a 'Big Picture' also exists for Primary and Key Stage 4). Learning for Life and Work (LLW) which encompasses four subject strands at Key Stage 3 - Personal Development, Local and Global Citizenship, Employability and Home Economics - transcends all other traditional Areas of Learning and is designed to support the aim and objectives of the NIC.

The statutory curriculum requirements for all other Areas of Learning, which include key elements, underpin the curriculum objectives. As the key elements are common across all subjects, this design serves as a way of supporting departments to connect content naturally and develop more collaborative, connected and relevant 'real world' learning experiences. Examples of key elements include personal development, mutual understanding, moral character, cultural understanding, media awareness and economic awareness. By its nature, the NI Curriculum emphasises flexibility, purposeful connected planning and learning and autonomy for schools and departments in curriculum-making, thus ensuring schools tailor their provision to suit the specific needs and interests of their pupils - locally and globally, now and in the future. The philosophy underpinning the curriculum is based on the ideals of social constructivism, where the process of learning is paramount and is considered as important as the end product. In order to implement the curriculum effectively, schools should embrace the principles of this curriculum and its emphasis on active participatory learning. Delivering such a curriculum therefore requires teachers to facilitate pupil learning in an active and stimulating environment.

Table 7.4.1 shows the Areas of Learning and the subject strands within the NI Key Stage 3 Curriculum. Whilst schools do not have a prescribed curriculum to follow for each area or subject strand within, they do have a statutory duty to deliver each Area of Learning.

A key aspect of the NI Curriculum is a focus on the cross-curricular skills of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), Using Mathematics and Communication. Since 2012, schools are required to assess and report annually on pupils' progression in the cross-curricular skills. Embedding these skills across the curriculum requires effective planning and promotes a whole-school approach to teaching and learning, whereby subject departments should collaborate with other departments and plan for collaborative learning opportunities.

A Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities (TSPC) framework exists as a means of describing pupil progression and development and all teachers have a responsibility to promote these skills within their subject contexts - TSPC include: managing information, working with others, thinking, problem-solving and decision-making, self-management and being creative.

An example of a 'thinking skills' activity is provided in Task 7.4.1 and Table 7.4.2. The 'odd one out' activity (Task 7.4.1) and the subsequent debriefing questions in Table 7.4.2 illustrate that there can be more than one credible answer and, importantly, that there is more than one way to arrive at an answer. The activities show that it can be helpful to 'struggle' when thinking about a problem. Remember that in these activities, it is the process of thinking which is more important than the answers. Tasks 7.4.2 and 7.4.3 ask you to plan a thinking skills activity for your subject.

The "Big Picture" of the Curriculum at Key Stage 3

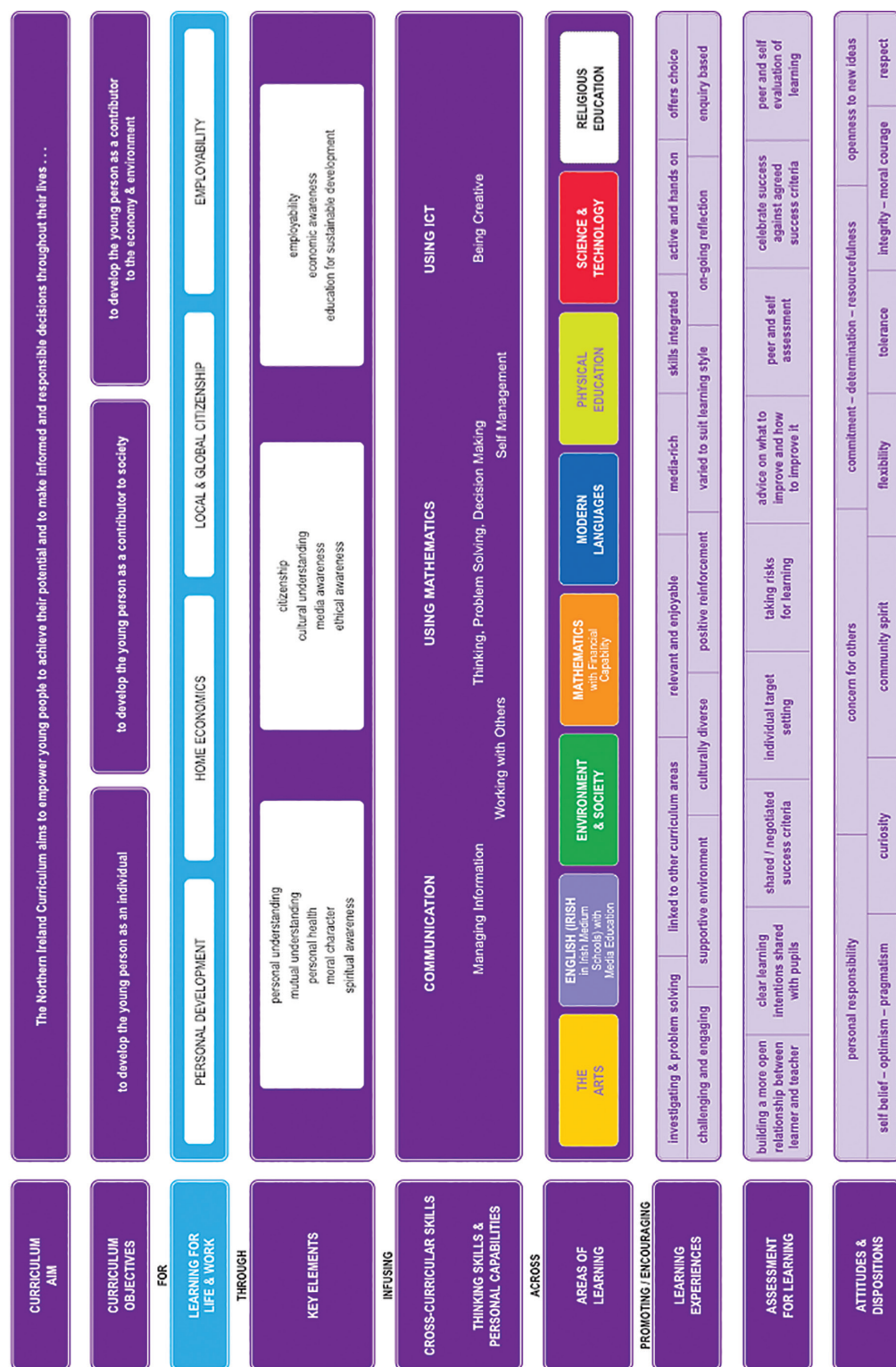


Figure 7.4.1 CCEA's 'Big Picture' of the Curriculum at Key Stage 3

Source: CCEA (2007b)



Task 7.4.1 The 'odd one out' activity

1. On your own, identify the similarities and differences between the well-known faces.



Then select the 'odd one out'.

Share and explain your choice to a partner.

As a pair, share and explain your choice to another pair.

Table 7.4.1 Areas of Learning in the NI Curriculum

Area of Learning	Subject Strands
The Arts	Art and Design, Drama and Music
English with Media Education	English or Irish in Irish Medium Schools
Mathematics with Financial Capability	Mathematics; Financial Capability
Environment and Society	History and Geography
Modern Languages	French, Spanish, German, Italian, Irish, etc.
Physical Education	Physical Education
Science and Technology	Science, Technology and Design
Religious Education	Religious Education

Source: CCEA (2007a)

Table 7.4.2 Examples of debriefing questions

How did you arrange the objects?
What assumptions did you make, and why?
Tell me more about ...
What do you mean by ...
How did your ideas change over time?
How did your group operate?
How did you resolve disagreements?
If you did it again, what would you do differently?

Source: CCEA (2007c)



Task 7.4.2 Plan a thinking skills activity

Create an 'odd one out' activity for your subject. When this task is completed, store the information for your professional development.



Task 7.4.3 Prepare a lesson involving thinking skills

Identify a thinking skill to be introduced/practised/assessed in the lesson.

Decide what thinking vocabulary is needed during the lesson.

Design tasks to introduce/practise/assess the chosen skill - create a 'cognitive' conflict to generate pupil interest.

Identify indicators that show your pupils are using the thinking skill - both for you and for the pupils to be aware of.

Consider the challenges that the pupils might face - how can they be overcome?

Consider the ideas that pupils may generate - how can you stretch them further? Be prepared for their thinking to be different or even better than yours!

Prepare your debrief questions - focus on the thinking skill.

When this task is completed, store the information for your professional development.

Assessment for learning in the NI Curriculum

The focus on assessment is central to the philosophy behind the 2007 NI Curriculum. The recognition that effective assessment enhances teaching and learning is evident in the curriculum design. The curriculum promotes Assessment for Learning (AfL) where there is a deliberate focus on formative assessment methods. The Assessment Reform Group (ARG, 2002) defined AfL as 'the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go next, and how best to get them there' (p. 1). In the 2007 NI Curriculum, the components of AfL are:

- effective planning (school and classroom level);
- sharing learning intentions;
- agreeing success criteria;
- monitoring pupils' learning;
- effective questioning;
- constructive feedback and feed-forward;
- pupil self-reflection including peer and self-assessment.

Effective planning includes setting learning intentions, which describe what the pupils should know, understand or be able to do by the end of the lesson (or series of lessons). Learning intentions should be shared with the pupils and should thus be written in pupil-friendly language. It is important to discuss why pupils are learning what you intend to teach with them. Consider pupil views and

try to reach a shared intention. When learning intentions have been agreed and shared, it is important to establish success criteria (or learning outcomes) so that pupils know what success looks like, thus helping pupils to be aware of how well they are doing during the lesson. The success criteria could summarise the key steps required in order to fulfil the learning intention.

In considering the definition of AfL, it is obvious that its key purpose is to encourage further learning, therefore the validity of AfL practices is judged on whether actual further learning takes place. Teachers and pupils must establish where each pupil is in their learning through meaningful observations and conversations. Once established, the purpose of AfL is to support learners' learning on a continual basis (Tveit, 2014) and, if it is effective, it has the potential to 'close the gap' from 'where learners are at' (actual performance) to 'where they want to be' (desired performance) by telling them how to get there (use of feedback to move learners on in their learning). Therefore, delivering quality constructive feedback is a critical component of AfL.

Task 7.4.4 will allow you to think about constructive feedback and when this task is completed, store the information for your professional development.



Task 7.4.4 Assessing constructive feedback

Rate the following statements as 1-10, where 1 = non-constructive and 10 = highly constructive:

Feedback statement	Your rating (1-10)
1. Tell me more. What do they look like? How do they move?	
2. Gold star	
3. Explain why you think this	
4. How do you think he felt? ■ Angry that people did not trust him ■ Annoyed with himself for lying in the past	
5. Beautiful, neat work	
6. Well done	
7. Say how you think this made him feel	
8. Develop these ideas further	
9. Describe the expression on his face	
10. Good, but not as good as your brother's	
11. How do you think Darryl felt about not being believe? Do you think he might have regretted anything he'd done?	
12. You must try harder	
13. First place in class	
14. Try one of these or one of your own instead of bad: ferocious, terrifying, evil	
15. A lovely story	

(Continued)

Feedback statement	Your rating (1-10)
16. You're one of the best	
17. 10/10	
18. He showed me he was a good friend when ... (finish this sentence)	
19. Very good start. Count how many times you have used the word 'said'. What other words could you have used?	
20. What did you see on your boat trip? Fish, birds, people?	

Source: CCEA (2007c)

AfL is therefore a key aspect of ITE in NI and even though the Curriculum does not stipulate that teachers must integrate AfL practices into their teaching, it is strongly recommended as best practice (CCEA, 2007a).

Entitlement framework

The entitlement framework is the post-14 curriculum and is designed to put the needs of pupils first and aims to provide access for pupils to a broad and balanced curriculum to enable them to reach their full potential no matter which school they attend or where they live (DENI, 2015). It sets out the minimum number and range of courses that schools should offer at Key Stage 4 and post-16. In order to meet the full statutory requirements of the entitlement framework all post-primary schools are required to provide pupils with access to a minimum of 21 courses at Key Stage (KS) 4 and 21 courses at post-16. DENI's (2010) rationale for increasing the level of choice is very straightforward:

We know that young people stand the best chance of succeeding and achieving if they can follow courses that interest and inspire them and that can take them on, through further and/ or higher education or through training, to fulfilling careers. (p. 1)

The current targets are a reduction from what was set in 2015/2016 where schools were expected to provide 24 courses at Key Stage 4 and 27 at post-16. Many schools were unable to meet these targets and in response to this the then Education Minister, Peter Weir, reduced the number of courses. In 2017, Minister Weir emphasised that reducing the specified number should provide flexibility and enable schools to manage their resources better.

A third of these courses must be general and a third applied, whilst schools must also provide:

- at least one course to cover each of the Areas of Learning; and
- at least one course in an official language of the European Union (other than English, and in Irish Speaking schools, Irish).

The nature of course provision is defined in terms of whether it leads to a general or applied qualification (DENI, 2010). A general qualification is one where knowledge, understanding and skills are developed within a subject context. Assessment will be mainly through written tasks. An applied

qualification is one where knowledge, understanding and skills can be developed through practical demonstration and/or within a context related to employability and assessment will take place in this same context (DENI, 2010).

Curriculum monitoring

In 2018-2019, CCEA conducted phase one of their curriculum monitoring by gathering the views of teachers. The aim of this initial phase was to develop an understanding of the current level of engagement with the curriculum and to identify any gaps between the 'intended curriculum, implemented curriculum and achieved curriculum' (CCEA, 2019, p. 4). Responses in the main were positive with teachers citing the flexibility affordance within the curriculum and the appropriate balance of knowledge, skills and understanding. However, 'there may be variation in understanding and implementation of the curriculum within schools' (CCEA, 2019, p. 5) when theory is translated into practice. Teachers noted that preparation for non-statutory transfer tests in Primary 7 and external qualifications at Key Stage 4 'can narrow the range of educational experiences for pupils' (CCEA, 2019, p. 5) and that teachers would benefit from a refocus on the curriculum and its relationship with key developments and best pedagogical practices. Cross-curricular skills remain relevant but 'digital skills are underdeveloped at Key Stage 3 and that some of the current practice in teaching ICT is outdated' (CCEA, 2019, p. 6). Teachers reported that they require access to continued professional development in this area so that they can keep up to date with technological advancements. Following this, in January 2022, CCEA hosted a Curriculum Symposium with over 160 education stakeholders, aimed at 'taking stock' of the NI curriculum and planning. Discussions focused on the curriculum's flexible, skills-based design, highlighting connected learning across subjects and clear progression pathways for students. A key takeaway was that NI's curriculum remains fit for purpose, as its flexibility and skills focus help address modern challenges. Participants also stressed the need to move beyond a narrow, content-heavy approach towards a more holistic development of learners (CCEA, 2022).

Initial teacher education in Northern Ireland

In NI, the only routes into school teaching are the traditional Bachelor of Education (BEd) and Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) programmes. In NI, beginning teachers are known as student teachers. Most post-primary-level teachers study through one of the two universities (PGCE), both of which are mixed in terms of religion and gender. However, most primary student teachers study in either Stranmillis University College (mostly Protestant) or St Mary's University College (mostly Catholic) towards a four-year BEd.

Set against this background, ITE programmes in NI provide student teachers with opportunities to consider how they, as future teachers, can best promote reconciliation and tolerance in a post-conflict society.

All full-time PGCE programmes are offered only at Level 7 in NI, with the consequence that all entrants must hold an Honours degree or its equivalent. PGCE student teachers are examined at Level 6 for school placements, and at M-level for university-based modules; the advantage of this is that they earn M-level credit which can be 'cashed in' for module exemption in future M-level courses. Furthermore, in the spirit of the Bologna Declaration (1999), it is hoped that the combined Level 6 and Level 7 credits (120) earned from the NI PGCE will create parity of esteem with the

Republic of Ireland's two-year equivalent, a significant advantage for those wishing to broaden their career prospects south of the border. The advantage to schools is that emerging teachers from the PGCE programmes are both academically capable, and competent classroom practitioners.

Professional competence

The professional competences to be developed by teachers at all levels of their careers were reviewed and published by the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI, 2007) in a booklet entitled *Teaching: The Reflective Profession*. In this document, GTCNI suggests that it has 'consistently rejected any attempt to adopt a reductionist approach to professional development' (p. 4) and that the adoption of a competence-based system allows for the conceptualisation of professional development as 'organic, and to an extent evolutionary, reflecting a synthesis of research, experiences gained, and expertise shared in communities of practice' (p. 4). To some, this may seem paradoxical, as the very fact of articulating generic competences could be considered as 'reductionist'. The GTCNI argues that it has been 'conscious that the teacher competences must be considered holistically and not treated as a series of discrete entities, divested of values or a sense of mission and professional identity' (p. 5). The GTCNI (2007) understanding of a teacher is as an 'educator and moral agent' who is:

knowledgeable, skilful, reflective ... and concerned with the purposes and consequences of education, as well as ... technical proficiency; be prepared to experiment with the unfamiliar and learn from their experiences; have an approach characterized by open-mindedness and wholeheartedness; be committed to professional dialogue in collaboration with colleagues, in school and beyond; have working patterns characterized by a process of action, evaluation and revision; and ... assume, as life-long learners, responsibility for their ongoing professional development. (p. 9)

The reflective and activist practitioner

The GTCNI concept of a reflective and activist practitioner sees the teacher as a moral agent and an informed, knowledgeable practitioner. This is illustrated in Figure 7.4.2, which suggests that each of the four areas of values and attributes, mission and purpose, sense of professional autonomy and knowledge and competence contributes towards the development of the reflective and activist teacher in a dynamic interaction which serves to reproduce the reflective and activist components as each area develops.

In seeking to make more explicit the attributes, skills and knowledge that teachers as professionals should possess and exemplify, the GTCNI set out 27 new competence statements, under three broad headings. These are:

- Professional Values and Practice;
- Professional Knowledge and Understanding;
- Professional Skills and Application:
 - *Planning and Leading*
 - *Teaching and Learning*
 - *Assessment.*

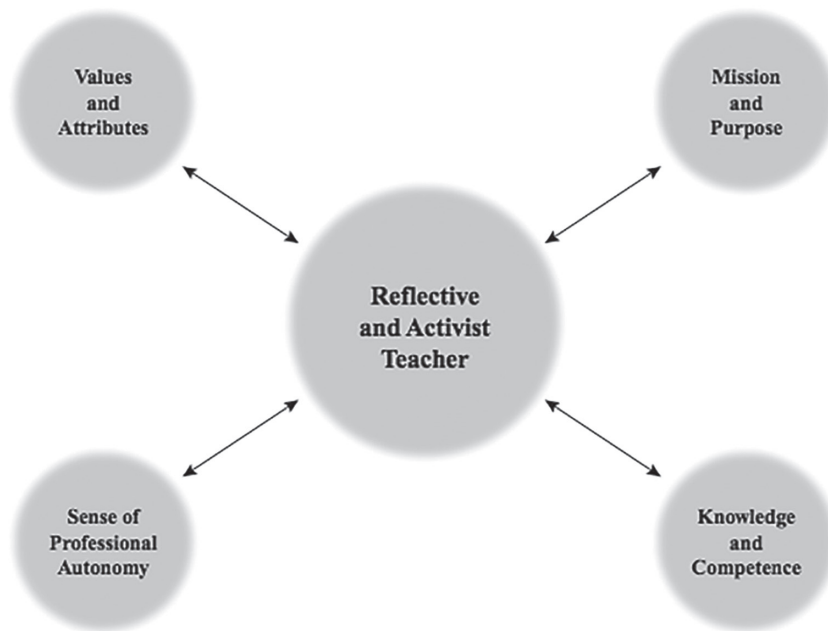


Figure 7.4.2 The concept of the reflective and activist practitioner

Source: Redrawn from the competence booklet (GTCNI, 2007, p. 10)

Competence statements

The competence statements are ‘predicated upon the notion that the achievement of competence is a developmental process which, of necessity, transcends early teacher education and continues throughout a teacher’s career’ (GTCNI, 2007, p. 11). They therefore effectively underpin all phases of early teacher education and professional development. The achievement of competence depends on:

- the nature and level of the teacher’s experience and his/her personal effectiveness;
- the work-based context;
- the roles teachers experience and the development opportunities arising from such experiences.

The full description of the 27 competence statements is articulated, with exemplars for the initial, induction, EPD and continuing professional development (CPD) stages of a teacher’s career on pp. 16–43 of the competence booklet (GTCNI, 2007). The summary outlines of the statements are set out on pp. 13–15 of the booklet.

Each of the competences is articulated progressively for the different stages in a teacher’s career from ITE to CPD. They progress in terms of complexity and sophistication but each assumes that teachers relate theory to practice at all career stages.

Now complete Task 7.4.5. When the task is completed, store the information for your professional development.

**Task 7.4.5 Reflect on your current level of competence**

Consider the statements of competence for your course. Rank them in groups representing your self-perception of how well you demonstrate each (a) during your ITE course and (b) during your first year of teaching.

Code of values and professional practice

The code of values and professional practice indicated in the first competence statement is considered as 'eloquent testimony to the profession's commitment to excellence in and for all' (GTCNI, 2007, p. 44). This code seeks to:

set out clearly the core values underpinning professional practice; encourage attitudes and conduct commensurate with the core values of the profession; provide a framework for evaluating both policies and practice; and enhance the status of the profession in the eyes of the public.

(GTCNI, 2007, p. 44)

The core values of the profession are: trust, honesty, commitment, respect, fairness, equality, integrity, tolerance and service. These values are to be exemplified 'in their work and in their relationships with others; recognising, in particular, the unique and privileged relationship that exists between teachers and their pupils' (GTCNI, 2007, p. 45). Teachers will at all times be conscious of their responsibilities to others (learners, colleagues and the profession).

The competences articulate the way that it is envisioned that teachers will progress through their careers. During the PGCE programme in NI, student teachers complete a 'formative profile' report after their first extended school placement, in which they self-assess their progress against the competences. This document is discussed with a tutor and consensus is reached in terms of strengths and targets which student teachers will concentrate on during the second extended school placement. Following this, student teachers complete a 'career entry profile' report. This report indicates the direction for support during induction and is given to the employer responsible for mapping the course of induction and EPD for the new teacher.

New teachers follow a process of induction during their first year of teaching, during which they are observed and supported in the production and implementation of a personalised action plan. There follows two further years of EPD, in which teachers complete portfolios of whole-school issues, such as behaviour management, pastoral care or ICT use in the school. Having completed this stage, teachers then embark on CPD in their chosen direction, be that towards curriculum development and leadership, and/or pastoral care.

The teaching profession in Northern Ireland

There is no such thing as Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) in NI. Successful completion of either the BEd or PGCE programmes gives new teachers the opportunity to apply for registration with the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI). Having gained their Teacher Reference Number, they can begin applying for teaching positions throughout the province.

Once appointed to a teaching position – whether permanent, temporary, full-time or part-time – new teachers alongside the teacher-tutor begin discussions of induction requirements (DENI, 2024a). This will begin their three-year period of Induction and EPD. The process is managed by the school and supported by Education Authority Northern Ireland (EANI). It relies heavily on building a tailored programme for each individual based on his/her Career Entry Profile – a record of the assessment of the student teacher's competences on completion of the ITE programme.

EPD is the third stage of teacher education; a continuous integrated process that commences with ITE and progresses through the induction stage. The emphasis in EPD shifts from teachers teaching to how children and young people learn. Similar to the induction stage, the EPD stage is not an option but an essential part of further professional learning in which all teachers are required to participate (DENI, 1987).

Having passed EPD, teachers in NI are expected to continue their professional development through the Performance Review and Staff Development (PRSD) process operated by each school. Guidelines issued by DENI state that the scheme aims to:

- recognise the contribution of teachers to achieving the aims of the School Development Plan and help them to identify ways of enhancing their skills and performance;
- identify the professional needs and necessary resources to support teachers in their professional development and career progression;
- increase teachers' participation in decision-making and career planning and develop, in teachers, a greater sense of control over their work;
- enhance the quality of education;
- inform the management of schools;
- improve teacher morale and motivation;
- be seen by staff as enabling;
- be manageable and minimise bureaucracy.

PRSD is not directly related to teachers' pay until they apply for the first of three Threshold Assessments after approximately six years of teaching.

Promotional allowances

Promotional Allowances are awarded to teachers usually in response to advertised internal positions. These range from basic responsibilities to those of Head of Year/Department or, for example, Curriculum/Assessment Leader. Traditionally, positions above and including that of Vice Principal have been advertised externally, but more recently, lower (middle management) posts are also being advertised externally.

Large schools often provide clearly defined promotional pathways. A teacher can either rise through the ranks by acquiring skills and experience in pastoral care leading eventually to a Head of Year position or Vice Principal (Pastoral), or alternatively through curriculum development, leading to Head of Department and Vice Principal (Curriculum). Teachers in smaller schools (i.e. fewer than 800 pupils) may be expected to combine pastoral and curricular responsibilities to ascend through the ranks but they gain an inherent advantage by acquiring a broader experience and greater career potential, especially if they have their eyes set on headship.

Education in Northern Ireland: policy, progress and prospects

Education in NI will face many opportunities and challenges over the coming years. In light of findings from the Centre of Research in Educational Underachievement), which highlighted (inter alia) poor academic attainment by those from low socio-economic backgrounds, particularly Protestant males, the government in NI must address the issue of academic selection at a substantive level. The decision by selective schools to continue academic selection has proven to have had a detrimental impact upon many pupils who attend non-selective schools, particularly Protestant males. Whilst pupils in selective schools are achieving and succeeding, many pupils attending non-selective schools continue to underachieve. Connolly et al. (2013) have highlighted that the odds of those entitled to FSMs securing a grammar school place are nearly five times lower than others; whilst the odds of a young person achieving five or more GCSE passes at grades A*-C, including English and Maths, in NI are over three and a half times higher if they attend a grammar school compared to a secondary school. There is an onus on our politicians, church leaders, academics and parents to aim to build an improved education system where all pupils have an opportunity to achieve their potential.

Shared and integrated education

As NI looks forward to a more stable and socially cohesive future, recent legislative changes continue to recognise the role of education in supporting peace-building and improving inter-group relations. In 2016, the Shared Education Act (Northern Ireland) was introduced and places a duty on the Department of Education (DE) to encourage, facilitate and promote sharing between schools. The Act defines Shared Education as:

The education together of those of different religious belief, including reasonable numbers of both Protestant and Roman Catholic children or young persons; and those who are experiencing socio-economic deprivation and those who are not, which is secured by the working together and co-operation of two or more relevant providers.

(Northern Ireland Executive, 2016)

Shared education allows for pupils from separate schools and different backgrounds – many of whom may not otherwise have the opportunity to meet other young people from ‘across the religious divide’ – to engage in some joint classes and activities. Teaching staff and Boards of Governors from the two different schools also have the opportunity to work together.

In 2022, an Integrated Education (NI) Act came into effect and requires the DENI to ‘encourage, facilitate and support’ Integrated education. Given the entrenched and divided nature of NI’s education system, it is not surprising that the Integrated Education Act encountered considerable political resistance on its passage through the NI Assembly as well as opposition from the bodies representing Controlled and Catholic Maintained schools (Northern Ireland Executive, 2022).

Teacher Professional Learning

In 2016, DENI published a new strategy for teaching and learning in NI entitled *Learning Leaders: A Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning*. The aim of this strategy is ‘to empower the teaching

profession to strengthen its professionalism and expertise to meet the challenging educational needs of young people in the 21st century' (DENI, 2016, p. 10). A key feature of the strategy is the recognition that Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) should be career-long, as opposed to current practice where there is a focus on Induction and EPD. There is an emphasis on the importance of effective collaboration and the vision is that, 'Every teacher is a learning leader, accomplished in working collaboratively with all partners in the interests of children and young people' (DENI, 2016, p. 10). Despite the lack of funding for its planned ten-year roll out, working groups are currently rewriting the GTCNI competences, aiming to identify how the highest possible standards can be maintained within TPL provision and forming the key principles that should underpin the planned framework. Clarke and Galanouli (2019) consider the balance between autonomy and accountability as being of crucial importance as well as effective collaboration amongst stakeholders to support a research-informed profession. This strategy puts the onus on leadership teams within schools to ascertain the type of professional learning opportunities that staff require. Without funding and the potential for variation in terms of the implementation of this strategy, teaching staff are concerned that professional learning opportunities may fall short of what individual teachers and subject departments require. Whilst the roll out was interrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic, it does offer some hope at a time when the teaching profession is in need of increased levels of support and guidance. Another cause for optimism has been the publication of the *New Decade, New Approach* document.

New Decade, New Approach

In January 2020, the Northern Ireland Executive produced their document, *New Decade, New Approach*, which outlined the priorities of the reconvened Assembly (after a three-year suspension).

Education features prominently in this document with commitments to:

- address resourcing pressures in schools, ensuring that every school has a sustainable core budget to deliver quality education;
- establish an external, independent review of education provision, with a focus on securing greater efficiency in delivery costs, raising standards, access to the curriculum for all pupils and the prospects of moving towards a single education system;
- build a shared and integrated society, support educating children and young people of different backgrounds together in the classroom;
- establish an expert panel to examine and propose an action plan to address links between persistent educational underachievement and socio-economic background, including the longstanding issues facing working-class, Protestant boys (see the following section, 'A Fair Start');
- deliver a new special educational needs framework to support young people with special needs to achieve their full potential.

The second point perhaps has had the most significant progress in that an independent review has been undertaken and key recommendations have been made, some of which address the other points that have been listed and are discussed below.

The Independent Review of Education

The Independent Review of Education in Northern Ireland, published in December 2023, calls for extensive reforms to address systemic underfunding and improve outcomes for all learners. The review highlights a funding crisis within NI's education sector, with a real-terms reduction of £145 million in the last 11 years, whilst student numbers have increased by 7 per cent over the same period. To close this funding gap, the panel estimates that an additional £291 million is required (Independent Review of Education, 2023).

One of the key recommendations is to expand early years education by increasing investment to enhance both accessibility and quality, allowing for early intervention for children facing challenges. Addressing educational disadvantage is another priority, with proposals to fully fund initiatives like the *Fair Start* and *Engage* programmes, alongside introducing pre-vocational pathways and raising the school-leaving age to 18. In addition, the review stresses the importance of student wellbeing, calling for investments in mental health, counselling and life skills, whilst reforming SEN support to provide better access to specialists and improve resource allocation.

The review calls for a significant curriculum overhaul, including continuous review, streamlined content and smoother transitions between educational stages. It recommends new pre-vocational pathways from age 14, alongside changes in assessment to promote personalised learning. The review also urges reforms in the transition process, advocating for reduced reliance on academic selection, moving away from using a single test as a means of selection for transfer to post-primary school, and instead using a broader pupil profile. The pupil profiles used for selection would be largely based on the results of assessments undertaken throughout the learner's time at primary school, largely via computer adaptive testing. The review also highlights the need for greater flexibility in educational pathways, ensuring that students from all communities learn together in inclusive classrooms.

The report also underscores the need for significant investment in SEN services, highlighting that NI has a higher proportion of students with special educational needs compared to other UK regions. With a 51 per cent increase in children attending special schools between 2005/2006 and 2022/2023, the review calls for capital investment in the special school sector and changes in how SEN statements are written to increase school capacity, reduce reliance on classroom assistants and better meet the diverse needs of learners.

To strengthen the education workforce, the review suggests a comprehensive strategy to address shortages and support ongoing professional development. The creation of a unified department overseeing all education stages, alongside a reconfigured school network, is proposed to enhance sustainability, accountability and community integration.

As expected, the review highlighted the key features of this fragmented system, namely segregation by religion and segregation by academic selection (Gardner, 2016). However, all previous attempts at dealing with the latter have foundered on 'deeply entrenched views that NI's children should be systematically separated' into grammar and non-selective schools at the age of 11 (Gardner, 2016, p. 358). Numerous government reports have criticised academic selection, starting in 1964 when the education minister stated that the 11+ was NI's greatest educational problem. This was followed by a report from Northern Ireland's Advisory Council on Education (ACENI) where they expressed 'grave disquiet regarding the principle of selection' (ACENI, 1971, p. 27) and in 1973 they revisited the issue with more force, stating that the minister should abolish academic

selection as soon as possible. When DENI (1996) released its report on *Free School Meals and Low Achievement*, the inequality of opportunity and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils were once again highlighted. Following the Good Friday Agreement (1998) and the inauguration of the devolved NI Assembly, the Minister of Education, Martin McGuinness (Sinn Féin), commissioned a review of NI's education system, the Burns Review. In recommending an end to academic selection, the Burns Review (2001) gained support from the educational community but 'failed to gain favour across the political parties' (Roulston and Milliken, 2021, p. 2). In 2008, the Education Minister at the time, Catriona Ruane, without the explicit backing of the Assembly, declared that the current transfer arrangements were to cease, with the last state-sponsored test taking place in November 2008. What followed has been described earlier in relation to grammar schools using their own admission tests. Roulston and Milliken (2021) note that it is difficult to find any arguments from researchers in favour of academic selection whilst Nick Hillman (cited in Furlong and Lunt, 2020, p. 5) claims that there is 'a broad consensus against grammar schools among Educationalists'.

The findings of the independent review promote hope for a more cohesive education system, but unless it receives political backing, all will be in vain. Gardner (2016) states that in relation to academic selection, the 'various actors have retreated to their traditional positions' with the Catholic Church continuing to 'swither between not wishing to promote the immorality of state-sponsored disadvantage and the cynical protection of some of its top grammar schools', whilst the DUP remains 'callously indifferent to the effects of a system that condemns children in their heartland working-class constituencies to poorer outcomes than their Catholic peers, and Sinn Féin continue to make their social justice agenda expedient to their power hungry pragmatism' (p. 358). The time for change is now and whilst there are 'strong economic reasons for changing a flawed system ... the social and moral arguments for fundamental transformation are even stronger' (Roulston and Milliken, 2021, p. 7).

A Fair Start

As noted earlier in the fourth bullet point (under 'New Decade, New Approach'), an expert panel was set up to address the issue of educational underachievement linked to socio-economic background. In May 2021, this panel published *A Fair Start* report which set out their findings and recommendations (DENI, 2021).

The report has highlighted eight key areas in addressing this, including:

- redirecting the focus to Early Years;
- championing Emotional Health and Wellbeing;
- ensuring the relevance and appropriateness of Curriculum and Assessment;
- promoting a whole community approach to education;
- maximising boys' potential;
- driving forward Teachers' Professional Learning;
- supporting the professional learning and wellbeing of school leadership;
- ensuring interdepartmental collaboration and delivery.

Each area is underpinned by an action plan and recommendations that will ensure all children and young people, regardless of background, are given the best start in life.

Key recommendations and actions include:

- greater policy and investment focus on 0–6 age group, acknowledging the importance of prioritising children’s learning and development from 0 to 6 years;
- further investment and development in Nurture Groups to prevent further impacts on children’s emotional and mental health, and support them to engage fully in learning;
- schools should be supported to recognise how boys can benefit from tailored approaches to teaching and learning; teachers should be challenged and supported to have high expectations and employ strategies designed to challenge and engage boys;
- boys at risk of underachievement and/or disengagement should be identified early, and appropriate, evidenced-based interventions implemented.

As noted earlier, academic selection continues to be a contributing factor to educational underachievement. However, it is interesting to note that the report does not address this issue.

Initial teacher education

Central to the future of education in NI is the future of ITE. As previously highlighted, most post-primary student teachers’ study through one of the two universities, both of which are mixed in terms of religion and gender. However, most primary student teachers’ study in either Stranmillis University College (mostly Protestant) or St Mary’s University College (mostly Catholic). The latest review of teacher education in NI highlighted the need for a more shared and integrated approach to ITE. Phase one of the review was conducted by the consultancy firm, Grant Thornton (Department for the Economy (DfE), 2013), who did a financial review of the infrastructure, reporting that the costs per student teacher at St Mary’s and Stranmillis were higher than those in the rest of the UK, due to both colleges receiving premia funding for small institutions. The second stage of the review was conducted by an international expert panel (DfE, 2014) chaired by Pasi Sahlberg. The panel recommended changes to the infrastructure as well as emphasising the need for research-based teacher education. They identified research-based, masters level provision as being the preferred pathway. Four proposals were made by the panel, each aimed at increasing collaboration and recognising the ‘importance of the historic context of NI society and its continuing diversity’ (DfE, 2014, p. 43), by respecting the importance of the various faith traditions. The panel noted that the ‘existing infrastructure of teacher education in N Ireland is currently too fragmented to deliver the changes that are necessary’ (p. 47). The first proposal was that each provider would continue to provide ITE education but that there would be greater collaboration between Queen’s University, St Mary’s and Stranmillis. That all three would work more closely together was to be a condition of the funding grant to each institution, with Ulster University continuing its provision in the North West. The second proposal was the formation of a two-centre model, with one based at Ulster University’s Coleraine campus and the other being an Institute of Education in Belfast. The institute would comprise Queens University, St Mary’s and Stranmillis and although each would retain their current location, each staff member would be transferred to the institute. The third proposal was the creation of an Initial Teacher Education Federation that would have ‘the responsibility of ensuring that the various institutions achieved greater efficiency through the rationalisation of provision whilst at the same time driving-up quality to world-class standards’ (DfE, 2014, p. 53). Whilst this option emphasised the importance of each institution retaining its individual ‘ethos and mission’, provision

would be within a common framework where the focus on reducing duplication and increasing collaboration in the planning of ITE programmes would create greater efficiency. The fourth proposal was the creation of a single institute of education which would have one budget, one suite of academic programmes and a single set of staff who would be responsible for ITE provision and in-service provision across the whole of NI.

As noted by Clarke and McFlynn (2021), the recommendations were never implemented 'due to the political turmoil which ensued around the proposed infrastructural changes' (p. 132). The DUP and Sinn Féin rejected these proposals, opting for 'continuance of the status quo' (p. 132). Gardner (2016) highlights the stark reality of this current fragmented system, stating that 'teacher education in NI has a considerable distance to travel if it is to present itself as a modern system fit for the needs of today's society' (p. 353). However, over the past 50 years, ITE in NI has undergone a number of reviews (Farren et al., 2019) resulting in relatively minor changes to policy and practice, as each review became caught up in 'debates along the sectarian political divide' (Clarke and McFlynn, 2021, p. 132), which Rittel and Webber (1973) refer to as NI's *Wicked Problem*.

Policy developments

Following the 2024 Northern Ireland Assembly elections and the appointment of a new Education Minister, education reform has gained renewed political momentum. Two flagship initiatives now set the strategic direction: a Curriculum Review and the TransformED NI Strategy. The Curriculum Review aims to modernise the 2007 framework with a focus on coherence, progression and a knowledge-rich curriculum and it will be supported with a new literacy and numeracy strategy (DENI, 2024b). The TransformED strategy outlines key commitments including a redesigned curriculum, major investment in TPL (£27 million over three years), refreshed induction and leadership frameworks, and a new evidence infrastructure to inform policy and practice (DENI, 2025b). Reforms to assessment, qualifications and accountability are also underway, alongside targeted strategies to address educational disadvantage and new legislation to extend participation in education or training until age 18. Whilst the scale of ambition is significant, the challenge, echoed by the 2023 Independent Review of Education, remains one of implementation, ensuring reforms are not only well conceived but deeply embedded. At the time of writing, the findings of the Curriculum Review are still to be published, but these will likely shape much of the system's future trajectory. With the structures, partnerships and policy intent now in place, NI has an opportunity to build a more equitable, evidence informed and world class education system if it can sustain the political and professional will to see it through.

SUMMARY AND KEY POINTS

This unit has sought to identify key features that make the NI education system distinctive from the rest of the UK. The unit has also aimed to raise awareness of the structure and balance of the curriculum in NI and the preferred approaches when implementing the curriculum. It is intended that this unit presents a clear description of how schools are governed as well as an informed outline of the teaching profession in NI. The overall intention has been to stimulate

thinking about the various issues that prospective and qualified teachers will encounter during their professional practice.

- Pupils in NI are segregated by religion and by academic selection.
- The divided schooling system means that different sectors have different arrangements for control and management.
- The philosophy of the NI Curriculum is based on the ideals of social constructivism whereby pupils are required to engage with learning material and in the process develop life skills that will develop them as individuals who can contribute to society, the economy and the environment.
- The attainment gap that exists between the rich and poor in NI is ever increasing and the Fair Start proposals have the potential to address this issue.
- There is a drive towards increasing shared education in NI with £25 million being currently used by schools to support their engagement in shared education. The creation of the Shared Education Act NI (Northern Ireland Executive, 2016) and the additional 35.3 million euros from Peace IV funding has increased the momentum of shared education.
- There is a need to restructure the provision for ITE in NI with the recognition that the move towards a one or two centre provider would enhance the overall quality of ITE in NI.
- The decision to remove the Curriculum Advisory Support Service means that there has been a severe lack of provision for CPD amongst the teaching profession since 2008. The absence of subject-specific support coupled with the Education Training Inspectorate's (ETI's) emphasis on school leadership and non-subject-based inspections has led to each school interpreting the curriculum under pressures and priorities considered more important than the minimum entitlement.
- The Learning Leader's Strategy (DENI, 2016) outlines a clear framework for TPL, identifying TPL as being career-long with an appropriate focus on collaboration and building the leadership capacity of all teachers.
- The *New Decade, New Approach* document outlines the NI Executive's commitment to a number of key educational issues. The most important is the independent review of education which has called for significant reforms to streamline the education system, including reducing the number of schools and overhauling the transfer test. It also highlighted the need for greater integration between different school sectors and improving equality of opportunity for all students.
- Education reform has gained momentum through the Curriculum Review and TransformED NI Strategy, aiming to modernise teaching, invest in professional learning, and build a more equitable, evidence-informed system.

Check which requirements for your ITE programme have been addressed through this unit.





Further resources

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Offers research-based insights into shared education initiatives and their potential for promoting integration.

DfE (Department for the Economy) (2014) *Aspiring to Excellence: Final Report of the International Review Panel on the Structure of Initial Teacher Education in Northern Ireland*, viewed 31 July 2025, <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/20454/1/aspiring-to-excellence-review-panel-final-report.pdf>.

Provides comprehensive analysis of ITE infrastructure in Northern Ireland and recommendations for future development.

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Outlines the professional competence framework and values underpinning teacher development in Northern Ireland.

Independent Review of Education (2023) *Investing in a Better Future*, viewed 31 July 2025, <https://www.independentreviewofeducation.org.uk/key-documents/investing-better-future>.

Presents the most recent comprehensive review of education in Northern Ireland with recommendations for systemic reform.

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