# Northern Ireland announces task force to overhaul flawed education curriculum



Significant shortcomings in Northern Ireland's education curriculum have been unveiled in a comprehensive report that advocates for an urgent overhaul. Conducted by education consultant Lucy Crehan, the review presents a detailed analysis highlighting a “lack of specificity,” which has resulted in inequality and inconsistency in curriculum delivery. It also points to a curriculum overload that obscures essential learning outcomes.

The report proposes the establishment of a new curriculum framework framed around five core principles: it should be purpose-led, knowledge-rich, continuous and coherent, specified and focused, and finally, inclusive and flexible. Such a comprehensive approach is viewed as necessary to rectify the disparities that currently plague the educational landscape, especially for disadvantaged groups, including those with special educational needs and learners in Irish-immersion contexts.

Speaking on the findings, Ms Crehan articulated the transformative potential of an effectively designed curriculum, stating, “A purpose-led, knowledge-rich curriculum is transformative because it equips students with the foundational understanding and skill they need to navigate and shape the world.” She further emphasised that this new model should aim to bridge socio-economic gaps and offer equitable opportunities for all learners.

Education Minister Paul Givan echoed these sentiments, expressing concerns that the curriculum had stagnated and failed to adapt to international educational advancements over the past 17 years. “The report identifies significant weaknesses in the current curriculum, which has not been formally reviewed in over 17 years,” he stated, calling for a curriculum that not only imparts essential knowledge and skills but also equips students to succeed regardless of their background. Givan highlighted the necessity of creating "cultural capital" through education, thereby breaking the cycle of poverty.

As part of the reform strategy, a dedicated task force is being established to take these recommendations forward. The task force will be chaired by Christine Counsell, a founder of Opening Worlds, which supports around 300 primary schools with resources and training. Counsell pledged to develop a “world-leading school curriculum” that embodies ambitious yet equitable education, carefully integrating powerful knowledge into the learning framework.

Among the report's pointed recommendations is the need for improved data collection across various qualifications, facilitating the development of relevant career pathways for students aged 14 to 19. Additionally, it suggests that the amount of content in GCSEs be reduced and highlights the necessity of including digital technology and additional languages in the curriculum from primary school.

These changes stem from acute dissatisfaction. A recent survey conducted by the Secondary Students Union NI revealed that over 67% of Northern Ireland pupils feel inadequately prepared for life after school, with almost 89% stating they have not received sufficient financial education—a glaring oversight as students step into adulthood. This sentiment underlines the urgency for a curriculum that meets contemporary educational and vocational demands.

Moreover, contextually essential topics such as Northern Ireland's complex history, particularly the Troubles, are allegedly inadequately covered, leaving students with an incomplete understanding of their societal context. A study by Ulster University indicated that a focus on exam preparation has overshadowed the emotional and social dimensions of education, necessitating a broader and holistic teaching approach.

As Northern Ireland navigates these educational reforms, the pressing need for a curriculum that not only reflects the realities of contemporary society but also proactively shapes its future remains clearer than ever.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/task-force-announced-as-significant-weaknesses-in-education-curriculum-revealed-by-report-NPWHP3BKSBA7ZPZM3ZERINIKLY/), [[2]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/task-force-announced-as-significant-weaknesses-in-education-curriculum-revealed-by-report-NPWHP3BKSBA7ZPZM3ZERINIKLY/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/task-force-announced-as-significant-weaknesses-in-education-curriculum-revealed-by-report-NPWHP3BKSBA7ZPZM3ZERINIKLY/), [[3]](https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/education/two-thirds-of-northern-ireland-pupils-say-the-curriculum-does-not-prepare-them-for-leaving-school/a907015483.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/task-force-announced-as-significant-weaknesses-in-education-curriculum-revealed-by-report-NPWHP3BKSBA7ZPZM3ZERINIKLY/), [[4]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-61074468), [[5]](https://www.itv.com/news/utv/2023-12-13/ni-education-review-recommends-overhaul-of-system)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://www.pivotalppf.org/our-work/news/134/review-of-the-northern-ireland)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/task-force-announced-as-significant-weaknesses-in-education-curriculum-revealed-by-report-NPWHP3BKSBA7ZPZM3ZERINIKLY/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/task-force-announced-as-significant-weaknesses-in-education-curriculum-revealed-by-report-NPWHP3BKSBA7ZPZM3ZERINIKLY/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/task-force-announced-as-significant-weaknesses-in-education-curriculum-revealed-by-report-NPWHP3BKSBA7ZPZM3ZERINIKLY/> - A recent report by Lucy Crehan highlights significant weaknesses in Northern Ireland's education curriculum, including a lack of specificity leading to inequality, curriculum overload, and insufficient coherence. The report recommends a new curriculum framework based on five key principles: purpose-led, knowledge-rich, continuous and coherent, specified and focused, and inclusive and flexible. Education Minister Paul Givan expressed concern that the current curriculum has not evolved in line with international developments and no longer meets the needs of all children and young people. A task force has been established to develop a new curriculum in the region.
3. <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/education/two-thirds-of-northern-ireland-pupils-say-the-curriculum-does-not-prepare-them-for-leaving-school/a907015483.html> - A survey commissioned by the Secondary Students Union NI reveals that 67.4% of Northern Ireland pupils feel unprepared for the world of work upon leaving school. The survey also found that 89.1% of pupils believe they have not received adequate financial education to navigate everyday life situations, such as applying for mortgages, car loans, and credit cards. The findings suggest a need for an overhaul of the Learning for Life and Work (LLW) curriculum to better equip students for life after education.
4. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-61074468> - A study from Ulster University highlights a lack of teaching about the Northern Ireland conflict, known as the Troubles, in schools. The research indicates that this omission leaves 'partisan narratives unchallenged and wider society unchanged.' The study also points out that the education system's focus on exams comes at the expense of addressing the social and emotional dimensions of education. The findings underscore the need for a more comprehensive approach to teaching about the Troubles in Northern Ireland schools.
5. <https://www.itv.com/news/utv/2023-12-13/ni-education-review-recommends-overhaul-of-system> - An independent review of education in Northern Ireland has identified a £291 million shortfall in the education budget. The review highlights a 'funding crisis' and recommends a radical overhaul of the education system, including curriculum reform, a reduction in academic selection after primary school, and a requirement to stay in education until the age of 18. The report also advocates for a greater mix of religious backgrounds in schools to promote inclusivity and diversity.
6. <https://www.pivotalppf.org/our-work/news/134/review-of-the-northern-ireland> - Pivotal, a public policy forum, has responded to the Call for Evidence from the Review of the Northern Ireland Curriculum. Their submission emphasizes the need for greater emphasis on employability and skills training throughout the curriculum to prepare young people for life after education. Pivotal also advocates for innovative, responsive, and accessible careers advice for young people, parents, and carers, and calls for the elevation of the status of vocational education within the education system.
7. <https://www.ukfiet.org/2019/education-systems-during-and-after-conflict-lessons-and-limitations-from-northern-ireland/> - This article examines the challenges and limitations of Northern Ireland's education system during and after the conflict known as the Troubles. It discusses the introduction of Local and Global Citizenship (LGC) in 2007, intended to promote tolerance and understanding. However, the article highlights issues such as the subject's ambiguous curriculum position, lack of clarity in defining citizenship education, and the rapid implementation pace, which have hindered its effectiveness in fostering critical engagement among students.