



Independent Review of Education Panel

CCEA Submission – January 2022

Independent Review of Education

Status: Sensitive & Confidential.

Context

The Panel for the Independent Review of Education has asked CCEA to provide comment on the following areas as part of their deliberations:

1. CCEA's view on its structure to enable delivery of its statutory duties (including any gaps in provision, limits in statute or structural issues).
2. The importance of Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1.
3. Curriculum and Assessment at Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5/Post 16.
4. Importance of consistency with England (or wider UK) in terms of portability of qualifications and if there is scope/appetite for change.

The panel also previously asked CCEA about its views on:

5. The strengths and weaknesses in the current system.
6. What the term "a single education system" means to CCEA and what are the key characteristics of a "single education system".
7. CCEA's Vision for Education.

CCEA is pleased to provide comment at this stage of the Independent Review and looks forward to ongoing engagement throughout the process.

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1. CCEA's Structure and Statutory Duties

The Independent Review of Education Panel has asked CCEA for its view on how it is structured to deliver its statutory duties (including any gaps in provision, limits in statute or structural issues)

CCEA's Remit and Organisational Structure

The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), established on 1 April 1994, is a non-departmental public body funded by and responsible to the Department of Education (DE). We put the learner at the centre of everything we do. CCEA is a unique organisation - being the only educational body in the United Kingdom that brings together the areas of curriculum, assessment and examinations.

CCEA's duties and functions are detailed in the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998¹ (Articles 73 to 80).

In summary, our role is to:

- a) continually review all aspects of the curriculum, examinations and assessment for grant-aided schools, colleges and training organisations;
- b) undertake statutory consultation on proposals relating to legislation involving curriculum, examinations or assessment;
- c) advise government departments on matters concerning curriculum, assessment, examinations and external qualifications;
- d) develop qualifications, conduct qualifications and assessments and moderate relevant qualifications and assessments;
- e) accredit, regulate and provide advice on approval of qualifications; and
- f) publish and disseminate information and material relating to curriculum, assessment and examinations.

The 1998 Order also outlines CCEA's governance and funding arrangements (para. 80), including the requirement for the submission of a costed work programme for approval by the Department. This is the mechanism that sets priorities and defines the practical

¹ [Education \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1998 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukni/1998/0001)

outworkings of CCEA's statutory duties on an annual basis, and includes the stipulation that CCEA is 'not to carry out any activities or incur any expenditure in any period except in accordance with the work programme approved under this Article in respect of that period'².

Our Structure

To deliver its statutory duties, CCEA is organised into four broad areas:

- Chief Executive's Office;
- Education Directorate;
- the Finance and Corporate Services Directorate; and
- CCEA Regulation.

Each area has discrete business units that are subdivided into operational teams. More detail on CCEA's organisational structure and areas of work can be found in Appendix 1.

Education Directorate - Curriculum & Assessment

CCEA's work in relation to curriculum and assessment supports schools and the Department of Education in delivery of their statutory duties, as outlined below.

The revised Northern Ireland Curriculum was introduced in 2007 and covers all 12 years of compulsory education. It is subject to a range of legislative requirements for curriculum, assessment and reporting. The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 is the primary legislation that specifies the statutory elements of the curriculum at each key stage.³

This includes:

- defining the Areas of Learning and requiring schools to teach the minimum content for these and the core syllabus for Religious Education;
- the acquisition, development and assessment of the Cross-Curricular Skills of Communication, Using Mathematics and Using ICT and of Other Skills; and
- assessment in each school year, including the Levels of Progression for Key Stages 1, 2 and 3.

The detail of curriculum, assessment and reporting requirements, such as defining the minimum content for the Areas of Learning, sits in a range of subsidiary legislation.

² [Education \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1998 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/2006/1915/contents)

³ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/2006/1915/contents>

CCEA is committed to ensuring that all pupils have access to the curriculum. In support of this we ensure compliance with other associated statutory duties, and support schools' compliance and that of the Department of Education (DE), including in relation to:

- Special Educational Needs (SEN);
- Shared Education;
- Wellbeing;
- Irish Medium;

In addition, we provide support for areas of the curriculum that link to wider legislative requirements and identified priority areas such as Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), Ulster Scots and Active Citizenship.

Education Directorate - Qualifications & Examinations

In line with its statutory remit, CCEA has responsibility for the design, development and delivery of qualifications. This includes the development of new qualifications and the requirement to review and revise existing qualifications to ensure they remain up to date and in line with education policy. CCEA offers a diverse range of qualifications such as GCSEs, GCE A and AS levels, Entry Level Qualifications and some Vocational Qualifications. It should be noted that, as an awarding organisation, CCEA operates within an open market for qualifications but currently delivers over 90% total market share of general qualifications to learners in Northern Ireland⁴. CCEA consults with a range of stakeholders during the design stage of a qualification, including where appropriate industry and employers, as outlined in para. 79 of the 1998 Order.

CCEA's remit includes the conduct of examinations and assessments. On average, each year 58,000 students receive a GCSE, AS, or A level results from CCEA, with over 850,000 examination papers and assessments marked and moderated. This work is supported by our professional teaching workforce, with an average of 5,000 examiners and moderators contracted each year. The delivery of examinations and assessments in schools require a range of internal cyclical processes including question paper production, a timetable of examinations, training of examiners and moderators, setting standards, marking, awarding and issuing grades. In addition, we have a range of services such as post results, compliance and appeals.

⁴ GCSE - 97%, A/AS- 88% for 2021

We support the delivery of our qualifications through the provision of examination and support materials for schools (and for students and parents where appropriate).

The requirements for the design, delivery and development of our qualifications are set out in the General Conditions of Recognition (GCOR)⁵, which are regulatory requirements of recognised awarding organisations. These conditions are mostly common across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. They are a self-evaluation tool and an annual return is required. Regulatory authorities will carry out annual monitoring activities against specified conditions.

Regulation and Accreditation

CCEA Regulation regulates qualifications on behalf of the Department of Education and the Department for the Economy.

Legislative authority to carry out this function is set out in paragraphs 75 and 79 of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998⁶. In summary, CCEA Regulation's duties are to:

- develop and publish criteria for the accreditation of relevant external qualifications;
- accredit, where they meet such criteria, any such qualifications submitted for accreditation; and
- seek to ensure that the standards of examinations and assessments conducted by bodies or authorities in Northern Ireland are recognised as equivalent to the standards of examinations and assessments conducted by bodies or authorities exercising similar functions elsewhere in the United Kingdom (paragraph 79).

CCEA Regulation seeks to ensure fairness for all learners taking qualifications and that standards are upheld and maintained across qualification types to protect the portability of qualifications taken by NI learners. In doing so, CCEA Regulation seeks to align as much as possible with Ofqual and Qualifications Wales as this mitigates any risk to maintaining standards across qualifications and jurisdictions. This process also ensures that employers and the higher and further education sectors can have confidence that the certificated qualifications of applicants are an accurate reflection of their attainment.

We currently regulate 90 Awarding Organisations (AOs) recognised by CCEA Regulation, offering a wide range of qualifications in terms of type, level, size and including vocational, skills and general subject-focussed qualifications. Seven of the 90 regulated AOs are NI-only

⁵ <https://ccea.org.uk/regulation/information-awarding-organisations/general-conditions-recognition>

⁶ [Education \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1998 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

organisations, with the remaining operating across England, Wales and Northern Ireland and to some extent Scotland and Republic of Ireland.

There are around 7,500 qualifications available on the Regulated Qualifications Framework for use in Northern Ireland, including an average of approximately 2,500 different qualifications taken in Northern Ireland each year. Around 170,000 Vocational Qualification certificates are awarded by recognised awarding organisations annually. These certificates are awarded to learners in further education and schools, and to a lesser extent training organisations, employer led training and community groups.

Previously, CCEA Regulation operated on a three-country agreement with Ofqual in England and Qualifications Wales. While the three regulators continue to cooperate to ensure as close alignment as possible across the jurisdictions (for example in response to the Covid pandemic), policy divergence in recent years has resulted in an increasingly independent role for CCEA Regulation. For example, previously CCEA general qualifications were accredited by Ofqual and were aligned to general and subject criteria defined by QCA. However, in the most recent revision of GCSE and GCE specifications, CCEA Regulation took on the role of accrediting these qualifications.

Finance and Corporate Services Directorate

This directorate delivers a wide range of high quality services to internal and external users and is divided into five business unit:

- Finance and Business Assurance;
- ICT;
- Multimedia Learning Resources and Engagement (including Marketing & Communications);
- Operations Modernisation; and
- Resources (including Facilities and Human Resources).

These essential services include digital learning and teaching resources in support of curriculum and qualifications, stakeholder communications and the provision of secure ICT services for the delivery of qualifications and examinations. The Directorate also supports corporate governance and conducts the administration of Appeals, Complaints and Data Protection responsibilities.

Summary: Reflections on CCEA's Remit and Structure

CCEA is a unique educational body in the UK, bringing together the areas of curriculum, examinations, assessment and accreditation. The 1998 legislation outlining CCEA's statutory duties defines the separate aspects of CCEA's work, including: the delivery and conduct of examinations; the accreditation and approval of qualifications; and support for curriculum, examinations and assessment.

These distinct functions mean that CCEA is a complex organisation that operates in a range of different ways according to the context. For example, as an awarding organisation (AO), CCEA operates within an open market for qualifications alongside other AOs. As a Regulatory Authority, CCEA ensures equivalence of CCEA's (awarding organisation) qualifications such as GCSE, GCE with other awarding organisations such as AQA, Pearson, WJEC, OCR and monitors maintenance of standards.

There is not always an even balance in the resourcing and resource requirements of CCEA's different functions. For example, CCEA has an annual income of approximately £30m. In order to demonstrate the high level typical running costs of examinations, and referencing the 2019/20 year as a typical year, teams directly involved in examinations spent around £17m. A further £8.5m was spent on support costs and teams, primarily in support of CCEA's examinations functions including the CEO Office. Curriculum spend in 2019/20 was £2.7m while CCEA Regulation spent approximately £750k.

In order to fund this level of expenditure, CCEA's earned income in 2019-20 was £9.9m of which £9.2m related to examinations. The remaining £19m was funded by Grant from the Department of Education.

CCEA's legislation is now 24 years old and does not necessarily reflect current educational structures. For example, the 1998 legislation does not reflect the separation of departmental responsibilities in which schools are within the remit of the Department of Education whereas further education colleges are within the remit of the Department for the Economy. The creation of the Education Authority, which has a new and different remit to that of the Education and Library Boards, has also impacted CCEA.

The 1998 legislation also sets out CCEA's responsibilities in relation to learners under the age of 19 in further education and children aged two to four (i.e. learners outside the compulsory school age and the statutory curriculum).

The qualifications regulators in the UK and Republic of Ireland are underpinned by legislation outlining their powers and responsibilities. While there is a core of common responsibilities across jurisdictions, the legislation can vary quite widely in terms of detail

and the powers awarded to the regulator. Some countries include legislative cover for the regulator to take a more pro-active role in qualifications development and policy direction, for example by commissioning or restricting qualifications (Wales) and accrediting the learning programmes that lead to qualifications (Republic of Ireland). In England, Ofqual has a role in facilitating innovation but must ensure that there is an ‘appropriate’ number of regulated qualifications available, which means that it must balance a ‘reasonable level of choice’ for learners while ensuring that the number of similar qualifications is not excessive. CCEA Regulation has powers to develop and publish accreditation criteria ‘with the approval of the Department’⁷ and must also ensure equivalence of standards with qualifications taken elsewhere in the UK⁸.

In terms of CCEA’s structure and statutory duties, the impact of changes, across the education landscape within Northern Ireland and policy divergence across the UK, requires consideration internally as well as with other education partners. We should reflect on the experiences and lessons learned as a result of the adjustments and new ways of working needed to manage the pandemic situation. For CCEA to continue to provide high quality products and services that meet the needs of all our schools and young people there will need to be a period of reflection and time to assess our needs. CCEA’s workforce must be appropriately skilled and agile to respond to emerging issues and priorities.

To summarise:

- CCEA’s structure does not prohibit execution of our statutory duties to a high standard. However, the nature of CCEA’s different statutory roles adds complexity to the delivery of its duties. A holistic assessment of the impact of policy divergence and changes to education landscape in NI is required to ensure CCEA’s structure is appropriate.
- An articulation of CCEA’s relationship and governance arrangements with both DE and DfE would be helpful.
- There is also a need to ensure that stakeholders are clear about CCEA’s function in relation to other education partners.
- Further consideration of expectations of CCEA’s support for the non-statutory phases of post-16 and early years is needed.
- A comparison of CCEA’s regulatory responsibilities with those of the other regulators is required.

⁷ [Education \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1998 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

⁸ [Education \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1998 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

- Workforce planning is required to consider how we remain an attractive employer and viable career option, for example for educationalists, IT and Multimedia specialists.

2. Importance of Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1

The Independent Review of Education Panel has asked CCEA to provide comment on the importance of the Foundation Stage and Key Stage One.

Context: The Northern Ireland Curriculum⁹

The Foundation Stage¹⁰ in primary education consists of Years 1 and 2. Teachers in the Foundation Stage build on the learning experiences that children bring to school from home, pre-school and other settings. In Foundation Stage, the children are provided with an appropriate programme of learning to develop their dispositions to learn alongside the skills and competencies which they will need to succeed in school and future life. Teachers deliver and interactive, practical curriculum which includes well-planned, challenging play and playful learning across all areas of the curriculum.

Key Stage 1 (primary school Years 3 and 4) builds on the learning experiences provided in Foundation Stage¹¹. The flexibility of the curriculum gives teachers the opportunity to provide a broad and balanced curriculum for all children by providing learning experiences that are worthwhile, challenging, relevant and enjoyable. Teachers also provide a continued emphasis on personal, social and emotional development as well as an explicit emphasis on the development of the Cross-curricular Skills and Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities.

The Importance of the Foundation Stage

The creation of the Foundation Stage in the NI Curriculum was not new practice for many teachers. It represented good practice which was informed by local and global research. The Foundation Stage provides a carefully structured programme of development and learning, delivered through a flexible curriculum, which enables teachers to provide learning experiences that are appropriate and relevant to the children they teach.

The Foundation Stage aims to provide a learning programme which will:

- promote children's personal development;
- promote positive attitudes and dispositions to learning;
- promote children's Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities;
- encourage creativity and imagination;
- enable children to develop physical confidence and competence;

⁹ [The Northern Ireland Curriculum Primary | CCEA](#)

¹⁰ [Foundation Stage | CCEA](#)

¹¹ [Key Stages 1 & 2 | CCEA](#)

- develop children's curiosity and interest in the world around them;
- enable children to communicate in a variety of ways; and
- motivate children to develop literacy and numeracy skills in meaningful contexts.

These are crucial to give children the best start to statutory education. Teachers develop the 'whole child' through a play-based and playful approach to their teaching which ensures that effective learning takes place both emotionally and cognitively.

The Importance of Key Stage 1

Key Stage 1 comprises of Years 1 and 2 in primary education. The flexibility of the curriculum gives teachers the opportunity to choose content and learning experiences, which are worthwhile, challenging, relevant, playful and enjoyable to the children. Teachers build and develop the experiences provided at the Foundation Stage with a continued emphasis on personal, social and emotional development as well as an explicit emphasis on the development of the Cross-curricular Skills and Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities. Children should be provided with opportunities to develop these skills through active, hands-on learning across all areas of the curriculum.

Learning at Key Stage 1 should continue to foster the intellectual, social, emotional, physical, cultural, moral and spiritual development of children by:

- providing opportunities for children to continue to develop the transferable skills of Communication, Using Mathematics, Using ICT and Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities through the opportunities provided;
- developing self-confidence and self-esteem;
- developing the skills necessary to enable children to participate as contributing members of groups;
- providing opportunities for children to engage in exploration, problem-solving and decision-making;
- promoting, in children, positive attitudes to learning to help them make informed and responsible choices and decisions;
- continuing to develop children's creativity;
- using a range of strategies, including thematic approaches, in a wide range of contexts which are worthwhile, challenging, relevant and enjoyable;
- developing a greater depth of knowledge, understanding and skills through a wide range of contexts; and

- providing opportunities for children to express their individual needs and to make realistic choices.

Evidence Base

With the benefit of a global perspective, the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) recognises that early childhood education and care is a critical foundation for future learning and assists with the development of both cognitive and non-cognitive skills, which is vital for the success in school and in later years. Research also suggests that much of the benefit for children's future learning and development depends on the quality of early years services¹².

The Education Endowment Foundation also finds that in England, gaps between more affluent children and their peers emerge before the age of five, so efforts to support children's learning in the early years are likely to be particularly important for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, that attainment at the end of primary school is impacted by the quality (rather than the quantity) of pre-school provision.¹³

Early Years and Pre-School

CCEA has produced *Curricular Guidance for Pre-School Education* which outlines the range of learning opportunities which children of this age and stage of development should have through play and other relevant experiences.¹⁴ All settings, that receive funding from the Department of Education as part of the Pre-School Education Programme, should adhere to this guidance.

There are many providers of support in the early years and in pre-school there are separate support structures for statutory and non-statutory sectors. The *Fair Start* Action Plan¹⁵ highlights the need to review and evaluate early years provision to clarify roles and responsibilities and ensure consistency of provision.

Within the constraints of the existing pre-school structure, consideration could be given to establishing a professional development strategy for all pre-school practitioners to ensure access to quality professional development.

¹² [Starting Strong 2017: Key OECD Indicators on Early Childhood Education and Care | READ online \(oecd-ilibrary.org\)](#)

¹³ [Early Years | EEF \(educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk\)](#)

¹⁴ [Curricular Guidance for Pre-School Education | CCEA](#)

¹⁵ [A Fair Start \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

3. Nature of Curriculum and Assessment at Key Stages 4 and Post 16

The Independent Review of Education Panel has asked CCEA to provide comment on the importance of the nature of curriculum and assessment at Key Stage Four and post-16, including assessment of the GCSE model, ensuring there is a promotion of softer skills and that these are assessed / valued in an appropriate manner. This should include high level detail on different models used in other nations and what learning there might be for Northern Ireland.

Nature of Curriculum at Key Stage 4 and Post 16

Key Stage 4 Curriculum

At Key Stage 4¹⁶ (post-primary Years 11 and 12), schools need to meet the statutory requirements of the Northern Ireland Curriculum and the Key Stage 4 Entitlement Framework¹⁷ (HMSO 2006; 2007; 2011). Pupils should be provided with a child-centred, broad and balanced curriculum experience to enable them to build on their learning from Key Stage 3.

At Key Stage 4, pupils meet the statutory curriculum requirements through compulsory Areas of Learning and a range of optional applied and/or general qualifications. At Key Stage 4, the minimum content is only specified for Learning for Life and Work and Physical Education and there are also requirements for Religious Education. Schools also need to ensure there are opportunities for developing and assessing pupils' progression in:

- the Cross-Curricular Skills;
- Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities (TSPC); and
- subject knowledge and understanding.

The qualifications undertaken by learners are normally Level 1 and 2 qualifications, although Entry Level qualifications are available for those young people working below Level 1 at Key Stage 4 and include qualifications that support the minimum content requirements for Learning for Life and Work and Physical Education. There are also Entry Level Mathematics and English Qualifications.

¹⁶ [Key Stage 4 | CCEA](#)

¹⁷ [Entitlement Framework | Department of Education \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

For system metrics, GCSE English Language and Mathematics are usually the proxy subjects for meeting the communication and using mathematics skills requirements at Key Stage 4.

One challenge for school curriculum planners is to provide for the needs of pupils while being responsive to the evolving needs of our society, economy and environment. This will mean considering both the requirements of the statutory curriculum and the potential for offering additional experiences that meet pupils' pastoral and other needs. CCEA has created advice and support materials for schools to support curriculum design at Key Stage 4¹⁸.

The Northern Ireland Curriculum encourages a focus on active learning methodologies. CCEA therefore encourages teachers to create assessments in meaningful contexts, which should involve using formative assessment strategies such as Assessment for Learning. *The Guidance on Teaching, Learning and Assessment at Key Stage 4*¹⁹ document supports schools in meeting the statutory requirements for the Northern Ireland Curriculum and assessment at Key Stage 4 and the Entitlement Framework. It provides guidance on how the curriculum can be embedded within qualification subjects.

Key Stage 5/Post 16 Curriculum

Key Stage 5 is a label used to describe the two years of education for students aged 16-18. In Northern Ireland, it is the phase of education often referred to as post-16. At post-16, most young people will stay in education either in school or through Further Education Colleges. Young people can choose from a number of qualifications, usually at Level 3 on the Regulated Qualifications Framework, including those that offered by CCEA such as GCE A Levels.

At Post-16, most pupils will be working towards a range of general and/or vocational qualifications. This is not a compulsory stage of education and there is no prescribed statutory curriculum. However, pupils should still experience 'a balanced and broadly based curriculum which: promotes the spiritual, emotional, moral, cultural, intellectual and physical development of pupils at the school and thereby of society; and prepares such pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life by

¹⁸ [Curriculum Planning and Design | CCEA](#)

¹⁹ [Guidance on Teaching, Learning and Assessment at Key Stage 4](#)

equipping them with appropriate knowledge, understanding and skills' (Education Order (NI) 2006).

Entitlement Framework

The Entitlement Framework aims to ensure that every post-primary pupil (14-19) has access to a broad and balanced curriculum and to a range of general and vocational routes, regardless of where they live or which school they attend.

It is embedded in legislation (The Education (NI) Order 2006) and guarantees young people access to a minimum number of courses at Key Stage 4 and Post-16. The courses available must be relevant and have clear progression pathways. One third of the courses must be designated as 'general' and one third must be 'applied'.

Nature of Assessment at Key Stage 4 and Post 16

Formal summative assessment for learners at Key Stage 4 and Post 16 is primarily through courses leading to accredited qualifications.

CCEA's Qualifications Offer

CCEA offers a range of qualifications, including GCSE, GCE, Entry Level and a small number of more vocationally related qualifications. CCEA consulted with relevant stakeholders, including educators, higher education and where appropriate industry and employers, to ensure that the content and assessment is both relevant to learners and fit for purpose. CCEA continues to keep its portfolio of qualifications under review to ensure that there are qualifications available in new and emerging areas of industry. Qualifications development is subject to resource and approval by the Department of Education and Department for the Economy.

CCEA's GCSE, GCE and Entry Level portfolio is diverse, including unique qualifications that address identified local needs and priorities such as:

- GCSE Agriculture and Land Use;
- GCSE and GCE Digital Technology;
- GCE Environmental Technology;
- GCSE and GCE Moving Image Arts;
- GCE Life & Health Sciences;
- GCE Software Systems Development;
- Entry Level and Level 1 and 2 Occupational Studies; and

- Entry Level Life Skills.

As well as subject specifications and assessment materials, we provide a range of online resources to support teachers delivering our qualifications.

GCSE

CCEA offers 41 GCSE qualifications in a range of subjects. These qualifications, designed to suit students at Key Stage 4, are at Levels 1 and 2 on the Regulated Qualifications Framework. In each subject, students are encouraged to continue developing the Cross-Curricular Skills and the Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities. They also have opportunity to develop and apply subject specific and other skills that will benefit them in their future education, work and life.

The assessment structure of CCEA GCSEs varies depending on the nature of the qualification. Some qualifications are linear, with all assessments at the end of the two-year course. Others are unitised and have unit assessments available in year 1 of the two-year course. Qualifications are 100% examination or a mixture of examination and controlled assessment, with the exception of Art and Design and Contemporary Crafts as they are 100% controlled assessment. Controlled Assessments are internal assessments which have levels of control assigned to task setting, task taking and task marking. These controls will vary depending on the nature of the task and the subject and are defined in the specifications.

A Level

CCEA offers 31 GCE A level qualifications in a range of subjects. These qualifications, designed to suit students aged 16 and over, are at Level 3 on the Regulated Qualifications Framework. In each subject, the content builds on the broad objectives of the Northern Ireland Curriculum. Students deepen and draw together their knowledge and understanding through synoptic assessment. They also have opportunity to develop and apply subject specific and transversal skills that will benefit them in their future education, work and life, including, for example, at A2 opportunities to develop higher order thinking skills.

A Level is split into AS and A2 and qualifications are 100% examination or a mixture of examination and coursework. Coursework units are internal assessments which have levels of control assigned to task setting, task taking and task marking. These controls will vary depending on the nature of the task and the subject and are defined in the specifications.

Entry Level

CCEA's 12 Entry Level qualifications offer a total of over 150 units at Entry 1 to Entry 3. Familiar subject areas such as Mathematics, History and Science are available, as well as vocationally related and skills for life options.

These qualifications aim to prepare learners for further study, work and adult life. They facilitate a range of learning styles for those working below or towards Level 1 on the Regulated Qualifications Framework. They are competency based, emphasising learning by doing. This helps learners develop the transferable skills needed in a changing and dynamic working environment. Learners also gain subject knowledge and independent living skills.

There are no external examinations; assessment is based on learners completing a portfolio of evidence that they have met the criteria. Teachers and learners can choose the assessment method that best suits their needs and resources. Learners can gain recognition at overall qualification level and/or at unit level. For those being awarded a qualification level, their certificate will also indicate their performance at unit level, i.e. acknowledging the 'spikey profile' some young people may have across a range of competencies.

Vocational Qualifications

CCEA offers a very limited number of vocationally related qualifications at Level 1, 2 and 3 of the Regulated Qualifications Framework. They include Preparation for Adult Life and Performance Skills certificates Level 1 and 2. There are no external examinations; assessments are based on learners completing a portfolio of evidence or a performance that demonstrates that they have met the criteria.

CCEA also offers other general qualifications such as Occupational Studies which are popular.

Assessment of the GCSE Model

CCEA's Curriculum Monitoring Report 2018-19²⁰ found that there was a disconnect from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4 in some schools, with a shift from the skills emphasis at earlier key stages to an increased focus on content and examination preparation at Key Stage 4. Post-primary representatives were concerned about the balance of the curriculum – in particular, the balance between subject-specific knowledge, understanding and skills – and continuity and progression between Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4 and post-16, with a lack of specified frameworks for progression in key concepts across the key stages. There were also

²⁰ [Curriculum Monitoring Programme Report 2018-19.pdf \(ccea.org.uk\)](https://www.ccea.org.uk/curriculum-monitoring-programme-report-2018-19.pdf)

concerns in some schools that content was being concentrated into Key Stage 4 and that the assessment methods used may not be consistent with a skills focus.

These findings were not new or unique to this report. They are also echoed in publications such as the OECD *Review of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Northern Ireland* (p. 71-72)²¹ and the 2013 review of qualifications. The work carried out to date by CCEA in response to the 2013 review is outlined below; this work included consideration of the models used in other jurisdictions such as Estonia, New Zealand, Scotland, The Netherlands, Canada and Singapore.

In 2013, at the request of former Education Minister John O'Dowd MLA, CCEA undertook a review of GCSE and A-level Qualifications. In the subsequent report a recommendation was made that "work should begin on the longer-term vision for learning, assessment and qualifications in Northern Ireland."

As a result, Professor Norman Apsley was commissioned by John O'Dowd MLA to establish an Expert Group to review the 14-19 qualifications system in Northern Ireland and develop a longer-term vision for qualifications here. Peter Weir MLA replaced John O'Dowd but agreed that Professor Apsley's work should continue and the final report of the Expert Group, *A Future for Qualifications in Northern Ireland*, was submitted to the Department of Education in December 2016.

The key findings included:

- Changes to the qualifications system cannot be considered in isolation. Change must be considered as part of the wider education continuum and the broader changes being made to this continuum.
- The Expert Group believes that consideration should be given to reviewing the purpose of the GCSE qualification.
- The Expert Group believes that there is a need for a new qualifications system for 14-to-16-year-olds in Northern Ireland.
- Consideration should be given to the development of a new accountability system that would assess achievement at the system level. This should be built into the design of the new qualifications system.

²¹ [https://www.oecd.org/unitedkingdom/Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education Northern Ireland.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/unitedkingdom/Reviews%20of%20Evaluation%20and%20Assessment%20in%20Education%20Northern%20Ireland.pdf)

- Continuous assessment from the age of 14-16 should be prioritised over end-point assessment system. This new assessment should support teaching and learning, not direct it.
- Consideration should be given to the different approaches to assessment delivery within the new system.
- All qualifications should have the necessary rigour, standard, portability and transferability to be accepted by a range of stakeholders, including employers, further education and higher education, both in Northern Ireland and elsewhere within the 'global market' place.

Taking forward the recommendations in Professor Apsley's report, the Department of Education asked CCEA in June 2017 *'to begin work to establish how the recommendations from the Expert Group could be implemented to inform formal advice to be given to a Minister'*.

Having considered the recommendations of the Expert Group and explored education systems in a range of countries including Estonia, New Zealand, Scotland, The Netherlands, Canada and Singapore. The CCEA Report was presented to DE in May 2018 and offered three options. (A hard copy of this report has been provided for the panel). The options were:

1. Retain but amend the current GCSE framework - This would involve working within the current GCSE framework to follow, as fully as possible, the principles and recommendations of the Expert Group, including establishing the creation of a 'Core 4' of subjects to include English Language, Mathematics, Digital Technology and the new 'GCSE Local and Global Perspectives' qualification to replace the GCSE Learning for Life and Work.
2. Introduce a Northern Ireland General Certificate (NIGC) – This would encompass a range of new examinations and assessment arrangements. In this option, the NIGC would replace the GCSE qualification brand, inheriting many of the GCSE principles and controls, only for the Core 4 (English, Mathematics, Digital Technology and Local and Global Perspectives). Remaining qualifications in the extended curriculum would be drawn from those already on offer at Level 2.
3. Introduce a Northern Ireland General Certificate (NIGC) alongside a closed market for qualifications - This option differs with Option 2 in that it proposes the establishment of a single state provider for all qualifications in Northern Ireland, for

both the Core 4 and the Extended Curriculum. Only qualifications offered by the single provider could be taken in Northern Ireland by publicly funded schools.

No further action was initiated following the submission of the report.

Points to note:

- Establishment of a Core 4 of subjects: English, Mathematics, Digital Technology and Local and Global Perspectives.
- Local and Global Perspectives would be a brand-new subject (but based on the statutory curriculum requirements for Learning for Life and Work and for Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities), with scope for assessment through an extended project.
- A credit system would be used to contribute to attainment of the Northern Ireland General Certificate (Options 2 and 3).
- Introduction of baseline assessments in literacy, numeracy and digital at the beginning of Year 8, the beginning of Year 11 and the end of Year 12 to measure cohort strength.
- Consideration of different approaches to assessment and delivery.
- Introduction of a transcript of achievement to provide information on individual learner performance to parents, potential employers and FE/HE.
- A proportion of young people will not achieve their GCSE English and Mathematics but may be competent in aspects of the subjects which are relevant life and work skills.

Considerations

While some of the complexities and considerations surrounding any fundamental reform of a qualifications system are discussed in the following section on portability and comparability, CCEA believes that there may be themes contained within the 2018 CCEA report that have relevance today in thinking about the future vision for examinations at Key Stage 4.

An important consideration is that 'curriculum' in a school should encompass much more than the qualifications on offer or the number taken by a learner. This includes:

- the components of pastoral provision that affect pupils' experiences of school;
- non-academic and enrichment activities;
- the nurture and development of attitudes and dispositions;
- all that a school can provide, considering any constraints and how its provision regularly changes to suit pupils' needs; and
- the experiences of pupils themselves, sometimes called the 'hidden curriculum'.

Consideration should be given to the aspects of a learner's experiences that need to be assessed and how can this be done validly and reliably. For example, to value the continued development of 'softer skills', do they need to be formally assessed?

CCEA's *Curriculum Planning and Design* and *Guidance on Teaching, Learning and Assessment at Key Stage 4* resources discuss how these issues can be addressed in a classroom and school context.

Narrowing pupils' experiences or specialising too soon can limit their options later; therefore, it is important that the curriculum provides access to a range of experiences and that routes to future study and employment remain open. One issue for potential consideration is whether our qualifications, at Post 16 especially, could be smaller in size to enable students to experience a broader range of subjects and skills.

It is also important to think more broadly than the GCSE 'brand' and to promote parity of esteem between academic and vocational routes for learners. For example, CCEA offers a diverse range of GCSE and GCE qualifications, including unique qualifications that address identified local needs and priorities. Some of these qualifications could be more suited to a vocational qualification approach with alternative forms of assessment, and as such meet the needs of students who can demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skills more effectively in a practical way.

This would require careful consideration of the range of measures and indicators that are used to determine the success of the education system for learners at age 16. Other jurisdictions have implemented or are considering broader indicators such as value-added, learner destination, wellbeing etc.

Any reformation of the qualifications landscape would represent a major systemic change and has significant implementation and resourcing implications; for example, it would require consideration of:

- The compulsory school leaving age
- An appropriate range of valued pathways
- The full range of current providers and their role in the provision
- Apprenticeships
- Transition years or transition points

- Meeting the needs of all learners including SEN and Irish Medium – change must be at same time
- Appropriate programmes that include specific areas and skills developments as well as aspects of wellbeing and preparation for life skills
- Resources
- Considerable engagement/consultation to establish/confirm the qualifications framework and qualification types
- Engagement with all stakeholders including employers/industry and general communications campaign to raise awareness and build confidence in new qualifications
- Engagement with other regulators/HE to ensure acceptance/equivalence of qualifications for progression and portability
- Teacher professional development
- Review/revision of curriculum delivery in all settings
- Development or revision of specific qualifications
- Provision of accompanying teaching resources
- Regulatory approval and accreditation

4. Importance of consistency with England (or wider UK) in terms of portability of qualifications and if there is scope / appetite for change.

The Independent Review of Education Panel has asked CCEA to provide comment on the importance of consistency with England (or wider UK) in terms of portability of qualifications or if there is scope / appetite for change.

Context

It is the statutory responsibility, through the 1998 Education (Northern Ireland) Order²², of CCEA to ensure that standards are maintained as equivalent across similar qualifications in the UK. It is through maintaining standards that fairness and consistency are achieved for all learners in Northern Ireland (particularly when NI has an open qualification market) and how the portability of qualifications taken by NI learners is ensured.

CCEA maintains equivalent standards in the award of GCSE and A levels through collaboration with regulators in England and Wales during each examination series. In an examination series, grade outcomes in subjects are carefully monitored, using evidence such as statistical information, to ensure that grading is justified. This process is known as maintaining standards through comparable outcomes and is an approach shared across the regulators of GCSEs and AS/A levels. Before results are confirmed and issued, the English, Welsh and NI Regulators meet to share the outcomes in each jurisdiction (for NI, these will be CCEA outcomes) and discuss any anomalies that may suggest unwarranted grade creep.

Portability

Portability is derived from confidence in the qualifications taken by NI learners and understanding and recognition of these. CCEA qualifications need to be accepted across the UK and globally. This in turn secures opportunities for learners holding CCEA qualifications and enables them to compete on an even playing field for higher education places and employment. The close working of CCEA Regulation with other UK regulators is critical to the acceptance of CCEA qualifications, to ensure there is comparability in the design principles and a shared approach to awarding qualifications and outcomes that is acceptable and can withstand scrutiny.

²² [Education \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1998 – Section 79\(c\)](#)

Scope and Appetite for Change

In the future, there may be appetite for changes to qualifications at Level 2 (i.e. those taken mostly at Key Stage 4). If the education landscape changed to remove the need for high stakes qualifications at Key Stage 4, this would enable more flexibility in the nature of the qualification and the assessment structure, and could facilitate a better progression from the Key Stage 3 curriculum. This change could include the removal of formal assessment for all Level 2 qualifications or with exceptions, for example for a defined list of core subjects. However, any change done in isolation from other parts of the UK, would not be without major risks, for example in terms of portability.

Divergence from the recognised qualification brands carries risks. GCSE and A Levels are qualifications taken by large numbers of learners and operate across the three jurisdictions so are easily recognised by employers and Higher Education (HE) providers. An established brand such as GCSE carries shared understanding amongst decision makers, for example shared characteristics and design and shared understanding of a standard or grading scale. This allows it to be easily transferred across the UK and globally. To change these radically without changing the brand name could be seen to mislead the users of these. For example, GCSEs are currently subject to review in Wales, to align them with the new Welsh skills-based curriculum. Should the design differ radically, the title of the new reviewed qualifications may have to change to differentiate between the GCSEs taken in Wales and those in England and NI.

To mitigate such risks, a comprehensive design and development programme would have to be implemented. This could include establishing new subject criteria, qualifications criteria and design principles to ensure a coherent suite of qualifications that are of the appropriate standard, are fit for purpose and produce reliable and valid outcomes. In tandem, a programme of engagement with a range of stakeholders, including higher education representative bodies and employers, would have to be implemented to give confidence in the validity and robustness of any new NI qualifications and to promote shared understanding of outcomes. This would be critical to protect the interests of students.

Vocational Qualifications

The GCSE and A Level brands have been relatively stable, recognised brands for about 35 and 70 years respectively. For example, A Levels were introduced in 1951 as a standardised school-leaving qualification and GCSEs replaced O Levels and CSEs in 1987. The vocational qualifications landscape has been more 'dynamic'. In recent years, vocational

education has undergone substantial reforms across the UK, particularly in England, with the move away from National Occupational Standards (NOS), the introduction of the Trailblazer apprenticeships, the introduction of T Levels, and the funding review of qualifications at level 3 and below.

These developments may have an impact on the common standards that have applied across the UK's qualifications system and on the supply and recognition of vocational qualifications used at various levels and in a variety of educational settings in Northern Ireland. The Department for the Economy has commissioned CCEA Regulation to consider the implications of these changes and to explore the options for potential solutions for Northern Ireland (the 'Future of Vocational Qualifications' project). This work is ongoing.

Awarding and standards are complex and sensitive matters and CCEA would welcome the opportunity to discuss the associated issues in greater depth.

5. The Strengths and Weaknesses in the Current System

The Independent Review of Education Panel has asked CCEA to provide comment on the strengths and weakness of the current education system.

In this section CCEA sets out observations on the strengths and weaknesses, and the challenges and key issues to be addressed, in the current education system in Northern Ireland.

System: Areas of Strength and Challenge

- Northern Ireland has strong GCSE and A levels results **but** also has the highest levels of underachievement and lowest number with a University Degree in the UK.
- There are strong linkages between communities and the education system **but** demands for sectoral-based education systems and a lack of revenue funding create significant service pressures.
- The devolved system of decision making allows for local solutions **but** can hinder progress in introducing system wide changes.
- The current system of examinations has broad support **but** wider exam reforms and the needs of the local economy mean that change is required.
- International studies demonstrate high performance at primary level in Northern Ireland **but** there is little or no local data available at system level to support policy or curriculum development.
- There is a strong culture of self-evaluation in schools **but** the industrial relations environment can hinder change.

Curriculum, Assessment and Qualifications: Areas of Strength and Challenge

In line with CCEA statutory duty to keep the curriculum under review, a refreshed Curriculum Monitoring Programme²³ was delivered in 2018/19. The purpose of this first stage of the programme was designed to engage with teachers and principals in relation to curriculum, assessment and qualifications and use the responses to inform CCEA's future planning and support.

We sought views on:

- the implementation of the curriculum – the benefits and challenges;

²³ [Curriculum Monitoring Programme | CCEA](#)

- progression and continuity across key stage transitions;
- the effectiveness and relevance of the Cross-Curricular Skills and Thinking Skills & Personal Capabilities; and
- assessing progress; and awareness/usefulness of CCEA curriculum support materials and areas to prioritise in the future.

Almost 1,000 teachers provided their feedback, with the key feedback highlighting that the aim, objectives and ethos of the curriculum remain sound, and it is time to refocus and reflect on the curriculum. Areas of strength and challenge were highlighted. Key feedback is included in the table below.

Key area	Feedback
Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The aim, objectives and ethos of the curriculum remain sound. • Time to refocus and reflect on the curriculum. • There may be a narrowing of pupils' curriculum experience at post-primary. • We need to ensure that the curriculum is accessible for pupils with SEN and other vulnerable groups. • There may be a need for further curriculum guidance to ensure effective pupil progression. • Digital skills within the curriculum needs to keep pace with societal and technological change, and teachers require access to professional development opportunities for digital skills
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are issues with how the curriculum can be validly and reliably assessed and measured. • Curriculum provision is being impacted by external assessment, with a focus on examination preparation at Key Stage 4 and Post-16. • The Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities may not be fully valued because there are not mechanisms in place for them to be assessed.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We need to ensure that qualifications recognise the achievement of all pupils and provide access to a range of pathways.
Progression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transitions remain a challenge, including from primary to post-primary. There is a disconnect between pupils' experience of the curriculum up to Key Stage 3 and qualifications at Key Stage 4.
<i>Support</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers want to remain up to date and have access to professional learning opportunities.

The disruption because of the pandemic has delayed the progress of a number of actions identified from the Curriculum Monitoring Programme. However, much work is underway or has been completed, including:

- Refocus on the delivery of a connected curriculum at KS3 which includes the key transition points in education (primary to post-primary school).
- Non-statutory subject progression pathways for six subjects in development.
- Curriculum planning guidance and exemplars for post-primary available.
- Enhanced digital skills support, increased engagement with education partners and new Digital Technology Programme Board established.
- Progression of pilots for online adaptive assessment project.
- Review of qualifications portfolio and consideration of converting a number of general qualifications to vocationally related qualifications.
- CCEA website redesigned and launched.
- Support communications strategy and increased communication of targeted area of support.

Other Challenges

The following challenges are also echoed in the Curriculum Monitoring report and/or have been derived from other stakeholder feedback as outlined below.

No statutory assessment in KS1-3.

- From the information contained in the School Omnibus survey of ²⁴ on the use and attitudes to commercial tests, it is estimated that schools may be spending in the region of £5 million per annum on commercial testing. This assessment data is not shared outside of each individual school.
- There is no longitudinal trend analysis of performance/underachievement.
- GCSEs are the only first proper system check of the entire system, unlike elsewhere in UK.
- There are no measures or indicators in place to determine 'whole child' wellbeing or skills linked to the NI curriculum; other jurisdictions are making progress in these areas.

Tensions between the curriculum and approaches in qualifications

There is tension between the underpinning principles of the curriculum, including a focus on developing skills and capabilities for life, and traditional approaches to qualifications.

- There is reliance on GCSEs and AS, A levels in the system.
- There is tension between qualifications and economic growth areas; for example, take up of digital is poor, despite this being a 10x Economy and digital spine economy focus.
- Online and innovative assessment developments - other jurisdictions are moving at pace, with Wales piloting GCSEs to move online and involve projects to match its new skills-based curriculum.
- Wales and England have had skills-based project qualifications for years. NI has a skills-based curriculum since 2007 yet there are limited skills-based qualifications offered by CCEA.
- Some qualifications are said to be 'content heavy' and therefore may limit the time in the classroom for skills development.
- The modular structure of most of CCEA NI qualifications leads to over-assessment at expense of the curriculum, with less time for experiential learning, skills development, extra-curriculum activities.

Equality of Access

²⁴ [School omnibus survey 2014 \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](https://education-ni.gov.uk/school-omnibus-survey-2014)

- There must be adequate funding and resource to ensure equality of access to the curriculum and appropriate qualifications for children and young people with special educational needs.
- There must be adequate funding and resource to ensure equality of access to the curriculum and appropriate qualifications for children and young people who are learning through the medium of Irish.
- There is a need for clear pathways for vocational/technical, applied and general, and there is a lack of parity of esteem.
- Traineeships and apprenticeships lack visibility; the focus is on academic progression to HE.
- There is a lack of a clear accountability framework to measure an agreed definition of success; for example, value added at key stages, appropriate progression pathways, linked to 10x Economy and digital spine.

CCEA's specific challenges

- Policy divergence across the UK presents a challenge. NI bodies need to be able to manage policy developments for NI in a robust manner with political cohesion on strategic aims.
- CCEA has a broad remit despite being a small organisation in comparison with partner bodies across the UK and in the Republic of Ireland.
- While there is a clear separation of CCEA's regulation and awarding organisation functions, this distinction is not always understood externally.
- There is a heavy reliance on English awarding bodies to provide vocational qualifications in NI. Ongoing developments in England such as the introduction of T Levels and the proposed defunding of BTECs may have a significant impact on the availability of vocational qualifications in NI. Currently CCEA is not placed to offer similar vocational qualifications even if there is a demand.

6. What the term “a single education system” means to CCEA and what are the key characteristics of a “single education system”

The Independent Review of Education Panel has asked CCEA to provide comment on what a single education system might entail.

The Northern Ireland Curriculum aims to empower young people to achieve their potential and to make informed and responsible decisions throughout their lives. Likewise, CCEA's mission is to enable the full potential of all learners to be achieved and recognised.

CCEA believes a single education system should focus on the effective and efficient use of the finite resources available to ensure that we achieve the best educational outcomes for all our children and young people.

CCEA would highlight that Northern Ireland already has aspects of a single education system, such as a single Education Authority, an Education and Training Inspectorate and one ICT infrastructure.

Some of the key factors to developing a single education system further are outlined below.

- A learner-centred system which has equity of access and provision at its core for all children and young people.
- A cohesive, flexible, developmentally appropriate, and inclusive education system for children and young people aged 2 to 19 where transitions can facilitate different entry and exit points and provide coherent pathways appropriate for the individual learner.
- Accountability measures that do not distort the delivery of the curriculum. The purposes of various assessment tools are known and there is a shared agreed understanding.
- Education that is supported and assessed through the appropriate and effective use of digital tools.
- A system that maximises the use of its financial and human resources to support learning and achieve the maximum impact for learners.
- A commitment to continuous improvement and professional development with agile structures and processes to respond to the need for change.
- An agreed, comprehensive and transparent performance framework through which the system can be accountable to learners, parents and the Assembly.

7. CCEA's Vision for Education

The Independent Review of Education Panel has asked CCEA to provide comment on its vision for education.

CCEA's Vision

CCEA's most recent Corporate Plan approved by Department of Education was for the period 2013-15. The organisation continues to set out its work through draft Corporate Plans approved by Council, the latest of which is available on the CCEA website²⁵. CCEA's mission and vision are largely unchanged and CCEA continues to deliver services based on an approved business plan agreed with DE on an annual basis. Our Corporate plan reflects the DE vision and aligns to the Draft Programme for Government.

Our vision for education is one which:

- supports intellectual, social, moral and spiritual development;
- fosters a love for learning in young people and adults alike;
- reflects the needs of individual learners, the community and the Northern Ireland economy;

and which ensures that:

- learning opportunities are available to everyone, and all our young people can develop skills that enable them to compete for jobs here and elsewhere;
- educational providers exhibit, in a transparent way, the very highest standards of corporate governance and accountability in their stewardship of public resources;
- customers and stakeholders are at the centre of educational providers' thinking, and their needs and expectations are met; and
- end-users of qualifications, particularly employers and higher education, have confidence in the integrity of the qualifications.

Setting Direction

There are a number of key driving policies that are shaping and building on our vision of the future.

- Fair Start report 2021²⁶

²⁵ <https://ccea.org.uk/document/1488>

²⁶ [A Fair Start – Final Report & Action Plan | Department of Education \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

- Children's Cooperation Act²⁷
- Draft proposals for 14-19 project Transition into Careers²⁸
- A Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland – Skills for a 10x Economy²⁹
- Children & Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education Framework³⁰
- OCED Scenarios for the Future of Schooling report³¹
- Legislation and the new SEN framework³²

The following sets out discussion in the areas which have been identified internally as areas of importance:

- Curriculum
- Assessment
- Regulation
- Engaging People
- System Evaluation

We have highlighted our vision for each area in summary in the boxes below each section.

Curriculum

Statutory Northern Ireland Curriculum

The Curriculum Monitoring Report 2019³³ highlighted that the central aim, objectives and ethos of the NI Curriculum are sound and schools have embedded these in pupils' learning, particularly at primary, where thematic approaches encourage connected learning.

The curriculum has been in place for 14 years and there is a need to refocus on the curriculum aim and objectives across all phases of education. CCEA's vision is for a collaborative refocus on the curriculum so that all teachers are confident in their

²⁷ [Children's Services Co Operation Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2015 | Department of Education \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/childrens-services-co-operation-act-northern-ireland-2015)

[Legislation and the new SEN Framework | Education Authority Northern Ireland \(eani.org.uk\)](https://www.eani.org.uk/legislation-and-the-new-sen-framework)

²⁸ [Transition of Young People into Careers \(14-19\) Project | Department for the Economy \(economy-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/transition-of-young-people-into-careers-14-19-project)

²⁹ [A Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland – Skills for a 10x Economy | Department for the Economy \(economy-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/a-skills-strategy-for-northern-ireland-skills-for-a-10x-economy)

³⁰ [Emotional Health and Wellbeing | Department of Education \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/emotional-health-and-wellbeing)

³¹ [Back to the Future of Education : Four OECD Scenarios for Schooling | Educational Research and Innovation | OECD iLibrary \(oecd-ilibrary.org\)](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/back-to-the-future-of-education-four-oecd-scenarios-for-schooling)

³² <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/review-special-educational-needs-and-inclusion>

³³ [Curriculum Monitoring Programme | CCEA](https://www.ccea.org.uk/curriculum-monitoring-programme)

pedagogical practice and delivery, and understand the principles that underpin the NI Curriculum.

Special Needs

The Curriculum Monitoring Programme 2019 highlighted that educators of pupils with SEN generally believe that the NI Curriculum is appropriate. They also feel that it has been embedded in pupils' learning in their schools, due to the flexibility to adapt the curriculum to pupils' specific needs. However, some respondents said that the minimum requirements of the NI Curriculum do not take account of learners with severe/moderate learning difficulties (SLD/MLD) and that schools can struggle with adapting curricular expectations. Some teachers said that it can be challenging to assess and track the progress of pupils with SEN, and qualifications do not always suit these learners. There were general concerns raised by all sectors including funding, resources, pupil absences, class size all of which are preventing teachers from fully implementing the NI Curriculum.

The 'Review of Quest *for learning* and Q Skills' 2020 gained very positive feedback from teachers and school leaders in special and mainstream schools. *"Responses suggested that Q Skills had a 'Considerable Impact' or 'Moderate Impact' on the teaching and learning of learners, the breadth of curricular experience, and learner progress. Qualitative comments indicated that the Q Skills provide a useful method for assessing learners and setting learners' individual targets."* The majority of those consulted agreed that the Q Skills Framework is fit for purpose and provides an appropriate assessment tool on the continuum between Quest *for learning* and the statutory Levels of Progression.

CCEA has undertaken a programme of liaising with colleagues across the educational sector including the Department of Education, the Education Authority and the Education and Training Inspectorate. This ensures that the CCEA provision is strategic, does not duplicate the EA provision and services and facilitates stakeholders' collaboration where appropriate.

Strategic planning is needed to ensure equity of access to services and provisions and funding for resources is available to support pupils with Special Educational Needs from early years to age 19.

CCEA recommends the following actions:

- The Q Skills assessment framework and associated recording software is completed based on the outcomes of the consultation with special and mainstream schools in

Spring 2020 and current research, such as Engagement 4 Learning by Barry Carpenter; and alignment with the new SEN Framework.

- The collaborative partnership continues the:
 - development of the functional curriculum guidance;
 - update sessions on Quest and Q Skills for EA colleagues; and
 - provision of materials on Quest and Q Skills for EA training on the new PLP software.
- Consultations with educational colleagues continue to ensure there is no duplication of provision.
- Completion of the development of the PEER Awards to provide acknowledgement of learning for pupils working below entry level 1.

Irish Medium

The Irish Medium Education (IME) sector delivers the statutory curriculum through Irish, adopting a language immersion approach. The benefits of this, including the ability to learn other languages more easily, enhancement of self-esteem, and broader appreciation of difference, were outlined in a ministerial statement to the Northern Ireland Assembly (Department of Education of Northern Ireland (DENI), 2014). According to Department of Education of Northern Ireland (DENI, 2020) there are 6, 816 pupils in IME schools or units in NI out of a total of 349, 536. Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta report that there are 92 schools providing IME across all educational phases (Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, 21 Jan 2020). As part of the January 2020 New Decade, New Approach³⁴ agreement, many of the proposals sought under an Irish Language Act would be implemented by amending existing laws rather than introducing a new standalone law.

CCEA has established an Irish Medium Programme Board to support the sector in 2020. Representatives include school leaders, sectoral bodies, the Education Authority and the Education Training Inspectorate.

Strategic planning is needed to ensure equity of access to services and provisions and funding for resources is available to support pupils in the Irish Medium sector from early years to age 19.

³⁴https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/856998/2020-01-08_a_new_decade_a_new_approach.pdf

Collaborative partnership continues to ensure shared and agreed priorities and avoid duplication of provision.

Emotional Health and Wellbeing

The Children & Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing (EHAW) in Education Framework was launched on 26 February 2021³⁵. The main emphasis of the Framework is to support educational settings to promote emotional health and wellbeing at a universal level, through a holistic, multi-disciplinary approach, and providing early and enhanced support for those children and young people who may be at risk or showing signs of needing further help.

At the request of the Department of Education, CCEA has published an online Wellbeing Hub which provides information to demonstrate how the curriculum supports pupils' learning and skills development in relation to wellbeing and mental health. It also directs users to CCEA and other external resources that support pupils' emotional health and wellbeing. The CCEA Wellbeing Hub is reviewed and revised as appropriate to take account of developments in mental health education.

CCEA has developed guidance for schools to support a whole-school approach to EHAW. This includes materials which have also been developed to exemplify how the curriculum supports the development of social and emotional learning competencies across the areas of learning, the skill of Communication and the Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities. By taking a whole school approach to EHAW, and adopting the principles described in the CCEA guidance, schools can use a self-evaluation process to develop provision that is most effective for their own contexts.

CCEA is aware that other jurisdictions are taking interesting approaches to wellbeing. For example, school reports to parents are required to include development of skills, plus wellbeing information, alongside qualification grades. In these instances, the number of examinations reported on have been reduced to provide time for other activities. This approach focuses on a well-rounded education rather than examination results. CCEA recommends such an approach could be considered in NI and feature in a new accountability framework.

³⁵ [Emotional Health and Wellbeing | Department of Education \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/emotional-health-and-wellbeing)

In recent engagements with young people, they have expressed the desire for an education system which is centred on the importance of their wellbeing and mental health, rather than examination outcomes and ensures appropriate content for today's world and recognises their achievements.

CCEA recommends that a review of the education system should be holistic and includes a consideration of the identified need in NI to focus on issues relating to mental health.

Other Curriculum Areas

While most aspects of the curriculum remain sound and relevant for our children and young people today, there are aspects of the curriculum that require review and further consideration. Examples of this include emerging controversial and sensitive issues and CCEA must provide an agile response to support schools in their delivery of these aspects of the curriculum. Other areas which require prompt action include Digital Skills and Modern Languages; both are covered below.

Digital Skills

Using ICT is one of the three Cross-Curricular Skills at the heart of the curriculum. Developing children's digital skills encourages them to handle and communicate information, solve problems, pose questions and be creative in using digital technology.

Digital technology incorporates aspects of computer science and information technology. It explores how we can use technology to create, store, process, analyse and present information in a digital context. This includes computer architecture, networks, web technology, digital media, programming tools and software applications.

Digital technology affects many parts of our lives, from work and travel to entertainment and banking. There is also a growing demand for workers with specialist digital skills. The government estimates that we will need 1.2 million new technical and digitally skilled workers by 2022 to satisfy future skills needs. The Minister for the Economy recently (January 2022) indicated that GCSE ICT should be a compulsory element of education.

We developed our innovative GCE Software Systems Development to support schools meeting the Entitlement Framework requirements and help address the skills gap of the

future workforce. More recently we developed GCSE and GCE Digital Technology qualifications that will also support the digital skills gaps.

As part of our ongoing work, we have established a digital programme board with key experts, school leaders and educational technologists to ensure that we maintain and build upon digital skills that have been gained through the pandemic.

One of the major challenges facing education is ensuring adequate confidence and capability to develop digital skills that our young people need. This is a challenge when there is no ITT programme for digital/computer science teachers in NI.

Our educational eco-system needs to be underpinned by a strong and robust digital infrastructure both in schools and in our communities. During periods of remote learning the common concern of educationalists was the digital divide and inequalities experienced through digital poverty in our communities.³⁶

A series of high-profile reports has identified teacher confidence and expertise as a critical enabler of success in the future. The COVID19 pandemic forced teacher professional learning in the area of educational technology to support remote learning.

To support digital skills progression through the key stages it may require discrete content delivered by specialists, especially at Key Stage 3. This will also enable young people to make informed decisions about qualifications options for digital technology.

CCEA believes that all education partners ie ITT providers, ETI, DE, DfE and EA need to support initial and continued teacher professional learning in digital skills.

Modern Languages

Take up of languages qualifications has been in decline since 2014. Research by Jones 2020³⁷ suggests that additional language acquisition offers significant cognitive as well as social and economic benefits, and that young learners have a particular capacity to learn a new language successfully. Although in Scotland and in England learning an additional language is a statutory part of the curriculum in primary schools, in Northern Ireland this is

³⁶ [‘Left to their own devices’: the inequality of homeschooling - Stranmillis University College | A College of Queen's University Belfast](#)

³⁷ [Jones, Sharon \(2020\) Finding Our True North: On Languages, Understanding and Curriculum in Northern Ireland - Stranmillis University College | A College of Queen's University Belfast](#)

not yet the case. Jones 2020 further asserts that “NI has one of the shortest periods of exposure in formal education to additional language learning in Europe, given that it is compulsory only at KS3”

The Primary Modern Languages Programme (PMLP), established in 2007 and offered in approximately half of our primary schools, ended in 2015. In 2019, the inaugural *Languages Trends Northern Ireland*³⁸ report (British Council, 2019) found that 55% of the primary schools it surveyed (25% of primary schools overall), offered some language learning provision.

From 2007, the impact of the disapplication of a requirement for all pupils to take an additional language at GCSE has been a steady decline in the uptake of Modern Languages both at GCSE and A Level. At GCSE, between 2010 and 2018, while entries for Spanish increased by 16%, examination entries fell overall by 19%, with significant falls in Irish (- 8%), German (-18%) and French (- 40%) (British Council, 2019, p.6). At GCE A level, since 2010, there has been a decline in entries in all the main languages (French - 40%; German - 29%; Spanish and Irish - 6%) (British Council, 2019, p. 31).

CCEA is currently undertaking a review of current language provision. This will provide a report and recommendations on the future of languages. This work will consider all recent research into Modern Languages and will seek to provide a comprehensive plan to further promote and develop languages in Northern Ireland schools. The report is due to be complete by March 2022.

In December 2021, CCEA established a programme board for Modern Languages to consider the issues within Northern Ireland reflecting on the Language Trends report. The purpose of the Modern Languages Programme Board (MLPB) is to advise on matters relating to curriculum support and to qualifications in the development of Modern Languages in the Northern Ireland (NI) education sector (primary and post-primary).

CCEA is committed to doing all that it can, within its remit, to reverse the downward trend by seeking to modernise and promote our languages portfolio, and by identifying solutions in collaboration with all stakeholders.

³⁸ [Language Trends Northern Ireland | British Council](#)

There is a need to ensure that fresh approaches to language learning are adopted to ensure that our young people can flourish. This will require further investment in an overarching modern languages strategy which would include teacher education and would be linked to progression pathways that align with a global economy and the NI 10x strategy.

Assessment

Key Stage Assessment

From our Curriculum Monitoring report 2019³⁹, we know that teachers in Northern Ireland use and see the value of a wide range of assessment methods to support learning, and that Assessment for Learning is well embedded. The Levels of Progression are used and valued more widely at primary than post-primary, and teachers who engage fully with the statutory assessment materials recognise that they provide useful pathways through the skills. Post-primary teachers reported that they had concerns about the accuracy and reliability of teacher assessment and the breadth of the Levels of Progression, as well as the availability of reliable and robust assessment information. They also indicated preference for summative assessment methods such as class tests and commercial assessments to quantify pupils' attainment and progress, particularly when assessment outcomes are used for accountability purposes.

The prolonged period of industrial action (from 2013) has also impacted on engagement with, and the implementation of, statutory assessment arrangements.

As part of the settlement of the union action by teachers and schools, DE developed a *Transformation Programme – Review of Statutory Assessment*. This included the appointment of seconded school leaders to the EA to support the implementation. The Transformation project has been delayed because of the pandemic and disruption to education. More recently, CCEA has engaged with the Department of Education on the assessment needs. CCEA is currently writing a report that considers formative and summative assessment and includes a range of options for statutory assessment. The report and other associated documents will form the starting point for discussions at stakeholder level.

³⁹ [Curriculum Monitoring Programme | CCEA](#)

CCEA will also explore the viability of using the current online adaptive test project as a potential tool for end of Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 assessments and also the range of data that could be made available for analysis at school and individual level.

Computer Adaptive Assessments

CCEA recognises that in line with previous DE reports, many schools are spending considerable amounts purchasing commercial based assessments.

At present, CCEA is developing and piloting online literacy and numeracy assessments bespoke to the Northern Ireland Curriculum⁴⁰. We have designed these adaptive diagnostic assessments to be a useful educational tool for schools to support and inform teaching and learning. The assessments adjust to individual ability, maximising equality of access for all pupils, including those with special educational needs (SEN) and those who learn through the medium of Irish.

A key focus of the pilot is the development of a range of outcomes and reports, which will include standardised scores, percentiles, stanines and detailed individual diagnostic reports on pupils' strengths and areas for development. This detailed data is intended to inform teaching and learning, school evaluation and the monitoring of progress over time.

This year, the assessments are available to pupils in Year 8 and Year 10. Assessments may be available for other year groups and key stages in the future.

CCEA would like to progress development of its own diagnostic assessment tools for use in all schools (including Irish Medium) from KS1 to KS3 for schools.

The *Fair Start* report indicates that DE should commission CCEA to progress development of its own diagnostic assessment tools for use in all schools (including Irish Medium) from KS1 to KS3 for schools.

Online Examinations

At present, we have very few qualifications that are offered online. Moving Image Arts is one of CCEA's success stories but without adequate funding we are unable to progress with other aspects of online assessment at GSCE or A Level.

⁴⁰ [CCEA Adaptive Assessments | CCEA](#)

Education Technology Services (ETS) system will be made available in all grant-aided schools from 2021. It is vital that digital infrastructure, hardware and data sharing agreements are in place to ensure that this could become a reality moving forward.

There are many considerations with regards to online examination and further exploration is required. There are risks such as capacity and the nature of the subject being compromised but there are opportunities also to look at what is being assessed and to make assessments more accessible and relevant to real life experiences.

CCEA would like to begin widening our online qualification offer as an awarding body. This will require strategic planning and investment.
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Future for Qualifications in Northern Ireland

Work has been carried out on the future of qualifications, especially GCSEs, including the Fundamental Review of Qualifications (2013), the final report of the Expert Group, *A Future for Qualifications in Northern Ireland*, submitted to the Department of Education in December 2016, and the CCEA Report presented to DE in May 2018.

As highlighted throughout this response, CCEA believes that there are themes contained within these reports that have relevance today in thinking about the future vision for examinations at Key Stage 4.
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General and Vocational Qualifications

General qualifications are based on traditional classroom learning. Vocational (practical) qualifications are often career-based or have a significant practical element.

CCEA offers 41 GCSE qualifications and 30 GCE qualifications. We also offer a range of Entry Level and a limited range of Vocational Qualifications, which approximately 10,000 students undertake each year.

As an awarding body, we recognise that our children and young people need access to a range of suitable vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. The outworking of the 14-19 Transition into Careers and the Future of Vocational Qualifications project should create further scope for the development of vocational qualifications.
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Regulation

CCEA Regulation is a separate unit to the awarding organisation and the education directorate as a whole; this enables it to operate independently and carry out the statutory obligation to regulate awarding organisations impartially and maintain standards. There is risk in the perception associated with CCEA's regulatory function being in the same organisation as the Awarding Organisation with potential built-in conflicts of interest. However, CCEA Regulation is branded separately from CCEA and procedures and processes are designed to manage conflicts of interests real or perceived.

The integrity of CCEA Regulation must be preserved and to do so the regulatory functions must be independent of the awarding organisation. Policy divergence is increasing across the UK. CCEA Regulation needs sufficient resources to manage key functions that support comparability and maintenance of standards. This is essential to uphold public confidence in qualifications offered in NI.

Engaging People

CCEA has a key role to play in helping to raise whole-curriculum awareness among teachers, learners, parents and other partners, particularly those responsible for teacher education and professional learning.

CCEA will continue to focus on the strategic influencing of curriculum leaders, in line with the *Learning Leaders* Strategy published by the Department of Education in March 2016⁴¹. The strategy sets out the department's vision for the next 10 years as "Every teacher is a learning leader, accomplished in working collaboratively with all partners in the interests of children and young people."

CCEA will continue to enhance stakeholder engagement through our programme boards and meetings with education partners, subject advisory boards, principals' groups and Curriculum Monitoring activities.

CCEA will continue to support the Learning Leaders strategy and work with educational partners to support its implementation.

⁴¹ [Learning Leaders | CCEA](#)

CCEA will continue to ensure that children and young people, parents, employers and stakeholders understand the NI Curriculum, how young people are assessed and make sure that all learners can access the appropriate pathways for learning and life.

System Evaluation

The Northern Ireland education system has significant successes that are evidenced by the available performance data. As outlined in the OECD *Review of Evaluation and Assessment in Education*, Northern Ireland is an evidence rich system with a breadth of available measures on student outcomes.

Every year, CCEA produces a significant amount of information and analysis about GCSE and GCE qualifications, using data from across Northern Ireland and our own qualification results. We present much of this information and analysis to the media and public during the summer months.

From 2015 we have published an Annual Qualifications Insight Report that provides a detailed analysis of the data (of interest to a narrower education audience). The last Insight report, published in 2019⁴² (due to the alternative awarding arrangements in 2020 and 2021), highlighted once again the strength of the NI cohort achieving the highest pass rate in the UK at both GCE and GCSE. From our analysis, Mathematics remains the most popular A level with STEM accounting for around 40% of both GCSE and GCE entries.

Northern Ireland has some of the highest-achieving primary school pupils in the world in mathematics, according to major international tests. NI pupils ranked seventh out of 64 countries and regions in the Trends in International Maths and Science Study (TIMSS). They are only behind pupils in Singapore, South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, and Russia.

Similarly, in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2016, pupils in Northern Ireland significantly outperformed 41 of the 49 other participating countries in reading and were significantly outperformed by only two countries. However, there was a relatively widespread attainment for reading between the highest and the lowest attainers.

However, it is essential that necessary actions are progressed to address the long tail of underachievement in Northern Ireland. In addition, there is currently no longitudinal trend analysis to track the achievements of learners across phases and between transition points.

⁴² [Annual Qualifications Insight Reports | CCEA](#)

There is scope for the use of more longitudinal measures and broader indicators in the accountability framework that determines the success of our education system, as proposed in the *Fair Start* report.

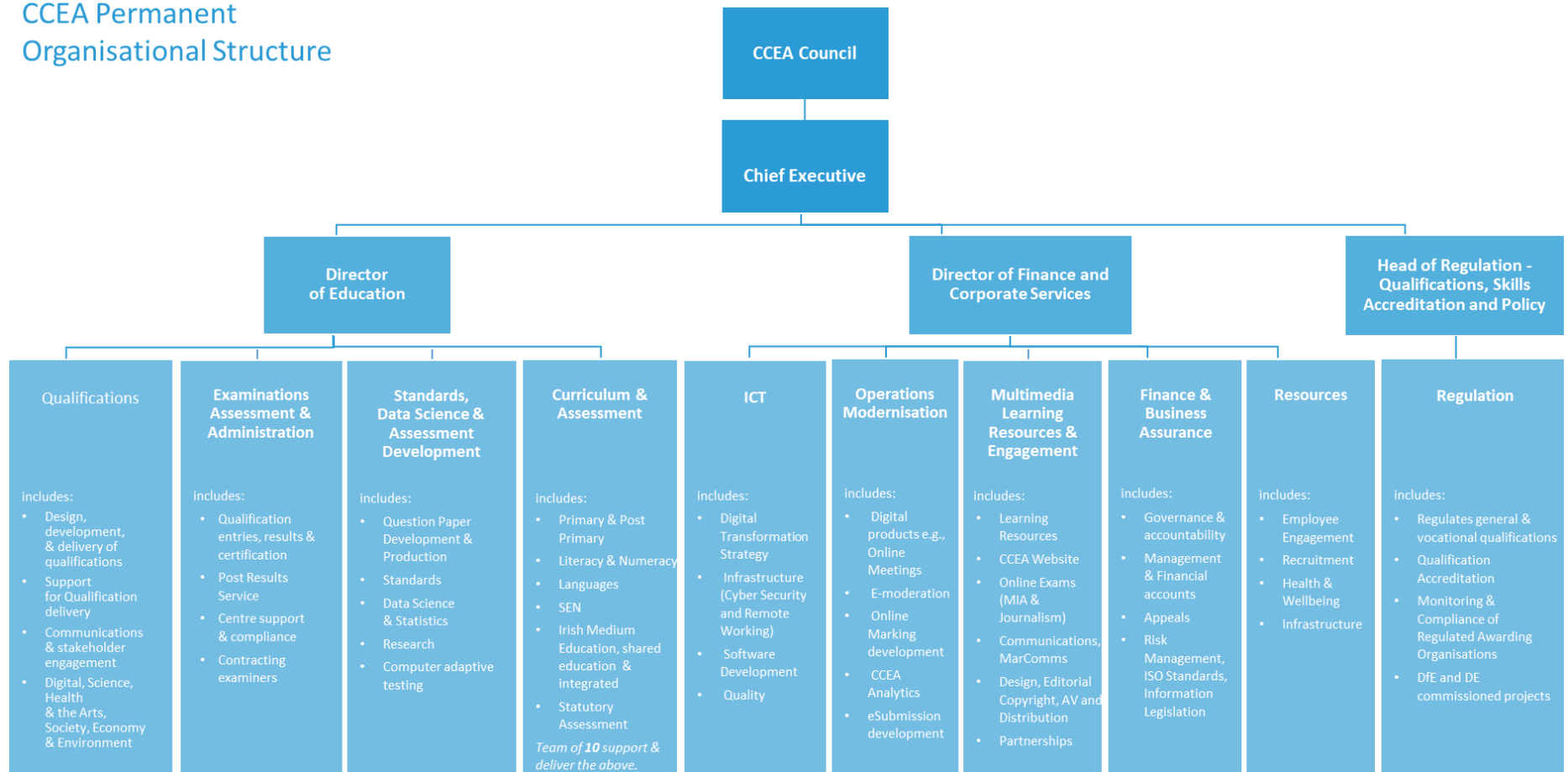
A system level assessment should include value-added assessment and assessment of higher order skills.

CCEA supports the proposal to develop a system evaluation/accountability framework that can demonstrate the breadth and depth of learning and achievements in Northern Ireland and the range of ways in which schools support learners as they progress through their education, providing additional information such as the context of the school, the challenges which learners face and the value-added which has been provided.
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Appendix 1

The following organisational chart sets out CCEA's areas of work and the discrete business units that are subdivided into operational teams.

CCEA Permanent Organisational Structure



Appendix 2: The ‘Big Pictures’ of Curriculum and Assessment

Primary

CURRICULUM AIM	The Northern Ireland Curriculum aims to empower young people to achieve their potential and to make informed and responsible decisions throughout their lives.									
CURRICULUM OBJECTIVES	TO DEVELOP THE YOUNG PERSON AS AN INDIVIDUAL			TO DEVELOP THE YOUNG PERSON AS A CONTRIBUTOR TO SOCIETY			TO DEVELOP THE YOUNG PERSON AS A CONTRIBUTOR TO THE ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT			
	personal understanding mutual understanding personal health	moral character spiritual awareness		citizenship cultural understanding	media awareness ethical awareness		employability economic awareness	education for sustainable development		
INFUSING										
CROSS-CURRICULAR SKILLS	COMMUNICATION			USING MATHEMATICS			USING ICT			
THINKING SKILLS AND PERSONAL CAPABILITIES	Managing Information	Working with Others		Thinking, Problem Solving, Decision Making			Self-Management		Being Creative	
ACROSS										
AREAS OF LEARNING	THE ARTS	LANGUAGE AND LITERACY	MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY	PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING	PHYSICAL EDUCATION*	THE WORLD AROUND US	RELIGIOUS EDUCATION			
INCORPORATING										
ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING	building a more open relationship between learner and teacher	clear learning intentions shared with pupils	shared/ negotiated success criteria	individual target setting	taking risks for learning	advice on what to improve and how to improve it	peer and self assessment	celebrating success	peer and self evaluation of learning	
PROMOTING/ENCOURAGING										
LEARNING EXPERIENCE	investigation and problem solving	links between curriculum areas	relevant and enjoyable	media-rich	skills integrated	active and hands on	offer choice			
	challenging and engaging	supportive environment	culturally diverse	positive reinforcement	varied to suit learning style	on-going reflection	enquiry based			
FOSTERING										
ATTITUDES AND DISPOSITIONS	personal responsibility	concern for others	commitment – determination – resourcefulness			openness to new ideas		self-confidence		
	curiosity	community spirit	flexibility	tolerance	integrity moral courage	respect				

* Physical Development and Movement at Foundation Stage

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Key Stage 3

CURRICULUM AIM	The Northern Ireland Curriculum aims to empower young people to achieve their potential and to make informed and responsible decisions throughout their lives.														
CURRICULUM OBJECTIVES	To develop the young person as an individual			To develop the young person as a contributor to society			To develop the young person as a contributor to the economy and environment								
FOR															
LEARNING FOR LIFE & WORK	PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT		HOME ECONOMICS		LOCAL AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP			EMPLOYABILITY							
THROUGH															
KEY ELEMENTS	personal understanding mutual understanding personal health		moral character spiritual awareness		citizenship cultural understanding		media awareness ethical awareness		employability economic awareness education for sustainable development						
INFUSING															
CROSS-CURRICULAR SKILLS	COMMUNICATION				USING MATHEMATICS				USING ICT						
THINKING SKILLS AND PERSONAL CAPABILITIES	Managing Information		Working with Others		Thinking, Problem Solving, Decision Making				Self-Management		Being Creative				
ACROSS															
AREAS OF LEARNING	THE ARTS	ENGLISH (IRISH in Irish Medium Schools) with Media Education		ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIETY	MATHEMATICS with Financial Capability	MODERN LANGUAGES	PHYSICAL EDUCATION	SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY	RELIGIOUS EDUCATION						
PROMOTING / ENCOURAGING															
LEARNING EXPERIENCE	investigation and problem solving		links between curriculum areas		relevant and enjoyable		media-rich		skills integrated		active and hands on	offer choice			
	challenging and engaging		supportive environment		culturally diverse		positive reinforcement		varied to suit learning style		on-going reflection	enquiry based			
ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING	building a more open relationship between learner and teacher		clear learning intentions shared with pupils		shared/ negotiated success criteria		individual target setting		taking risks for learning		advice on what to improve and how to improve it		peer and self assessment	celebrating success	peer and self evaluation of learning
ATTITUDES AND DISPOSITIONS	personal responsibility		concern for others		commitment – determination – resourcefulness				openness to new ideas			self-belief – optimism pragmatism			
	curiosity		community spirit		flexibility		tolerance			integrity moral courage			respect		

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Key Stage 4

CURRICULUM AIM	The Northern Ireland Curriculum aims to empower young people to achieve their potential and to make informed and responsible decisions throughout their lives.								
CURRICULUM OBJECTIVES	To develop the young person as an individual			To develop the young person as a contributor to society			To develop the young person as a contributor to the economy and environment		
INFUSING									
CROSS-CURRICULAR SKILLS	COMMUNICATION			USING MATHEMATICS			USING ICT		
THINKING SKILLS AND PERSONAL CAPABILITIES	Self-Management			Working with Others			Problem-Solving		
ACROSS									
AREAS OF LEARNING	THE ARTS	LANGUAGE AND LITERACY	ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIETY	STATUTORY LEARNING FOR LIFE AND WORK	MATHEMATICS with Financial Capability	MODERN LANGUAGES	STATUTORY PHYSICAL EDUCATION	SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY	STATUTORY RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
TO MEET									
THE STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS THROUGH THE KEY STAGE 4 ENTITLEMENT FRAMEWORK	All post-primary schools must provide learners with access to at least 21 courses at Key Stage 4.*								
	At least ⅓ should be general courses.			At least ⅓ should be applied courses.			⅓ are optional.		
TO PROMOTE									
THE RELEVANCE OF LEARNING TO EVERYDAY LIFE AND WORK	Personal Development	Healthy Living	Citizenship	Community-Based Learning	Employability	Entrepreneurship			
	Career Education	Career Planning	STEM	Work-Related Learning	Education for Sustainable Development	Financial Capability			
INDEPENDENT AND LIFELONG LEARNING	Supportive Learning Environment	Learner-Centred Pedagogy	Active Enquiry-Based Learning	Critical Thinking Skills	Metacognition (Thinking about Thinking)	Assessment For Learning			
ATTITUDES AND DISPOSITIONS	Personal Responsibility	Concern For Others	Commitment	Determination	Resourcefulness	Openness To New Ideas	Self-Belief	Respect	
	Optimism	Pragmatism	Curiosity	Community Spirit	Flexibility	Tolerance	Integrity	Moral Courage	

* See the DENI website at www.education-ni.gov.uk for a list of approved courses at Key Stage 4.

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Assessment and Reporting

AIM OF ASSESSMENT	To facilitate the monitoring of standards over time in order to inform the development of policy and practice leading to better pupil outcomes				
PRINCIPLES Assessment should:	1 be complementary to, and supportive of, the key aims of the NI Curriculum	2 be fit for purpose	3 be manageable	4 be supported by teacher professional judgements that are consistent and reliable	5 be appropriate at all levels for system-wide accountability
PURPOSE	DIAGNOSTIC To identify strengths and areas for improvement and to inform next steps	FORMATIVE To use assessment information to make specific improvements in learning	SUMMATIVE To acknowledge, record and report pupils' overall performance and achievement at a point in time	EVALUATIVE To inform curriculum planning and to provide information for monitoring and accountability	
WHAT IS ASSESSED?	Pupil performance and achievement in ...	CROSS-CURRICULAR SKILLS (CCS) Assessment: a robust model of moderated teacher judgement	OTHER SKILLS (Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities: TSPC) Assessment: delegated to schools	AREAS OF LEARNING (AoL) Assessment: delegated to schools	
ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS	FOUNDATION STAGE ASSESSMENT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess pupil progress in each CCS Assess pupil progress in each of the Other Skills (TS&PC) Assess pupil progress in each AoL REPORTING <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual Report Parent Meetings Annual Review* 		KEY STAGE 1 & KEY STAGE 2 ASSESSMENT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess pupil progress in each CCS Assess pupil progress in each of the Other Skills (TS&PC) Assess pupil progress in each AoL REPORTING <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual Report Years 4 & 7 numerical outcomes for CCS; and additional school/system information to parents Parent Meetings Annual Review* 		KEY STAGE 3 ASSESSMENT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess pupil progress in each CCS Assess pupil progress in each of the Other Skills (TS&PC) Assess pupil progress in each AoL REPORTING <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual Report Year 10 numerical outcomes for CCS; and additional school/system information to parents Parent Meetings Annual Review/Transition Plans*
USING ASSESSMENT OUTCOMES TO INFORM NEXT STEPS PLANNING	AT CLASSROOM LEVEL:	What level are my pupils now?	Where do they need to be next (with an appropriate level of challenge)?	What are the best strategies to help pupils reach the 'next steps' in their learning?	
	AT CO-ORDINATOR LEVEL:	How is my area of responsibility performing, compared with recent 3 year trends?	How is my area of responsibility performing compared with other curriculum areas?	What are the priorities for improving provision within my area of responsibility?	
	AT WHOLE SCHOOL LEVEL:	How is our school performing, compared with recent 3 year trends?	How is our school performing compared with other schools in similar circumstances?	What are our whole school priorities for improving pupil outcomes, especially in Literacy and Numeracy?	

* EDUCATION (NORTHERN IRELAND) ORDER 1996 Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs 1 September 1998

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