

Stepping Up and Stepping Forward

Learning Insight 7

All learners require a curriculum that enables them to succeed; the capacity and flexibility of the Northern Ireland Curriculum is there to meet the needs of all learners



What do we know?

Curricula should reflect the values, culture and priorities of society. Learners are entitled to an enabling curriculum that meets their needs, is relevant to their lives and provides pathways through appropriate learning experiences. A relevant and empowering curriculum should develop knowledge, understanding and skills as well as nurturing attitudes that can be progressed through lifelong learning.

[The NI curriculum](#) (NIC) was designed to provide for diverse individual learning, taking account of local contexts so that lessons are relevant, enjoyable and matched closely to need. Non-statutory, pre-school, post-16 and youth curricula have all been designed in ways that complement similar skills development, but often the links and opportunities are not made explicit to learners of all ages, particularly at key transition points. It is important that the *outworkings* of the statutory curriculum enables learners to develop as individuals, participate in the communities in which they live and secure strong foundations for lifelong learning and work.

What have we learned?

The flexibility that is embedded in the NIC is there to meet the needs and aspirations of the learners. In planning a coherent curriculum, schools and organisations have had to contend with many additional issues including alternative examination arrangements, and public health regulations and constraints on the delivery of practical subjects. Across the FE colleges, opportunities for project-based learning – which can be used effectively to provide rich experiences for the students and enable them to develop a broad range of transferable skills that are highly valued by employers - were restricted due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Classroom and workshop learning should be enriched through high quality additional experiences such as: outdoor learning; educational visits; workplace experiences; and, access to mentoring and coaching from local and international leaders and experts. While many of these opportunities were available to learners pre-Covid 19 and despite the best efforts of schools and organisations to make the curriculum relevant and enjoyable, it has to be acknowledged that the public health restrictions disrupted these important learning experiences.



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Consequently, this has resulted in a much narrower curriculum experience and has impacted on experiences and outcomes for many learners. For example, pupils could not enjoy educational visits, access careers conventions or attend the open days at universities and colleges. Learners undertaking professional and technical courses in FE colleges and work-based learning were unable to complete the practical elements of courses and consequently their accreditation had to be delayed.

The ETI's [thematic reports on remote learning](#), including the [College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise](#) (CAFRE), featured examples of schools and organisations adapting creatively their curricula and associated pedagogy to meet their learners' needs. In addition, the [pre-school](#), [primary](#) and [special](#) phase thematic reports include case studies, outlining innovative solutions that schools and settings have employed to improve provision within localised and challenging contexts.



Schools and other organisations are at a crossroads now regarding curriculum and future provision for their learners. We know also that the flexibility and opportunities within the NI curriculum have not been realised to their optimum.

What will help us move forward constructively?

We believe that the starting point post-pandemic should be that schools and organisations who know their learners best should adapt curricula to reflect the needs, interests and career aspirations of their learners.

Current and future employment requires learners who have the skills to collaborate with others, work in unfamiliar and changing contexts and think critically. Employers value skills and dispositions such as problem-solving, team-working and resilience. The core aim of the NIC aspires to develop learners as informed and responsible decision-makers. Schools should encourage learners to engage critically with information and recognise decision-making as a range of alternatives that can be subjected to testing for truth, accuracy and reliability.

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The ETI is interested in how we can work with others to ensure that organisations are supported in tailoring their curriculum offer to meet the diverse needs of learners. This includes ETI assuring communities that the curriculum offer at all levels is coherent and manageable in developing confident, independent and reflective learners. Within curriculum design, schools must give serious consideration to ensuring that their post-16 provision is sustainable, provides very good pathways for learners and takes cognisance of how appropriate any transition offer may be. It is important that where vocational qualifications are offered, schools have the necessary resources to deliver enriched and engaging courses and that the staff are appropriately qualified and experienced in the area.

The ETI is keen to prioritise conversation about how organisations can best develop their learners as individuals who can participate effectively in society and have the skills to contribute well to the economy and environment.



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