CIDREE

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...THE CORE CURRICULUM...

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AHOVOKS (Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education, Qualifications and Study Grants) is a Flemish government agency that, together with education partners, is committed to lifelong learning for everyone. The agency's activities include the recognition of foreign diplomas, the awarding of study grants, the management of personnel files for higher and adult education and the organization of central examinations and entrance examinations.

One of the departments within AHOVOKS, the Qualifications & Curriculum Department, is responsible for the development of curricula, training and professional and educational qualifications. The department also manages communication about those products and conducts educational research into the implementation of the products in the educational field.

CIDREE stands for the Consortium of Institutions for Development and Research in Education in Europe. CIDREE is a network of educational organizations involved in curriculum development and/or educational research, set up in 1990 to establish closer working relationships at a European level.

CIDREE YEARBOOK

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Foreword

President's foreword – Jindra Divis

An important fact with regard to curriculum policy, organisation and content is that these elements are all subject to constant change. This is certainly true for my own institute, which is currently involved in one of the most significant reviews of the national curriculum in its existence. This context of constant change is also clearly distinguishable in other countries, both within and outside CIDREE. As a consequence, curriculum development has increasingly become a balancing act in all three regards: policy, organisation and content. The often close involvement of politicians and numerous other stakeholders in curriculum reviews is a significant and usually complex factor. The organisation of a review requires increasing levels of commitment from a multitude of parties. At the end of the day, though, it is the content that matters. The need to make choices from a continuously growing body of knowledge, comes together with social expectations, European ambitions and the outcomes of comparative research into a weighing process. The challenge for curriculum developers is that they have to distil this into a substantive core curriculum that is broadly supported and consistently elaborated.

In the course of describing this core, they are faced with another daunting task: providing a thorough justification for the choices they make. After all, making choices involves excluding certain elements in favour of others. In that respect, no curriculum can ever be perfect, simply because it is impossible to please all. This means that every curriculum will always be the subject of debate. Now and again, this debate must culminate in an established curriculum. It helps when there is a system behind this – one that involves a periodic reassessment of the curriculum, during which the ongoing debate about it is temporarily put on hold. This enables the processes of developing teaching and learning materials, assessment, in service training and school inspection to play out. It is vital that students are offered a curriculum that is not only up to date, but also has a stable foundation in the form of content of lasting importance.

Within our organisation, we like to compare the national curriculum with a set of railway tracks: all trains must be able to run on it. Schools and teaching staff operate their own trains, determining how fast they go and how often and where they stop. However, the tracks under those trains must be firm, providing direction as well as – other than actual railway tracks – room to manoeuvre.

Europe is characterised by diversity and variety. This yearbook offers yet further proof of this. At the same time, it contains a number of common threads. The authors have done exceptionally well to illustrate both aspects in the opening chapter. The yearbook offers interesting insights into the broad theme of curriculum development on our continent.

Once again, reading how Europe meets the challenges of our time and prepares for the future has been a highly satisfying experience. Throughout these processes, we look to each other for inspiration.

All that is left for me is to give heartfelt thanks to the initiators and the editorial team in Brussels for this yearbook. I look forward to discussing the yearbook's theme further, in all its facets, at the CIDREE conference in Brussels on 23 November 2023.

Happy reading!

Jindra Divis

CIDREE President and Director General of the Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development SLO

Overview article

Eds. Ballyn, D., Breemeersch, V., De Knijf, S., De Ridder, E., Froyen, D. & Vandeput, V.

Introduction

Society expects a lot from education. It is generally accepted that subjects such as languages, mathematics and science are necessary but not sufficient to prepare the next generation for an ever-changing society. This is also evident from the eight key competences that the Council of the European Union recommends for lifelong learning. In addition to the 'classic' content, the eight key competences include transversal competences such as Digital competence, Entrepreneurship competence and Citizenship competence.

At the same time, there is debate about what and how much can be included in a core curriculum. Preconditions such as available learning time, resources, teacher competence, the learning ability of students and infrastructure can impose limitations on what is feasible in schools. The core curriculum often leaves room for regions or schools to add their own learning objectives that fit the regional context or the school context. In any case, choices have to be made about what is and what is not part of a core curriculum.

In this yearbook twelve European countries describe how their core curriculum is organised and how it is designed. They used the following questions:

- What strategies are used to develop a core curriculum in times of increasing expectations of education due to new social developments and challenges?
- Which competences are so essential that every student must be taught them and how is this decided?
- Can transversal / cross-curricular competences be included in a core curriculum? To what extent and in what way?
- Which approaches are used to balance the breadth of a curriculum with its depth?
- Which strategies are used to ensure the feasibility of a core curriculum?

The various articles show that the concept of 'core curriculum' does not mean the same in every country. Each country has a specific context that determines how the core curriculum concept is implemented. For the sake of comparability, in this overview article a national curriculum, which is the same for all learners within a certain level, is considered a core curriculum.

Historical perspective on curricula in Europe

The vision on education and what students should learn at school is always value-related and reflects the dominant social model within a society (Standaert, 2011). A very brief review of European education since classical antiquity illustrates the influence of society on the core curriculum.

It is generally accepted that the roots of European education lie in classical antiquity. The Greek education system was strongly linked to the philosophical ideas of the time. For example, Plato emphasised the importance of education as a means of forming individuals and helping them achieve virtue and wisdom. He advocated an education system aimed at developing both physical and intellectual skills, emphasising music, mathematics, philosophy and gymnastics.

In the Middle Ages, education focused on religion and serving the Catholic Church (in Western Europe) and the Eastern Orthodox Church (in Eastern Europe). The aim was to train priests, monks and clergy, and education focused heavily on religious doctrines and the study of religious texts. Charlemagne (742-814) recognised the importance of education and believed that an educated population was essential for the stability and success of his empire. He promoted the uniformity and quality of education by establishing standards for curricula and teaching methods. The focus was mainly on reading, writing and arithmetic, in that order.

During the Renaissance in the 15th and 16th centuries, the humanist movement emerged, which emphasised the study of classical literature, art, history and philosophy. The curriculum broadened and focused on a wide range of subjects aimed at developing the human mind and understanding the world. The curriculum also began to expand

to include the natural sciences, with a greater emphasis on observation, experimentation, and empirical knowledge. During the Renaissance, universities became increasingly important as centres of higher education. The curriculum at universities covered a wide range of disciplines, including theology, philosophy, law, medicine and natural sciences.

The Enlightenment, which took place in the 17th and 18th centuries, saw significant changes in the curriculum, which emphasised rationality, empiricism, science, and enlightened thinking. The curriculum was therefore expanded to include natural sciences, such as physics, chemistry, biology and astronomy. Scientific experimentation and observation were encouraged to gain knowledge and understand how the natural world worked. The Enlightenment was also a period in which philosophical ideas and ethical issues were central. Therefore, the curriculum often included philosophy and ethics as subjects to help students think critically about social structures and moral issues. Another important aspect of the Enlightenment was its emphasis on spreading knowledge and promoting education to a broader population. There were pleas for greater accessibility and equal opportunities in education, with the establishment of public schools and the push for universal literacy.

The 19th century saw major changes in the curriculum in Europe in response to social, political and industrial developments. There was a significant expansion of primary education. Governments increasingly began to take on the responsibility of providing free and compulsory education to all children. This broadened the curriculum to include, in addition to reading, writing and arithmetic, subjects such as geography and history. In France, for example, the core curriculum in compulsory education also included civic responsibility, national history, creative subjects, natural sciences and personal hygiene.

The rise of nationalism led to a greater emphasis on education of the national identity and citizenship. Schools became important institutions for conveying patriotism and the nation's history and values. The curriculum often included lessons in the language, literature, history and geography of one's own country, with the aim of promoting a sense of national unity and loyalty.

During the 20th century, education was increasingly regarded as a fundamental right and efforts were made to further increase access to education for all sections of the population. Compulsory education, which until then had been limited to primary education in most countries, was also extended to lower secondary education. The curriculum underwent significant changes to better meet the needs of modern society. There was greater emphasis on practical skills, science, technology, languages and social sciences. New subjects emerged, such as computer science and economics. Since the 1990s, European countries have systematically introduced competence-based education, which emphasises the acquisition of specific skills, the application of knowledge in practice, the development of problem-solving skills and the promotion of independent learning.

Core curricula in Europe today

Due to globalisation and technological progress, the internationalisation of education increased at the end of the 20th century. The number of exchange programmes and international cooperation in education and research grew enormously. This led to more and more coordination in the field of education between countries. The European Union also played a major role in this. The European Union launched an initial version of the European Key Competences in 2006, which were updated in 2018 (European Commission, Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2019). The recommendation describes from which social model and for what purpose the EU formulates those key competences: "...for personal fulfilment, a healthy and sustainable lifestyle, employability, active citizenship and social inclusion." The foreword to the revised European Key Competences emphasises the importance of acquiring the key competences at a high level so that Europe can compete in the global race. The most important competences, in addition to literacy, mathematics and science, are digital competences and transversal competences such as critical thinking, media literacy, communication skills and entrepreneurship.

Since the European Union has no authority in the field of education, it cannot impose curricula requirements on Member States. It can only provide guidance by formulating recommendations and by supporting the preconditions, such as digitisation and enhancing the skills of educational professionals. For example, the EU offers financial support for targeted projects including sharing good practices, setting up peer learning activities and conducting research (Looney, O'Shea, Staring, et al., 2022). The various articles in this yearbook demonstrate the effect of these actions. Many countries, including candidate EU countries and non-EU countries, explicitly focus on European key competences when revising their core curricula. The reasons for this are international recognition and the comparability of qualifications between countries.

However, many differences remain between countries, due to the historical and political context and the specific structure of each country's education system. In the remainder of this overview article, a number of observations and comments that arise after reading all the articles are discussed. We use the guiding questions (see introduction) as they were also provided to the authors of the articles.

Vision and purpose of the core curriculum

The general aim of compulsory education in the twelve countries contributing to this yearbook is very similar to the vision behind the eight European key competences. In Sweden, more explicit emphasis is placed on personal development (human empowerment and 'Bildung') than on 'social efficiency'. One does not necessarily exclude the other, but it is a remarkably different perspective.

Furthermore, in almost all countries in the yearbook, education is viewed as a lever for reducing inequality. It is

striking that reducing inequality is used both as an argument for setting the bar high in terms of ambition in the core curriculum as well as for not setting it too high. One reason for setting the bar with regard to ambition is that everyone is provided with sufficient competences for equal opportunities later in life (Bosnia & Herzegovina, Montenegro, Sweden). One reason not to set the bar too high is to avoid too many students dropping out of regular education. An explanation for these different perspectives might lie in the student population concerned and the room for differentiation within the respective student population. This is discussed further under 'Which strategies are used to ensure the feasibility of a core curriculum?'.

What strategies are used to develop a core curriculum in times of increasing expectations about education due to new social developments and challenges?

In most countries, curricular reforms are infrequent and ambitious in the expectations they must meet. They involve an extensive development process. Concern about the quality of education, for example due to declining results in international comparative research (Wales, Sweden), is often the reason for legitimising a reform (Gamson, Eckert & Anderson, 2019). Sweden's article discusses this in more detail.

With regard to the development process of a new core curriculum, we distinguish four phases in most countries: the preparatory phase, the development phase, the approval phase and the implementation phase. However, the way these phases are completed varies.

The importance of support for changes in curricula is recognised everywhere. This is mainly pursued during the preparatory and development phases. Almost all countries involve a wide range of stakeholders: school management, teachers, parents, students and representatives of the sectors and the academic world. This is in line with the shift from a top-down to a bottom-up approach as described in the literature review about curriculum reform (OECD, 2020). For example, Luxembourg and Ireland organise public consultations with key stakeholders, including young learners, to gather input during the preparatory phase. In Ireland, efforts are even made to include the 'voice' of toddlers. In Luxembourg, particular attention is paid to transparency throughout the entire consultation process.

Despite efforts to strive for support, it is not always achieved. Not surprising, given the diversity of all the stakeholders involved, it is a search for balance between many different interests. In Flanders, for example, it only became apparent during the approval process that a large number of school boards did not support the new core curriculum in upper secondary education. Consequently, it was challenged in the Constitutional Court, arguing that the core curriculum was too extensive and detailed and therefore violated the freedom of education enshrined in the Belgian constitution. The Constitutional Court followed that argument. The government subsequently decided to have the curriculum reworked, resulting in a less extensive and less detailed curriculum. The expectation is that schools and teachers will supplement the extra space created in the core curriculum with their own goals. Sometimes the lack of support only becomes apparent during the implementation phase, such as in Bosnia & Herzegovina and Slovenia, so that adjustments are necessary immediately after implementation, which leads to additional work in schools.

The Netherlands and Sweden are committed to maximum transparency during the development process in order to create support. The resulting experiences do not appear to be unambiguously positive. Due to the influence of social media and pressure from public opinion, a proposal supported by educational professionals can end up in the eye of a media storm, making a nuanced debate difficult. In Sweden, on the basis of the established lesson schedule, a proposal was made to delete a paragraph on antiquity in the history subject, where there was a bottleneck in terms of feasibility. However, this led to a lot of public outrage and ultimately not to the adjustment of the content of the history subject, but of the class schedule. Hungary and Norway took an interesting middle path in which a draft version of the national core curriculum was made publicly available for social debate. Professional organisations, as well as individuals, could provide feedback. This resulted in hundreds of comments, many of which were relevant and led to further consultation with those who submitted comments.

A comprehensive and ambitious curricular reform carries a number of risks. The fault lines between successive core curricula can be so great that their implementation requires a lot of change management and takes a lot of resources. Moreover, a thorough curricular reform usually takes a lot of time. It might take more time than planned, resulting in a process spanning several legislatures and causing the political vision of the core curriculum to change (Netherlands). Smaller-scale and more frequent revisions can provide an answer to this. In Hungary, a decree stipulates that the core curriculum must be evaluated every five years after implementation and adjusted where necessary. Five revisions have taken place since 1995. Recently, a decree has also been introduced in Flanders stipulating that the core curriculum should be evaluated on a regular basis with the aim of keeping it sufficiently up to date.

Which competences are so essential that every student must be taught them and how is this determined?

As mentioned above, the European key competences serve as the starting point in most countries when developing national curricula:

1. Literacy competence
2. Multilingual competence
3. Mathematical competence and competence in science, technology and engineering
4. Digital competence
5. Personal, social and learning to learn competence
6. Citizenship competence
7. Entrepreneurship competence
8. Cultural awareness and expression competence

Eurydice recently conducted extensive research into the use of teaching time in 39 European countries (European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice, 2021). Broadly speaking, the use of teaching time boils down to the following:

1. Reading, writing and literature: it is not surprising that in all countries reading, writing and literature take up the majority of teaching time, in both primary and secondary education.
2. Mathematics, on average, occupies the second largest share in primary education. The share decreases in secondary education.
3. Within the sciences (physics, chemistry, biology, ecology, etc.) we see the opposite: a rather limited share in primary education and a larger share in secondary education. The emphasis that each country places on the different sciences varies within a country per grade or between primary and secondary education.
4. Within the social sciences, the variety of subjects is even greater: history, geography, social and political studies, philosophy, citizenship, etc. In primary education, only half of the countries surveyed have allocated teaching time for subjects within this field. In secondary education, the recorded teaching time for subjects within this field is increasing, but remains lower than the recorded teaching time for sciences.

In the article of the Netherlands, a comparison of average teaching time in the Netherlands with international data from the 2019 OECD-report 'Education at a Glance' is clearly visualized in an overview table. The OECD-data is in line with the above mentioned Eurydice data and is, provided some variation, also reflected in the 12 articles. School language, foreign languages and mathematics are part of the core curriculum in all countries that contributed to this yearbook:

- In upper secondary education in Ireland, only physical education is added to the compulsory core curriculum. This does not mean that all teaching time is spent only on this core curriculum. Part of the teaching time is devoted to electives and optional subjects. In addition to the common core curriculum, students are offered additional content depending on their interests and talents. In lower secondary education in Ireland, four subjects are compulsory: English, Irish, Mathematics and History. In addition, all students must engage with the field of Well-being, which includes Physical Education (PE), Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Civic, Social and Personal Education (CSPE). In primary schools in Ireland the core curriculum consists of seven key competences: being well, being a digital learner, being mathematical, being a communicator and using languages, being creative, being an active learner and being an active citizen.
- In the Netherlands, compared to other countries, there is still a lot of room in the core curriculum for schools to fill. The core curriculum consists of nine learning fields. Dutch language, numeracy and mathematics, digital literacy and democratic citizenship are considered 'basic skills'. In addition, humans and society (social studies), humans and nature (natural sciences), arts and culture, English and other modern foreign languages and exercise and sports (physical education) complete the core curriculum.
- Sweden and Norway attach great importance to the place of fundamental values and transversal themes in education. These values are made explicit in a curricular framework. This curricular framework does not necessarily describe what students should learn, but rather what schools should use when organising their school activities. In Sweden this translates into a core curriculum composed of themes such as Bildung, Human rights, Democratic attitudes and working methods, Sustainable development, Cultural heritage, Ethical perspectives, Environmental perspectives, International perspectives, Historical perspectives, Health and well-being, Sexuality, consent and relations, Equality and gender, Group rights, Critical literacy, Language development, Socio-emotional skills, Digital competence and entrepreneurship. In Norway, the core curriculum consists of five basic competences, understood as literacies: oral, reading, writing, numeracy and digital competences and three interdisciplinary topics: Public health and life skills, Democracy and citizenship and Sustainable development.
- In Slovenia the focus is on mathematics, languages, history and sport. Other subjects such as geography, science, art, psychology, sociology, philosophy, citizenship and computer science are also covered, but not in all years of compulsory education.
- Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Hungary all use a similar system. They formulate a curricular framework with curricular fields such as languages and communication, mathematics, natural sciences, social science, arts, physical education and health and technology and ICT. These curricular fields are then elaborated in learning outcomes and indicators in the subject curricula.

- Wales also uses a curricular framework. However, this is not elaborated at a central level in learning outcomes and indicators. The intention is for schools to develop their own school curriculum, taking into account a number of mandatory criteria.
- Montenegro and Luxembourg have a broad core curriculum that has been detailed down to didactic guidelines and in which subjects such as philosophy, psychology and cultural awareness are also part of the core curriculum.

In Flanders, the core curricula for all phases of compulsory education are developed according to 16 key competences: Physical and mental health, Dutch, Other Languages, Digital competences, Socio-relational competences, Mathematics - natural sciences - technology - STEM, Citizenship, Historical awareness, Spatial awareness, Sustainability, Financial-economic competences, Legal competences, Learning competences, Self-awareness, Entrepreneurial spirit and Cultural awareness. However, it has been agreed that not all key competences must be covered in all phases of compulsory education. In particular, Dutch, other languages, mathematics, natural sciences, technology and STEM receive priority attention.

Central exams

All the countries that contributed to the yearbook, with the exception of Bosnia & Herzegovina, organise central exams. The central exams often focus on a limited number of subjects such as mathematics, school language and foreign languages. A well-known criticism of central exams is that they lead to 'teaching to the test'. What is tested in the central exams can have an impact on what priorities are set during the learning process. Especially when the central exams are high stakes, for example because access to higher education is determined by the result of the central exam. In some countries, other content besides mathematics, school language and foreign languages is also covered in the central exams. However, there will always be a limitation on which content and which specific competences can be tested centrally, mainly due to practical obstacles. A competence in which knowledge, skills and attitudes are highly integrated cannot be fully tested using only a written exam. Consequently, it makes sense to pay attention to the impact of central exams on how the core curriculum is approached in the classroom and by students and parents.

Competence-based curriculum

Whether or not under the influence of the European key competences, a shift has occurred in all countries from a description of content to a description of learning outcomes, whereby the learning outcomes are often described as competences. In a number of countries this has to do with the historical context of the country. In their article, Hungary explains that the curriculum under the communist regime mainly focused on the learning content and the learning process, for the purpose of state control, and not on learning outcomes. But Luxembourg, which has not known a communist regime, also describes having made such a shift in their curriculum reform in 2011. Regardless of the underlying reason, the switch to competence-oriented formulations in the curriculum does not exclude the possibility that learning content, such as essential knowledge elements, are formulated (for further reading Tahirsylaj & Sundberg, 2020).

The reason Montenegro provides for the switch to learning outcomes is that it allows a greater variety of educational practices and working methods. This is in line with the view in Bosnia & Herzegovina and Slovenia of the teacher as an educational professional who, taking into account the context, can make the right choices based on the learning outcomes to be achieved. Kosovo also mentions that one of the goals of the transition to learning outcomes is for teachers to move away from traditional teaching, mainly based on textbook content.

In Wales, they share that vision about the teacher, but go a step further. With the most recent curricular reform, they have evolved from a curriculum based on content to a 'purpose led process curriculum'. The aim is for teachers to ask themselves the question 'why they teach' in order to arrive at 'how' and 'what' they teach in function of the students' learning process. They are intensively guided in this by lecturers of the teacher training courses.

In Sweden people are more cautious about the transition to learning outcomes formulated as competences. They rightly note that there is little conclusive evidence for the advantage of a competence-based curriculum in comparison with a curriculum based on learning processes and content. Many factors influence the effectiveness of a core curriculum. They consciously choose, at least in their general core curriculum, to continue to focus on learning content and the learning process itself and not on learning outcomes. Since the last reform in 2022, their subject-specific curricula have placed more emphasis on learning outcomes, but at the same time attention continues to be devoted to learning content.

Can transversal/cross-disciplinary competences be included in a core curriculum? To what extent and in what way?

More than ever, the unpredictability of the future plays a role in recent curriculum reforms. How can today's students be prepared for a future that will be fundamentally different and which is hard to predict? Transversal competences such as creativity, problem solving and critical thinking are mentioned in response to those unknown challenges. In all countries, transversal competences are part of the core curriculum. These are often bundled in a separate section, for example as an underlying framework or as principles to be taken into account. The aim is for transversal competences to be integrated in the more traditional subjects such as languages, mathematics and science. The way in which schools deal with this is usually left open, although it is recognised that in practice it means these competences receive less attention than the subject-specific competences (for further reading Datnow, Park, Peurach & Spillane, 2022). In Norway and Kosovo, efforts have been made to explicitly link transversal competences to content from other, more traditional subjects. The future will show whether this approach produces better results.

Montenegro describes how they consistently pay close attention to transversal competences not only during the development process, but also during the implementation process. Schools are asked to state in their annual plans and policy plans how they guarantee that transversal competences receive sufficient attention. In addition, individual teachers must also indicate in their annual and lesson plans when and how they work on each transversal competence. In external quality assurance, explicit attention is paid to how schools and teachers deal with transversal competences. Montenegro also focuses on transversal competences in the field of teacher professionalisation. These actions to increase professionalism reach many teachers. For example, more than half of the teachers and all management has received training in integrating entrepreneurship into educational activities.

To prepare students for the future, not only knowledge and skills, but also attitudes are important. What place do attitudes have in a core curriculum? In almost all countries, socialisation and personal development are considered the core mission of education, in addition to qualification for higher education and/or the labour market. Yet the way this translates into the core curricula is very different. In a number of countries, education also has the task of conveying an appreciative attitude towards certain historical or political values (Hungary, Norway). Other countries deal differently with attitudes in the core curriculum. This is illustrated by the Netherlands, where the ambition is to formulate learning outcomes with regard to values and attitudes in a neutral manner. Another example can be found in Flanders, where the most recent revision of the core curriculum for upper secondary education did not include attitudes. In countries where attitudes are not included, or are only included as a limited part of the core curriculum, this does not mean that they are not addressed in education at all. It mainly means that it is left to the regions or schools to decide which attitudes are discussed.

It is impossible to achieve personal development and socialisation with a completely value-free curriculum. It is also not problematic for a society to offer a number of shared values through the core curriculum, for example in order to strengthen the democratic values of that society. This is comparable to offering knowledge and skills with the aim of maintaining a high level of prosperity. The frames of reference from which those values are formulated and communicated are especially important. There are many international reference frameworks that provide a broadly supported framework for formulating attitudes. By making use of these frameworks, short-term trends or a dominant political tendency are prevented from exerting an unbalanced influence on attitudes in education. Or to put it in the words of the 2013 yearbook: '... prevent the kidnapping of education in the political arena in order to stay independent from political gain'.

Which approaches are used to balance the breadth of a curriculum with its depth?

The editors' expectation was that in the discussion about choices in the core curriculum, one would consider, among other things, the breadth of the curriculum (which competences must be covered) and its depth (the depth with which competences must be effectively acquired). This is a consideration that is also made by the OECD in their report on curriculum overload (OECD, 2020). However, this duality appears less often than expected in the articles of this yearbook.

What is meant by the breadth of a curriculum may also be easier to grasp than what is meant by its depth. In Wales, depth refers to the transferability of competences from the field in which they were learned to other fields, for example the ability to apply grammatical concepts in a language other than the language in which they were learned. Slovenia also refers to greater depth as 'achieving higher taxonomic levels'. By also using knowledge in more complex contexts and at higher processing levels, it will become more deeply rooted.

Albania explicitly discusses a number of measures to ensure both sufficient breadth and sufficient depth in their core curriculum. A number of these measures can be applied during curriculum development itself, such as prioritising learning outcomes, developing interdisciplinary connections and repeatedly addressing content in greater depth throughout the school career. A number of other measures can be used by teachers, such as differentiated instruction and using technology to delve deeper outside the context of the classroom. It shows Albania's ambition to achieve the necessary depth in a broad core curriculum.

Which strategies are used to ensure the feasibility of a core curriculum?

Teaching time and learning time in relation to the size of a curriculum

Eurydice's study based on lesson tables in 39 countries shows that, if there is still room for one's own goals in addition to the core curriculum that is centrally determined, on average this amounts to just over 20% of the teaching time (Eurydice, 2021). In Slovenia, Hungary and Montenegro, 80% to 85% of teaching time is spent on the core curriculum, depending on the level of education. In Albania and Kosovo, respectively 93% and 95% of teaching time is spent on the core curriculum. In the Netherlands and Bosnia & Herzegovina, it has been established that the core curriculum takes up approximately 70% of the teaching time, which leaves 30% of teaching time open for other goals, deepening and broadening. In Flanders, a similar ratio was informally used in the most recent revision of the core curriculum for the 2nd and 3rd grades.

In the Netherlands, however, they go even further by also delineating design space by learning area. This allows development committees to take feasibility into account during development work. To determine the design space, the Netherlands took into account lesson tables in its own

country and results from the Eurydice study. It is interesting that the Netherlands also provides design space for the new fields 'Democratic citizenship education' and 'digital literacy', even though these will be offered integrated in many schools.

Countries where a lesson table has been established by the government can of course use the designated teaching time per subject during development work when estimating what is feasible in the curricula per field. Montenegro provides detailed information to the development committees about the number of available teaching hours per year, with a distinction between a mandatory and an open number of hours, as part of the methodological instructions to support the development work.

It is striking that no country has developed a system to measure effective teaching or learning time per learning field or cluster of learning fields. In Flanders, this was one of the arguments that led to the annulment of the educational goals by the constitutional court. However, when legislating the annulled core curriculum, a committee of secondary school directors and teachers was established to monitor the implementation process of the curriculum reform. The committee has also taken steps to investigate how much teaching time is spent in the annulled core curriculum. Obviously, the committee's work was stopped after the annulment of the educational goals. However, an in-depth study into how much teaching time is spent taking into account quantitative and qualitative aspects would still be relevant, not only in Flanders.

Adapting to different student profiles: abstract-theoretical versus concrete-practical?

When it comes to the core curriculum, the ambition in most countries that contributed to this yearbook is that the learning outcomes are achieved for all students, regardless of the finality of the field of study (higher education or vocational). That does not mean they are achieved in exactly the same way. Most countries support differentiation in the classroom. In Ireland and Wales, student-centred education is built into the core curriculum itself. In Albania and Hungary, the implementation of a new curriculum is supported with guidelines on dealing with different student profiles. In Bosnia and Herzegovina there is an explicit focus on the inclusion of students with special educational needs.

A number of countries provide elective subjects, especially in upper secondary education. These electives, whose content is sometimes determined centrally, are not necessarily less important for the individual student than other subjects. Montenegro, for example, emphasises that the electives are evaluated in the same way as the compulsory subjects.

It should be noted that in most countries compulsory education is limited to lower secondary education. Although the majority of students will also attend upper secondary education, some of the students can opt for hands-on, job-specific training. This means that the core curriculum, which is centrally imposed and taught to all students, is usually limited to lower secondary education.

Avoiding a negative perception about the reformed curriculum

As mentioned earlier, curricular reform in many countries follows an extensive, participatory process. One of the arguments for such a process is the search for the greatest possible consensus and support. Luxembourg's article shows that the participatory approach to the preparatory phase itself is already seen as part of the change process.

In most countries the government also plays an active role in the implementation process, enabling a coordinated approach to support teachers in adopting the new core curriculum. As mentioned earlier, regardless of all the efforts during the development of a new core curriculum, there is no guarantee for success during implementation. Slovenia and Kosovo openly describe the difficulties they encountered during the implementation process. Kosovo discusses how difficult it is to introduce transversal competences into education. They emphasise, among other things, the importance of tailoring the learning process and evaluation to the learning outcomes to be achieved.

Sometimes curriculum reform is not the only change that is pursued. Slovenia describes the ambition to change the pedagogical-didactic approach of teachers and teacher teams through changes in the core curriculum. By developing concrete didactic instruments for interdisciplinary topics, Slovenia aspires to increase teamwork among teachers and to achieve deeper and more sustainable learning among students. In this way, curriculum reform is simultaneously used as a goal in itself and as a means for change in the didactic approach. This dual ambition obviously makes the implementation process more complex.

Albania is taking an interesting approach to the smooth implementation of the new core curriculum. It will first be applied to a limited number of schools for a year, after which it will be rolled out to all schools. The aim is to properly prepare the professionalisation and training of teachers, and it also provides limited scope for adjustments.

In Hungary and Luxembourg, the implementation of a curriculum reform is accompanied by the development of new textbooks by the government. This means the new learning content can quickly be incorporated in classroom practice.

Closing thoughts

Curricular reforms are often a means for the government to influence the quality of education. Yet everyone realises that a new core curriculum is just one element in the entire quality assurance cycle. Other factors mentioned in the articles, in addition to the role of the teacher discussed above, are the assessment policies and external quality control. A study in Flanders into the role of learning outcomes shows that there are various expectations and perspectives with which learning outcomes are viewed, depending on who will use them: government, inspectorate, teachers, students, parents or society at large (Simons & Kelchtermans, 2016). According to the researchers, these different expectations cannot be reconciled and clear choices must be made in that area prior

to the development process. The tensions that arise from the different expectations of each stakeholder are also discussed in detail in Norway's article.

In addition, we refer to the CIDREE yearbook from exactly 10 years ago: 'Balancing curriculum regulation and freedom across Europe' (Kuiper & Berkvens, 2013). What a happy coincidence that we are discussing the curriculum again in our CIDREE yearbook, albeit from a different perspective. Ten years ago it was focused on the tension between the intended, the enacted and the attained curriculum. It takes more than a well-developed core curriculum to successfully implement that core curriculum. Discussing all these preconditions could fill a yearbook in itself. But one of the most important success factors is undeniably the teacher. As mentioned in various articles in the current yearbook, the ambition is sometimes to allow teachers to make their own choices more independently through curriculum reform. This is not obvious for all teachers. It requires motivated teachers who are adequately trained and have sufficient time and resources to fill the space left open by the core curricula. Or to express it with a quote from the 2013 yearbook: "Curriculum space offered, does not mean curriculum space taken". In Wales, therefore, there is an extra focus on empowering teachers within pioneering schools that develop the school curriculum themselves in collaboration with universities. The aim is for: "teachers to be knowledgeable and confident in how to access and use educational research and to have the methodological skills to undertake their own robust enquiries".

What if in 10 years' time, we put together another yearbook about core curricula? Do we expect that the contents we consider essential today will remain roughly the same? Many curricular reforms are based on the ambition to prepare the next generation of young people for the future. We can only conclude that it is becoming increasingly difficult to predict that future. It cannot be ruled out that new technological developments will make certain competences redundant and that others will receive more attention. How much faster could writing skills be learned if writing were no longer done by hand? Is it just an impression or does handwriting receive less attention today than ten, twenty, thirty or more years ago? And what is the impact of such an evolution on children's learning? Undoubtedly, AI will also have a major impact on both how learning takes place and what is learned. Teachers are already scratching their heads about how to test writing skills in students. The students themselves may wonder why they still have to learn to produce a coherent text. If we look at the final article in this yearbook, which was created by asking Chat GPT just a few specific questions, we have to ask ourselves what the possibilities and consequences of such applications will be in a few years' time and what that means for the core curriculum today.

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The Netherlands: fact box

This article focuses on:
☒ Primary education
☒ Secondary education

The level to which the core curriculum addressed in the paper applies to:

- Ages of the learner: 4-15 years.
- Goal of the core curriculum: orientation toward upper SE, which includes pre-vocational education, general education and pre-university education.

In primary education and in lower secondary education the estimated **teaching time** ratio between the core curriculum and the full curriculum is 70/30%. Upper secondary is a more complex system consisting of various profiles that students can choose and that include compulsory subjects and elective subjects. However, not all options are offered by all schools.

Teaching time legislation only covers the minimum total teaching time for the school period as a whole.

- On average in primary education (estimation)
- Grades 1-4: 22 hours per week
- Grades 5-8: 25 hours per week
- On average in secondary education: 25 hours per week

Regarding the number of weeks of school per year, the government establishes most of the holiday weeks, but schools also have some autonomy. On average there are 40 weeks per year.

As for **central examinations:**

- Pre-vocational education (vmbo): grade 4
- General education (vmbo-tl/mavo): grade 4
- Higher general education (havo): grade 5
- Pre-university education (vwo): grade 6
- These are high-stakes exams, which qualify learners for the next educational levels.
- All subjects at all levels have some sort of exam. At least 50% is a `school exam', for which the school is responsible. A number of subjects only has a `school exam'. In other cases, 50% takes the form of a central written exam.

	Core curriculum	Full curriculum
Subjects/topics/key competences	The core objectives for primary education and lower secondary education include nine learning areas, of which four are considered 'basic skills' (Dutch language, numeracy and mathematics, and the two new learning areas digital literacy and democratic citizenship education). The choice of specific topics and key competences that will be included in the core curriculum is part of the renewal currently taking place.	The core objectives cover 70% of the curriculum, 30% is flexible time for schools. There are no requirements about how to use this time, so you could say that anything can be part of the full curriculum in addition to the core.
Amount of detail	The core curriculum is not very detailed; the autonomy of schools is highly valued. Nevertheless, the current renewal aims at more elaborated core objectives than the previous (2006) version, to support and give more direction to schools and teachers. • It includes knowledge, skills and attitudes. • It does not contain detailed learning paths or intermediate learning goals. The core objectives for each learning area in primary education and lower secondary education are aligned, as are a number of upper secondary subjects. There are no pedagogical guidelines and suggestions in the core curriculum; this is part of the autonomy of schools.	Schools can make their own choices of how to elaborate the core curriculum in their school-based curriculum. There are no legal requirements for the 30% flexible time. Learning paths, intermediate learning goals, lesson and pedagogical suggestions will be developed by SLO in collaboration with stakeholders following the renewal of the core objectives. This elaboration is exemplary; schools can also develop their own, and are free to choose teaching and learning materials. A variety of textbooks is offered by commercial educational publishers and open source material is also available.
Who is involved in its development	Besides SLO: teachers, subject specialists, teacher educators, scientists, and a broad range of stakeholders (from policy, education, society and science) can give feedback on the drafts.	Educational publishers, educational supporting agencies, schoolboards and several other stakeholders can contribute guidelines, (enrichment or remedial) learning material and electives for the full curriculum.

The Netherlands: biographies

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Annette Koopmans-van Noorel works as a curriculum developer and educational scientist at SLO, the Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development. Her focus areas are alignment of curriculum development across subjects and between primary and secondary education, curricular trend analysis, formative evaluation, and quality assessment. She is involved in the actualisation of the national (core) curriculum in The Netherlands, as a general educationalist. Annette is a former teacher in primary education.

Dr. Jeroen Bron

Jeroen Bron holds the position of manager within the curriculum renewal program. His main task is quality assurance and knowledge development. Previously Jeroen was involved in various curriculum projects on democratic citizenship education, student voice and internationalization. He participated in Erasmus, Cidree and Council of Europe projects.

Renewal of core objectives for primary and lower secondary education in the Netherlands and the elaboration of design criteria

Abstract

The Ministry of Education decided that a renewal of the formal curriculum for primary, lower and upper secondary education was necessary, and the project was assigned to SLO. The programmes for primary, lower and upper secondary education are being developed by various teams almost concurrently.

The assignment includes a number of design criteria safeguarding the depth and breadth of the curriculum, as well as a focus on `basic skills': reading, writing and literature in Dutch, numeracy and mathematics, digital literacy and democratic citizenship education. Teams developing the proposals are meant to focus on the core of the learning area or subject. Two design criteria are elaborated in this contribution: the formulation and number of core objectives, and `design space'. The design space criterion must indicate the relative size of a learning area or subject as a percentage of the total `curriculum space'. One objective of this approach is to prevent curriculum overload, another is to facilitate a better balanced curriculum.

The political context is reflected in the government assignment and the design criteria. Political contexts are often dynamic. An important element in this dynamic is the pendulum between a broad and a narrow curriculum. In a broad curriculum multiple subjects as well as a balance between qualification, socialisation and subjectification are valued. A focus on basic skills devotes more attention to reading, writing and literature, and numeracy and mathematics and a focus on qualification. The pendulum is influenced by various organisations, networks, committees and opinion leaders. This raises questions about how best to organise a stable and long-term curriculum development in an unstable environment.

This contribution describes the current renewal of the core objectives, experience with previous renewals within the political context of that time and how SLO operates within this environment. We elaborate on the main design criteria meant to safeguard the focus on the core curriculum, addressing several challenges we experience, and explaining how we navigate them.

1. Introduction

SLO is currently in the midst of a comprehensive renewal of the formal curriculum. Primary, lower and upper secondary education programmes are being developed by various teams almost concurrently. This renewal has been assigned by the Ministry of Education, having been approved by the minister. A temporary scientific curriculum committee (*CurriculumCommissie*) has been established to advise the minister of progress made as well as the challenges addressed, such as equal opportunities for students, curriculum coherence and the need for the new learning areas of democratic citizenship education and digital literacy.

In this contribution we focus on SLO's efforts to develop a core curriculum for primary education and lower secondary education. These phases in general education cover the age group four to fourteen. Curriculum requirements are formulated in `core objectives' (kerndoelen). At the end of primary education there is a national test meant to help determine what form of secondary education will best fit each student's capabilities: pre-vocational education, general education or pre-university education. This, however, is not directly related to the curriculum requirement.

The assignment to reform the core objectives came in two stages. The first one in 2022 concerns the delivery of core objectives for four out of nine learning areas: Dutch language, numeracy and mathematics, digital literacy and democratic citizenship education. These are considered `basic skills' by the Minister of Education and a policy priority. In a second assignment SLO (2023) has been asked to start developing core objectives for human and society (social studies), human and nature (natural sciences), arts and culture, English and other modern foreign languages and exercise and sports (physical education).

Even though `basis skills' are a policy priority that resulted in the first assignment, this assignment also includes design criteria to safeguard the breadth of the curriculum. According to a rationale included in the assignment, three broad functions of the curriculum are presented: qualification, socialisation and subjectification. Qualification asks the question about the acquisition of knowledge skills and attitudes enabling students to act and be prepared for further studies and work. Socialisation means that students acknowledge that society includes various cultures, practices and traditions, values and norms. Subjectification asks questions about what it means to be part of this society as an independent, critical and responsible person (Biesta, 2010; Onderwijsraad, 2016; Wetenschappelijke curriculum commissie, 2021a). Curriculum proposals should reflect these three functions while, at the same time, schools are expected to find a balance between these three broad aims.

Besides this, the assignment includes design criteria in the

following aspects. The first two are elaborated in this chapter:

- Formulation of objectives: objectives describe the content that should be presented to learners, the effort expected of learners and the knowledge, skills or attitudes they should experience or acquire. The objective is formulated as a target sentence including up to five items for further specification.
- Design space: the relative size of each learning area indicated as a percentage of the total curriculum space for the core. This is elaborated in a framework (SLO, 2022).
- Coherence: horizontal (between subjects and learning areas) and vertical (within subjects and learning areas, longitudinal) coherence.
- Contribution to equal opportunities: a number of measures stimulate equal opportunities for students through the curriculum: a strong foundation for literacy and numeracy, a broad curriculum introducing various contexts to students, inclusive content that appeals to various backgrounds of students and clear objectives for orientation regarding further studies and careers.

In this chapter we focus on SLO's efforts to provide the curriculum development teams with design criteria to establish a core of most relevant content. Finding that core is challenging in a time of constantly expanding scientific knowledge, while at the same time the complexity of our societies demands multiple skills (Voogd & Paraja, 2012). Moreover, public concern about behavioural problems in society requires a moral aspect in education (Wetenschappelijke curriculum commissie, 2021: 19). Defining the core will always be imperfect considering the various and often opposing goals expressed in research, society, policy and educators, the so-called claims on aims.

In the following sections we elaborate various aspects of a core curriculum and introduce the concept of design space. We reflect on the challenges of the current development process and conclude with questions for discussion. We begin by describing relevant recent developments in Dutch educational policy.

2. Policy context and earlier renewal attempts

Revision of the national curriculum has been on the agenda for over a decade. The last renewal of the core objectives for primary education and lower secondary education dates back to 2006. This implies that discussions on relevant content took place around 2003: twenty years ago. Since then, various attempts have been made to renew the curriculum, but none of them have resulted in legally defining new objectives. Two attempts produced actual proposals for an up-to-date curriculum. The first attempt `Onderwijs 2032' was carried out by a committee of eight more or less established educational experts. Their advice was of a visionary nature aiming at a core curriculum for the challenges in present day society and what the future demands of young citizens. 'More about less' was used as an important principle. Prioritising Dutch and English language, numeracy, digital literacy and democratic citizenship education were advised. In addition, the committee advised the introduction of broader learning areas and a thematic approach in combination with transversal skills. This advice was rejected for several reasons: it was regarded as highbrow, top down and not in tune with the needs and practice of education. Furthermore, stakeholders concluded that a vast majority of teachers had no clue about the proposal's existence or its content. Despite the effort to consult educators in meetings and online consultations, participation of practitioners was regarded as symbolic (NRC, 2016). In the end the advice was rejected by a collaboration of organisations representing teachers, as concluded by a research journalist (Correspondent, 2016).

In response a new initiative was launched by a new administration: Curriculum.nu (Curriculum.nu, 2017). The initiative was led by a coordination group consisting of various large educational organisations representing teachers, schools and school boards. This time it was not the expert but the teacher who led. Inspiration came from a few Canadian provinces where teams of teachers designed proposals around `big ideas'. The goals of the initiative include a description of the core and reducing curriculum overload without changing the present structure of the seven learning areas. In addition, two new learning areas were added: digital literacy and democratic citizenship education. In this large-scale initiative close to 200 teachers and school leaders worked almost two years to develop curriculum proposals, which were delivered in October 2019. Afterwards, political discussion commenced. While much was criticised in the discussions that followed, we focus on a few aspects here. The first being the lack of experts and scientists involved in the development of the curriculum. Teachers have their role, but experts and scientists were lacking. Bigger problems than curriculum affect the quality of education, e.g., teacher shortage. The initiative was considered too big and the quality of the proposals was questioned. These criticisms stranded this initiative as well. The administration under which the proposals were developed fell and after the longest process in the Netherlands ever to form a new government, Curriculum.nu was declared finished and closed. Some elements in the proposals however are considered inspirational for the present renewal of the curriculum and are mentioned in the current assignment to SLO as possible sources teams can use when designing new core objectives.

In the two previous attempts to renew national curriculum frameworks, SLO was not assigned its usual formal role in national curriculum development processes, but was involved as a facilitator of curriculum expertise. In 'Onderwijs 2032', SLO's contribution was limited to facilitating the secretariat with two curriculum experts who helped prepare meetings, collected relevant literature and performed follow up work on decisions made by the committee. In Curriculum.nu SLO's role was more substantial but still acting as a facilitator supporting the development process. The teams of teachers who designed proposals for nine learning areas were technically supported by a SLO curriculum expert. During the development process it became apparent that these teams needed more support from curriculum experts and the number of SLO experts increased. In addition, SLO facilitated the coordination group consisting of various partners responsible for its operations.

3. Elaboration of design criteria safeguarding the focus on a core

Although the challenge to focus on a core and prevent curriculum overload or imbalance cannot be tackled at the national level alone, these issues cannot be ignored in the development process of core objectives. In this section we elaborate on two design criteria included to meet these challenges. The first criterion concerns the formulation and number of core objectives. The second involves the distribution of design space that indicates the relative size of learning areas within the total curriculum space for the core objectives.

FORMULATION AND NUMBER OF CORE OBJECTIVES

To understand the choices made in the formulation and number of core objectives, we begin by addressing the impact of more general versus more elaborate curricula on schools and the experiences with earlier versions of core objectives. Core objectives function as an instrument for curriculum development and quality assurance in schools (Wetenschappelijke curriculum commissie, 2021-b: 16). Curriculum ownership by teachers and schools is the underlying principle. In practice most schools order textbooks or other (digital) learning material for teachers to use. This means that textbook publishers and authors are important in elaborating the core objectives. And they do it well, offering teachers rich resources for lessons and providing for differentiation. This also means that the materials often cover more than the core objectives. But if teachers try to cover all that is available, without making choices, the available teaching time is exceeded. Because the core objectives are very general, teachers have difficulties making choices in the content covered in textbooks. This leads to feelings of curriculum overload as teachers worry that they cannot `finish the book' and lack the ability to prioritise.

Curriculum frameworks have been revised in the past. In 2006, a revision was carried out by SLO with the assignment to reduce the number of core objectives and limit these to general aims. The philosophy was that general aims are sufficient to describe the expectations society has of schools, while allowing the professionals, i.e., teachers and school staff, to make their own choices when elaborating the curriculum based on their vision of the rationale of education and the best way to organise this in their particular context. In terms of Ekholm's Political steering model, this policy can be regarded as a gradual development model in which schools are allowed to set local aims while government creates conditions and prescribes the way schools need to go about the improvement process (Kuiper, Nieveen, Berkvens, 2013; Leat, Livingston, & Priestley, 2013). Looking back in retrospect at the way this philosophy behind the reduction of core objectives played out, we must conclude that it did not work. According to the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS)(2018) teachers in the Netherlands score low on items on the understanding of the curriculum and they score alarmingly low on the ability to implement the curriculum compared to any of the other 47 countries in the survey. Because of this, the curriculum has become a more prominent responsibility of the government to assure quality education.

The core objectives currently developed have doubled in number and expanded to include up to five specifications per objective. Another new dimension is that they can be formulated both in terms of the educational offering of schools and experiences or outcomes of students. The philosophy behind this increase of written curricula is the same as it was in 2006: allowing teachers and school staff to make their own choices based on their vision of the curriculum and the best way to organise this in their particular context. In other words, the principle that teachers and school staff must have ownership of the curriculum remains the same as in 2006, but leads to a different conclusion, namely that more detailed curricula give more direction and thus insight into the schools' curricular autonomy. Again, in terms of Ekholm's model (Kuiper, Nieveen, Berkvens, 2013), the policy has shifted towards the result-oriented responsibility model in which the government prescribes the aims to be achieved by schools and at the same time allows schools to find their own way of achieving these aims. In 2006, school autonomy came first, direction second. At the present time, direction comes first, school autonomy second.

DISTRIBUTION OF DESIGN SPACE WITHIN THE CORE CURRICULUM AND FLEXIBLE TIME FOR SCHOOLS

In the Netherlands schools have autonomy when allocating teaching time to learning areas and this autonomy is highly valued. Only in physical education is a minimum hours standard established. However, learning area development teams need design criteria to establish the extent of the core objectives for each learning area. Therefore, SLO was asked to advise the Ministry of Education on a design space framework. This framework is meant to prevent two dimensions of curriculum overload: content overload and curriculum imbalance (OECD, 2020). At the same time, it emphasises the need to make content-related choices and thereby avoid the risk of curriculum expansion, a third dimension of curriculum overload.

The design space framework is not meant to directly influence time allocated to learning areas in schools. It is only meant to support curriculum developers. We focus on the design space framework for developing core objectives (SLO, 2022).

Core objectives are designed to cover about 70% of total teaching time. The other 30% is considered flexible time for schools to adapt the curriculum to the school population and to express the school's identity, a legal right for all schools. This identity can be pedagogical, religious or curricular, such as science schools or culture schools. However, schools can also use the 30% flexible time to provide more teaching time for specific learning areas or to offer additional (elective) subjects.

Flexible time for schools has not previously been marked in the Netherlands, although in earlier versions of core objectives it was an implied starting point. 70% is dedicated to formal national curriculum requirements and content and is considered essential for all learners in primary and lower secondary education. 30% of flexible time is above the

average found in most European education systems. In the Eurydice facts and figures (2021) this kind of space referred to as 'subject flexibility' was found in 14 educational systems and applied to less than 23% of the total teaching time.

Analysis of current average teaching time

The framework had to stay as close as possible to common practices in schools regarding the distribution of teaching time across learning areas. It also had to be based on scientific sources and international comparisons, insofar as they are available. We started with an analysis of available sources (Table 1). The only legal requirement we could rely on is the total teaching time. A large variation in the distribution of time and in the way the curriculum is delivered to learners is a natural consequence of school autonomy. The data in Table 1 are based on the average teaching time for each learning area in the entire school period, which includes eight years in primary education and two in secondary education. For primary education, monitoring reports per learning area from the Inspectorate of Education were used (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2013; 2015; 2071a;2017b;2018; 2019). Data on secondary education were found in IPTO research (Vloet, Den Uijl, & Fontein, 2018), for which all schools in secondary education are asked to submit their lesson tables. For international comparison the OECD (2019) data were most useful because they include all learning areas.

One of the conclusions of the analysis is that most of the teaching time seems to be allocated to the learning areas while the currently implied 30% of flexible time is hard to point out in the available data.

Learning area	Grade 1-8 PE	OECD PE	Grade 1-2 SE vmbo/havo/ vwo[1]	OECD SE
Dutch language (DL)	34%	25%	11%	15%
Numeracy & Mathematics (NM)	21%	17%	12%	13%
English Language (EL)	2%	6%	10%	10%
Other Modern Foreign Languages (OMFL)	d.n.a.	d.n.a.	vmbo-k/g/t: 7% havo/vwo: 13%	5%
Human & Society (HS) (social studies)	WO (grade 5-8): 13%[2]	**11%	**11%	**15%
Human & Nature (HN) (natural sciences)	NT[3]: 4%	8%	12%	15%
Arts & Culture (AC)	7%	10%	10%	7%
Exercise & Sport (ES) (physical education)	6%	9%	9%	8%
Digital Literacy (DIL)	*-	*1%	*-	*1%
Democratic Citizenship Education (DCE)	*-	*-	*-	*-
Other goals[4]	17%	13%	12-18%	11%
Total teaching time	100% 7,520 hours	100%	100% 2,000 hours[5]	100%

* Not enough reliable data available
**Including democratic citizenship education

Table 1: Average current teaching time per learning area in primary (PE) and secondary education (SE), as percentages of total available teaching time.

1 Pre-vocational education, general education, pre-university education
2 Thematic research: World Orientation: nature and technology, space and time. Human and society is not included. In grade 1-4 the curriculum is often delivered in an integrated format, which is reflected in the big differences in the data.
3 Nature & Technology
4 Content goals transcending or outside learning areas, such as career learning, individual guidance, elective activities. Aspects of citizenship education or digital literacy can also belong to 'other goals'.
5 Indicatively, because only the total teaching time is legally defined, not the teaching time for each grade.

The Netherlands

Design principles for the distribution of the design space framework

The design principles for the framework follow the requirements of the assignment and the aims of the renewal, taking into account analysis of current average teaching time:

- *Limit design space for the core objectives to explicitly mark flexible time for schools.*
  The core objectives provide content goals that require about 70% of total teaching time. In the eight years of primary education this corresponds to 5,264 hours; in the first two grades of secondary education this indicatively corresponds to 1,400 hours.
- *The core curriculum is limited to content goals that are important for all learners, in primary education and at all levels of secondary education.*
  There are two frameworks, one for primary education and one for secondary education. The core objectives are the same for all learners. In practice, schools can and do differentiate significantly between grades and levels of education.
- *Democratic citizenship education and digital literacy are included in the core curriculum.*
  These new learning areas have their own design space, even though this content is probably integrated in other learning areas. By assigning separate design space, these new learning areas are made visible in the base models.
- *The distribution of design space is derived from global proportions in average teaching time spent on learning areas in current educational practice.*
  To provide developers with clear guidelines and avoid false precision, rounded percentages are used. The coherence between primary and secondary education in the weight of learning areas is also taken into account.

Framework for the distribution of design space in primary education

The framework for primary education is visualized in Figure 1, as an example of what the criteria for design space look like in order to explain the underlying idea and the choices made. The weight of all learning areas is visualized within the core of the curriculum (70% of the total teaching time).

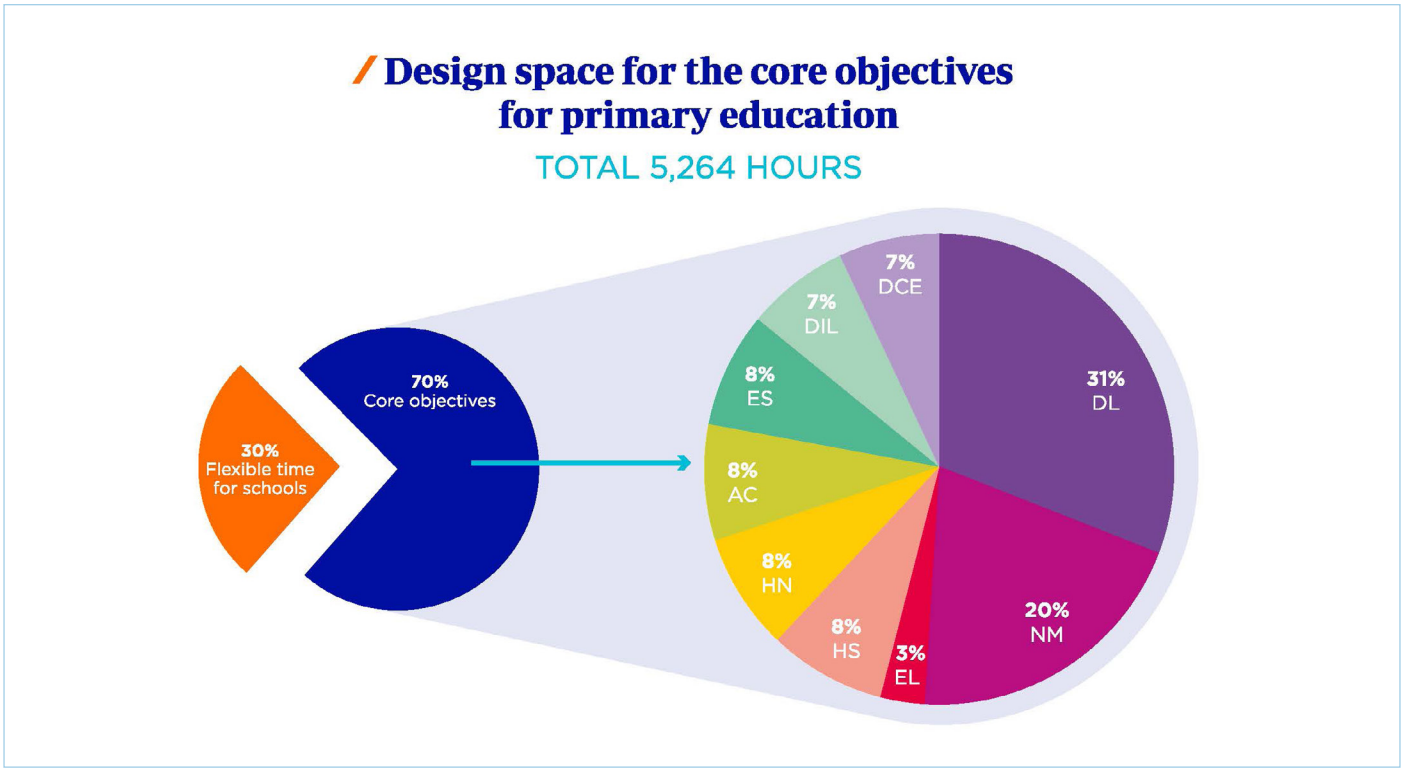

Figure 1: Distribution of design space for the development of core objectives in primary education (for the abbreviations, see Table 1)

Explanation of the choices made in the framework

In the Netherlands the average percentage of teaching time spent on (Dutch) language and on numeracy and mathematics in primary education is above the average in European and OECD countries (Eurydice, 2021; OECD, 2019). Because of concerns about learning outcomes in national and international comparative studies and the requirement that the distribution of design space had to stay as close as possible to general practice, the total design space for Dutch language and numeracy and mathematics still covers about 50% of the 70% that forms the core curriculum. However, of the 100% (70 + 30) total design space, 22% is dedicated to Dutch language and 14% to numeracy & mathematics.

Digital literacy and democratic citizenship education are new learning areas in the core objectives. Current data on average teaching time spent on these areas are limited. It is difficult to estimate the required time in advance, the percentage of design space is determined in comparison with the

other learning areas. It is substantial and visible in the core curriculum, but smaller than the design space of the 'multi-subject' learning areas such as natural sciences and social studies.

For English the percentage of design space is a bit higher than the current average teaching time because of the need to improve the continuous learning path to secondary education and to follow the higher averages in international comparison data. These arguments for rounding up design space also apply to the remaining learning areas. They all have the same percentage of design space to ensure the model remains clear.

Reflection on the distribution of the design space framework

The concept of the framework was submitted to the temporary scientific curriculum committee (TSCC) before the renewal process began (Wetenschappelijke curriculumcommissie, 2021a). In its advice the TSCC endorses the distribution of the design space framework as an initial version to use in the current renewal process. The TSCC acknowledges the complexity of determining design space and advises the evaluation of the design principles in the framework. To strengthen the empirical base, research is recommended to acquire an international benchmark and identify best practices. This will allow design space to be determined on the basis of more explicit substantive considerations. The TSCC also indicates that it is important to establish coherence in the core objectives, thereby preventing curriculum overload and also to create design opportunities for schools to deliver integrated aspects of the curriculum.

Monitoring and evaluation are important for the entire development process and the usability and effectiveness of the framework itself. Choices in the distribution of design space must also be monitored during the development phase, the pilot phase and the implementation. The results will be used to refine the framework.

The development process of the framework and the reflection of the TSCC raised some further questions. International comparative data on the distribution of teaching time were difficult to use because of differences in educational systems and policy. Available data also show a considerable bandwidth. Besides that, benchmarking is complex. Empirical evidence of the relationship between school teaching time and student achievement is inconclusive: more teaching time does not necessarily lead to higher outcomes (OECD, 2020). Nevertheless, more teaching time is often one of the first demands when concerns arise about results. We emphasise that design space and teaching time are not synonyms in the Dutch context, but we do expect that in practice there will be a relationship between the design space and the assigned teaching time. Consequently, this relationship will influence the debate.

Another issue to consider involves the criteria that can be used to appoint the best practices regarding design space; does an 'ideal distribution' exist? Determining the weight of each learning area boils down to the issue of what aspects of the core curriculum are most important when preparing learners for their future. It is difficult to find a shared answer to that question with all the different perspectives and stakeholders.

4. Discussion

In this chapter we describe how SLO, as a curriculum institute, faces various challenges of a diverse nature: the sphere of influence within the context of a national system, assignments that can include contradictions, and unpredictable developments that occur during the process. In this final section we address some of these challenges.

The first challenge is the policy context. The assignment SLO received from the department of education has been approved by the minister after discussion with parliament. These discussions influenced the assignment. This demonstrates that ideas about what a core curriculum is begin in the political discourse. In the Netherlands this means that four learning areas are considered the designated core: Dutch language, numeracy and maths, digital literacy and democratic citizenship education. The first two can be considered a classical core, the last two are a reflection of our time. Despite this designated core seven learning areas remain that also need to be revised and have sufficient `design space'. Furthermore, the ministry, again based on advice from the curriculum committee, introduced a rationale with three core aims of education: qualification, socialisation and subjectification. This rationale is included in the assignment to SLO. However, parliamentarians publicly announced that socialisation and subjectification should best be left to schools. An important principle at stake here is the legal freedom for schools to have and use their own pedagogical principles and values. The task of SLO is to show that socialisation and subjectification are indeed part of a national curriculum and can be described in neutral terms.

The National education council warned that the current policy situation makes the educational system vulnerable and negatively affects students' educational careers (Onderwijsraad, 2014, 2016, 2019). In an attempt to counteract the political instability of curriculum renewal efforts and to propose innovation that transcends the current system, the government is exploring options within the current structure with the national educational council (Onderwijsraad) and the curriculum institute (SLO) or may yet still include another body. An important outcome should be to establish legislation or a system for a more methodical and predictable cycle of curriculum renewal (Letter to Parliament (Kamerbrief) 2023).

The second challenge is transparency. SLO organises the design process by 1) openly hiring teachers and subject specialists reflecting different visions; 2) adding an advisory circle with stakeholders to the developing team; 3) organising a monitoring system to safeguard the quality of concepts and; 4) producing an explanatory and accountability document that describes how input from the advisory circle is used, the dilemmas the designers encountered, as well as the choices they made. This approach makes the development process as democratic and transparent as possible. The disadvantage of this approach is that outsiders using different forms of media have plenty of opportunity to criticise draft versions of curriculum proposals or take something out of context, and thereby make a point or cause confusion amongst stakeholders and uncertainty amongst the teachers and subject specialists in the design team. Transparent processes are therefore fragile. The failure of the two previous attempts to renew the curriculum was at least in some part influenced

by non-constructive opinions and incorrect framing in social and traditional media. In the current renewal, investment in communication must be considerable if we are to prevent or tackle misconceptions.

The third challenge is that of conservation and innovation. If we are to develop a core curriculum while adding new and actual content both within existing learning areas as well as adding two completely new learning areas (digital literacy and democratic citizenship education) tension cannot be avoided. This raises the question about the functions of a curriculum framework: the curriculum as a stable and enduring reflection of traditions or the curriculum as a catalyst for change, development and innovation in society. It is not a matter of choosing one of these functions but of how to combine the two. One consequence is that the `traditional core' needs to be defined with even greater clarity to allow space for innovative additions. Needless to say, preventing curriculum overload is a serious challenge for curriculum developers.

The third challenge is directly related to the fourth challenge: utilising the design space framework, which is new with regard to the development of core objectives. Due to the explicit marking of the free design space and the addition of two learning areas, the design space of existing learning areas deviates from the current average distribution of teaching time. Taking into account the change in the level of elaboration in the core objectives, it is difficult to estimate the ultimate implications of design space on the weight and extent of each learning area. It can be experienced as a reduction, but the current objectives are so general that the limits of the core of each learning area are hard to discriminate. Developers need to account for their choices to prevent curriculum overload and to prioritise the core of each learning area far more explicitly than in previous renewal processes. Moreover, it is quite challenging to estimate the total amount of time required to first of all deliver the objectives within the allocated teaching time and ultimately achieve the intended goals. The fact that the sets of core objectives are defined at the end level of primary and lower secondary education makes it more difficult. Especially when one considers the great autonomy of schools and the resulting variation in the way the curriculum is delivered.

The fifth challenge we want to be addressed is the risk of a `specialists' curriculum' as in a curriculum that can only be understood by specialists. Forming a design team that consists of subject teachers and subject specialists and an advisory circle consisting of stakeholders, who, to a certain extent, are advocates for a subject and would rather see the content of a subject increase, can easily lead to an unbalanced curriculum in relation to other subjects and to abstract formulations that can only be understood by colleagues. A system of checks and balances with a focus on the curriculum as a whole using criteria such as relevance, balance and coherence needs to be in place.

CLOSING REMARKS

In this chapter we described efforts to develop a core curriculum. There are different aspects of what can be considered a core. This chapter has made it clear that SLO considers the core curriculum to be the content formally defined by the government which schools must address. This core makes up about 70% of the total curriculum design time, leaving 30% to the school. The core consists of nine learning areas. For each of these, teams describe the content they consider most relevant for students. Amongst these nine, four learning areas are a policy priority and considered basic skills.

At the time this chapter is being written, we are still in the developmental stage. We cannot say if our efforts to manage the process using the design criteria will lead to the core as we envision and we do not know the effect the design space framework will have.

The underlying idea of the core objectives for each learning area is that they are essential to be offered to every student. They also imply room for more detailed elaboration at other levels, especially by teachers and schools. One of the responses to new societal expectations and challenges is the inclusion of the new learning areas digital literacy and democratic citizenship education in the core objectives.

Over the next period we will pilot the renewed curriculum and at the same time develop related guidelines for schools. The next challenge is to apply the core objectives, to work on 'shared sense making' and ultimately ensure they are jointly implemented in practice and achieve the aims of the curriculum reform. The implementation process will be supported as SLO exchanges information and cooperates with stakeholders, such as by encouraging the collaboration of educational publishers and teacher training colleges. Test developers are involved in an early stage to ensure alignment of the curriculum and assessment. Over the coming years, SLO will develop exemplary materials, intermediate goals and learning pathways. The implementation process will also be monitored to facilitate intervention on demand and in a timely manner. At the same time, we want to develop our own expertise for future curriculum renewal.

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Sweden: fact box

This article focuses on:
☒ Primary education
☒ Secondary education

In Sweden the **teaching time** in primary education amounts to 6.890 hours. The number of hours per stage (three year cycle within primary) and subject are also regulated. In secondary education the minimum regulated total teaching time for academic programmes is 2.180 hours and for vocational programmes 2.430 hours. Both levels have 40 weeks of school a year.

Sweden has **mandatory national tests** that have to be taken into special consideration by the teachers when grading. In primary education these tests are organised in year 3 (Mathematics, Swedish and Swedish as a second language), year 6 (English, mathematics, Swedish and Swedish as a second language) and year 9 (English, Mathematics, Swedish, Swedish as a second language, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Religion, History, Civics, Geography). In secondary education national tests are organised for English, Mathematics, Swedish and Swedish as a second language.

	Core curriculum	Full curriculum
Subjects/topics/key competences	Current research has suggested that the most salient themes are: Bildung, Human rights, Democratic attitudes and working methods, Sustainable development, Cultural heritage, Ethical/ Environmental/International/Historical perspectives, Health and well-being, Sexuality, consent and relations, Equality and gender, Group rights, Critical literacy, Language development, Socio-emotional skills, Digital competence and entrepreneurship.	Primary: Art, English, Home and consumer studies, Physical education and health, Mathematics, Modern languages, Mother tongue tuition, Music, Biology, Physics, Chemistry, Geography, History, Religion, Civics, Sami, Crafts, Swedish, Swedish as a second language, Sign language for the hearing, Technology. Secondary: a total of around 650 different subjects both for the academic and vocational tracks. Transversal elements may only be articulated in the subject syllabi if they are relevant to the subject in case and can be expressed in a subject-specific way.
Amount of detail	A 'value base' makes up most of the core. Tasks and responsibilities for schools are derived from this value base and presented as mission statements. The core curriculum defines integrative knowledge as a compound of facts, understanding, skills and familiarity. The core curriculum indicates some didactic implications but does not include concrete suggestions.	In addition to the core there are subject syllabi that: • Specify subject aims and relevant knowledge in the form of subject-specific facts, objects of understanding, skills and ways of forming judgments. • State one set of learning objectives for primary and one set for each subject in secondary. • Specify mandatory subject content. • Specify criteria for grading. The subject syllabi do not contain didactic guidelines and suggestions.
Who is involved in its development	Elected political decision makers, curriculum experts from governmental bodies, academics, various representatives from concerned parties. Also society, broadly through a process of public hearing of proposals.	Elected political decision makers, curriculum experts from governmental bodies, academics, representatives from concerned parties such as educational researchers, vocational associations, pupil and teacher associations. Also society, broadly through a process of public hearing of proposals.

Sweden: biographies

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Karl Larsson is a Director of Education at the Swedish National Agency for Education where he works with curriculum development. Karl holds a master´s degree in Political Theory with an orientation towards democracy and curriculum theory. He takes interest in foundational curriculum principles and how different curriculum ideologies come into play when they are translated into curricular frameworks. He also holds a teacher-certificate in social studies and history for upper secondary.

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Core curriculum in Sweden – balancing visions and increasingly disparate expectations and influences

Abstract

The Swedish curriculum framework is introduced and discussed in terms of coherence. Sweden defines its core curriculum as the general parts that address teaching and learning, regardless of subject. Since its inception in 1994, the core has been subject to several amendments. However, even more substantial changes have been made to the subject syllabi that are also part of the curriculum framework, which raises questions about the coherence of the framework as a whole.

Because Sweden´s take on competences differs somewhat from the contemporary notion, challenges that arise when a national curriculum has to meet demands driven by transnational policy flows such as competence-based frameworks are discussed.

Two cases – one concerning content overload and the other concerning attainment gaps – serve to illuminate a political perspective on the question of monitoring the curriculum's feasibility.

1. Introduction

How do we prepare students to participate in society, when society´s expectations rise due to increasingly rapid changes? This is a question that permeates the European and indeed international discourse among educational policymakers. Many see the answer to this in a broadened view on knowledge and the inclusion of new and transversal competences in the curricula. Although there may seem to be consensus on this issue the answers still differ depending on national traditions, politics and discourse, but also depending on the timing of reforms.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe and interpret the development of the 'curricular framework' in Sweden since 1994, and to illustrate its consequences in terms of curriculum coherence. Because national curricula are closely intertwined with politics, we have chosen to discuss questions on strategies for development and curriculum feasibility from a political perspective.

BACKGROUND: THE NATIONAL CURRICULA MEET TRANSNATIONAL POLICY FLOWS

Today, competence-based curricula are part of an international trend (Priestley & Sinnema, 2014, Nordin & Sundberg, 2016), which has gained ground since the EU's key competences were introduced in 2006. Although competence-based curricula or frameworks for curriculum development can emphasize different educational purposes, qualification for the purposes of entry into the labour market and economic growth is often prominent. The competence framework that has gained most traction at policy level in Sweden, is the European Qualification Framework (and the Swedish version SeQF), while interest in others, such as the OECD' s framework and the European Council´s Reference Framework for Competences of a Democratic Culture, has been more limited.

The impact that the competence-based approach has had internationally would suggest that it is now a dominant model for a modern curriculum (Andersson-Levitt, 2017). Sweden, however, has not undertaken a wholesale adaptation (see below). A question then, is if and to what extent the Swedish national curricula can and should adapt to the competence-based logic. This question is partly due to pressure on national policy from the EU's competence agenda (where the EQF may serve as an example). At the same time, the national level may not be willing to conform too much, as it would mean handing over curriculum decision-making. The position of the Swedish Agency of Education (SNAE)[1] is that what we call core curricula have already contained the domains of the EU's key competences since the mid-nineties. Thus, there is no need for change (Liedman, 2009). But this position becomes more difficult to maintain as more and more elaborate competence frameworks are institutionalized and consequently exert more pressure to adapt.

The Swedish approach

> *A paradigm shift in Sweden towards a broader conception of knowledge and skills already occurred in the reform of the curriculum as early as 1994. Since this shift came quite early in Sweden, the stance that was taken on competences differs from many other European countries.*

Therefore, this shift can be of interest in comparison to developments across Europe. It is also an interesting example of how the implementation of a new view on knowledge, learning and education evolves over time, meets objections, and is subsequently renegotiated. The development in Sweden thus illustrates both possibilities for change and possible pitfalls. Since 1994, the ideological/political discourse and public debate has shifted towards a more subject-oriented view on knowledge. Still, elements

1 The SNAE is the central administrative governmental body for the public school system, publicly organized preschool, school-age childcare and for adult education.

of the 1994 curriculum have remained the same when it comes to the general and introductory parts on transversal competences, values, and attitudes.

2. The development of the national curricular framework

DIFFERENT LEGISLATIVE LEVELS

The Education Act (skollagen), adopted by the Riksdag (Swedish Parliament), regulates all formal education from preschool, primary education and lower secondary education (compulsory education), upper secondary and vocational education (see figure 1). Among other things, the Education Act sets out the values that underpin formal education with reference to the constitution. These values are then elaborated in the core curricula, which are ordinances decreed by the Government. The national curricula for every level of formal education (including forms of education such as special programmes and compulsory education for pupils with intellectual disabilities) comprise a core section and subject syllabi (see Figure 1). The government holds the decision-making power over the core curricula as well as most subject syllabi. The government has authorized the SNAE to issue some of the subject syllabi (see below). In most cases the SNAE prepares and submits proposals to the government for its decision. In 2016, the government authorized the SNAE to initiate revisions and to continually evaluate and suggest changes to the government.

The Swedish national curricula concern most citizens since they regulate compulsory and upper secondary education. Therefore, it is important that the different regulatory texts, as well as the processes of their development, are perceived as legitimate. Because the subject syllabi are specialized they need to seek special legitimization in various fields of knowledge and in the teaching profession. Other stakeholders, such as vocational associations, pupil and teacher associations and educational researchers participate in the process of development, but it is the SNAE who decides on the final proposals that are submitted to the government.

The order between the different legislative levels reflects several aspects. Firstly, it indicates how the state recognizes the order of importance between the regulatory documents. Secondly, it is evident that the principle of achieving a broad consensus applies to a greater extent to the Education Act and the curricula than to the subject syllabi.

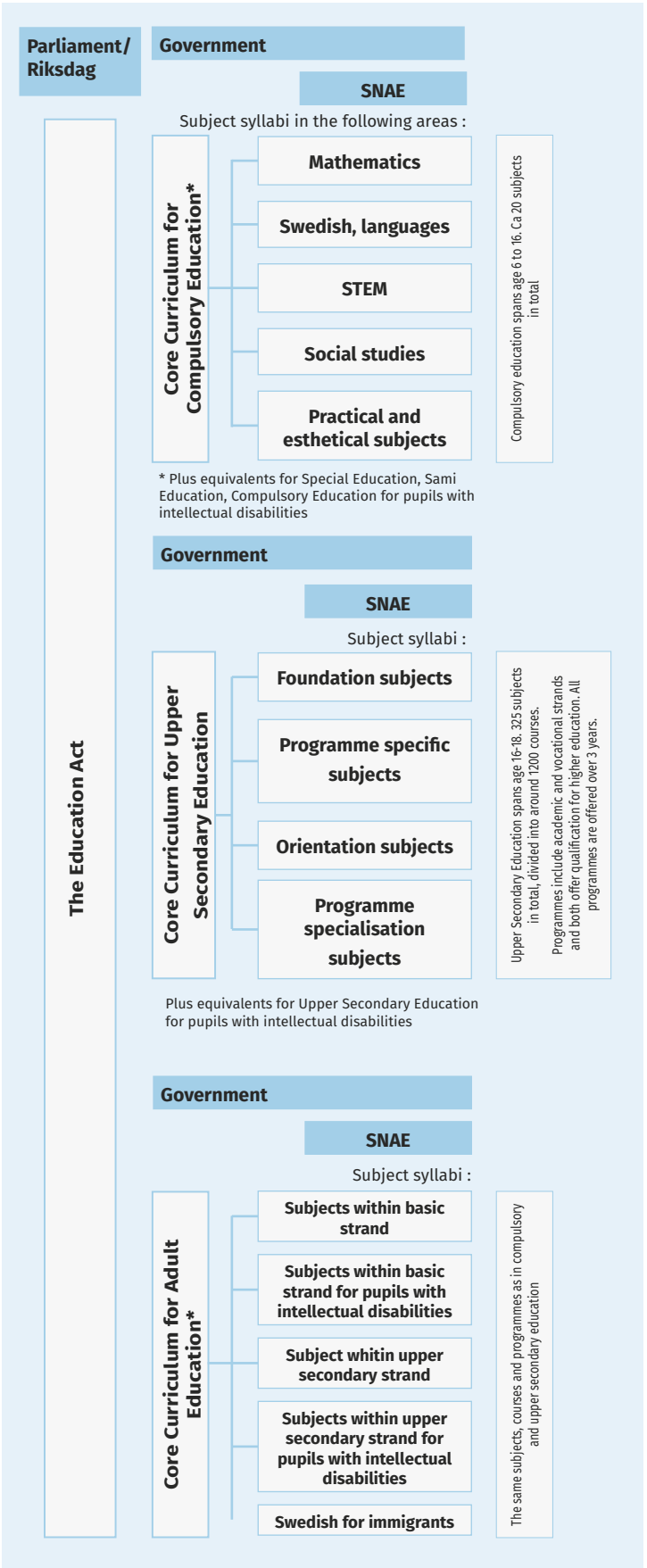

Figure 1: The legislative hierarchy of the national curricula

Sweden

WHAT IS THE 'CORE' IN THE CURRICULUM?

What 'the core curriculum' refers to in the Swedish context, is the introductory and general parts of the curricula. These make up the common 'core' for all types of formal education. This means that all students, regardless of age, should receive an education that is *based* on the set of common values that are stated, is *in line* with the directions that are given, and that *strives* towards the overall purposes of schooling. The 'core' is thus interpreted here as the common grounds, aims and tasks that are given to each form of education within public education as a whole. This view on a curriculum, as an instance that points out directions and purposes rather than expresses standards and outcomes, shares traits with the German-Continental Didaktik tradition (Hopmann, 2015, Hopmann, 2007, Gundem et al. 2003).

OVERVIEW OF THE CURRICULAR FRAMEWORK

The Swedish national curricular framework comprises the 'core' and the subject syllabi (see Figure 1 above). The core regulates fundamental values for each form of education respectively in one section, and goals and guidelines for them in a second section. A 'value base' makes up most of the core and from it, tasks and responsibilities for the schools are derived and presented as mission statements. The elements of the core are supposed to permeate teaching in all subjects and comprise different types. Among them are fundamental values such as human rights, democratic attitudes, and equality. Some elements are perspectives, for example, ethical, environmental, and historical. Other elements target topics like digital competence, entrepreneurship, and critical literacy.

The subject syllabi on the other hand regulate teaching, assessment and grading specific to different subjects (however not pedagogical-didactical methods). In compulsory education there are sixteen subjects (see fact box).

THE SWEDISH CURRICULAR FRAMEWORK AND THE CONCEPT OF COMPETENCES SINCE 1994

A major reform of the curriculum in Sweden was carried out in 1994. The reform introduced a new view on knowledge and was organized around a set of general goals instead of subject-specific content and methods.

A governmental Inquiry *(Statens offentliga utredningar SOU 1992:94)*[2] preceded the reform and took an ambitious approach to the question it tried to answer: how to prepare schooling for a society in constant change. The inquiry concluded that the core curriculum should: "... answer questions about what values public education should rest upon and the knowledge that should be selected for learning. It should highlight the cultural heritage that, in a broad sense, should be transferred from one generation to the next, and at the same time answer how schooling should prepare for a rapidly changing world. It should also clarify the mandates and responsibilities of the actors involved."

Another central question for the inquiry was how to overcome traditional hierarchies between theoretical and practical subjects. The conclusions led to a renewed, and substantially broadened concept of knowledge, the so-called four forms model (the four Fs). This concept is based on an integrative and practice-oriented approach and rests upon the assumption that regardless of the domain, all knowledge includes or consists of *1) facts, 2) understanding, 3) skills and 4) familiarity*. The four forms are all aspects of knowledge that are regarded as inseparable and always interact, presupposing one another. This view was, and still is, the foundational basis of the core curriculum as well as the subject syllabi.

The reform of the curriculum in 1994 was based on the principles that the inquiry suggested. Decentralization was key, which meant that instead of the state issuing detailed instructions, teachers and schools were encouraged to concretize the curricula locally according to local interpretations and considerations.

Today, the content and structure in the core curriculum remains more or less the same, but the subject syllabi have become more detailed. Also, there are no longer demands on schools and teachers to develop local plans. The different forms of education – compulsory, upper secondary and adult education – share the same core.

The value base of the Core Curriculum

In the first section, the core curriculum introduces the notion of a 'value-base'. The value base is supposed to state "the fundament that public education should rest upon and a background against which the other parts of the curriculum should be understood." (SOU 1992:94, p. 142). The first part of the core curriculum *Fundamental Values and Tasks of the School establishes that:*

The national school system is based on democratic foundations. The Education Act (2010:800) stipulates that education in the school system is aimed at pupils acquiring and developing knowledge and values. It should promote the development and learning of all pupils, and a lifelong desire to learn.

> *Education should impart and establish respect for human rights and the fundamental democratic values on which Swedish society is based.*

Each and every one working in the school should also encourage respect for the intrinsic value of each person and the environment we all share. (Skolverket 2018)

It moves on to state values like understanding and compassion for others, objectivity, openness, and respect for differences. It also states that education must be based on equality, and it highlights the foundational rights and obligations in a democratic society.[3]

The value base is based on the Swedish constitution but adapted to the educational context. Furthermore, the fundamental values are framed as inalienable. They are hence not supposed to be interpreted as ends to which education is a means (Skolverket, 1999). Instead, this set of values are preconditions for the educational ends, or objectives.

2 Governmental inquiries are commissioned by the government as part of the government´s preparation of new legislation. They support the government with in-depth analysis and often suggest legislative changes. The result of a governmental inquiry is published as an official report called SOU.

3 See Skolverket (2018), *Curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and leisure-time centre* for examples.

This logic constitutes a difference from a competence-based approach where values would be operationalized as objectives in terms of expected learning outcomes. The foundational values underlie the work at school – and describe the obligations of the school.

Tasks of the school

The section on fundamental values is followed by a section with mission statements, 'Tasks of the School', that are derived from the value base. The following examples illustrate the function of the mission statements, i.e., with an emphasis on the responsibility of the school:
The task of the school is to promote learning by stimulating the individual to acquire and develop knowledge and values. [...]

The school has a mandate to convey and embed fundamental values and to promote pupils' learning in order to prepare them to live and work in society [...] Pupils should be able to find their way around and act in a complex reality with a vast information flow, increased digitalisation and a rapid pace of change.

The school should strive to promote equality. In doing so, the school should represent and impart equal rights, opportunities and obligations for all people, regardless of gender. [...] The school should thus contribute to pupils developing their ability to critically examine gender patterns and how they can restrict people's life choices and living conditions. (Skolverket 2018:10 pp.)

It is in this section, 'Tasks of the school', where we find elements akin to modern competences. Although the term competence is not explicitly used, in the mission statements we find wording that relates to the same domains that are covered by the EU's key competences (Liedman, 2009). Important to note is that these wordings are embedded in paragraphs with descriptions of tasks and responsibilities of the schools. Therefore, they are not immediately recognizable as competences targeting individual students and their learning. The 'Task for schools' section ends with a set of perspectives. These four perspectives are meant to be applicable in all subjects and are defined as: *historical, international, environmental, and ethical.*

The new view on knowledge expressed in the 1994 curriculum can be seen as a precursor to the international shift in educational discourse towards a competence-based education (cf. Sundberg & Tahirsylaj, 2020). The way knowledge is conceptualized in the Swedish curricula is to some degree similar to a contemporary conceptualization of competences. This has meant that there has been no adaption to the language in competence frameworks (Nordin & Sundberg, 2016).

In 2008, when the EU's key competences had started to gain traction, the SNAE commissioned a study to find out if Sweden needed to change its core curricula in order to align with the framework of the key competences. The study found that although the terminology differed, content-wise, the Swedish curricula already covered the domains that the key competences sought to describe and thus there was no need for change (Liedman, 2009). This has been the SNAE´s position since then.

At the same time there is a difference in the sense that the Swedish approach to knowledge was concerned with capacities and dispositions connected to human empowerment and 'Bildung' (Carlgren, Forsberg & Lindberg, 2009). This can be contrasted with ideas of social efficiency that guide many contemporary competence-oriented frameworks (Sundberg & Tahirsylaj, 2020).

Even though the Swedish core curricula take an integrative stance on knowledge and capabilities, they do not express goals in terms of competences. Neither are the core curricula structured according to the logic of constructive alignment, specified outcomes, and emphasis on assessment. Instead, they dress the intended knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions (or, to use another word, competences) in a language of pedagogical interventions. This manifests in wordings on what schools must let students *meet, engage in, take part in, be encouraged to*, etc. Whether this is expected to produce certain outcomes is left unsaid.

Since its inception in 1994, several additions and minor changes to the curriculum have been made. For example, 'Digital competence' – interestingly the only element described as a 'competence' – and 'entrepreneurship', were added in 2011. The latest addition in 2019, was originally intended as an update on a paragraph on sex education that evolved into a new section on sexuality, consent, and relations. When the new wordings were introduced, there was no obvious place to insert them, since the disposition of the curriculum follows the logic described above. Due to these additions and changes, the internal coherence of the curriculum has become increasingly complex.

The relationship between core and subjects

The subject syllabi of 1994 contained two sets of goals: *aspirational* goals directed at teaching and *achievement goals* directed at the assessment and evaluation of individual students. The complexity with goals on different levels in the subject syllabi, combined with broad goals for schools in the core curriculum, soon came under criticism.

Critics also claimed that values, general perspectives, and generic competences were emphasized at the expense of knowledge. In 2007, a governmental inquiry (SOU 2007:28) recommended revisions to address these issues, and in 2011, the aspirational goals were removed from the subject syllabi. The link to the core was weakened and a section on mandatory content, explicitly stating the content that should be taught in each subject, was introduced. Since the late '00s, there has been an increasing interest in knowledge outcomes and the subject-specific content in the pedagogical and political discourse (Nordin & Sundberg, 2016). Consequently, the revision in 2011 emphasized outcomes, assessment and grading, as more explicit standards and requirements were included in the assignment to SNAE. As a result, the achievement goals were replaced by more detailed *knowledge requirements*.

Vociferous criticism against the notion of competences came after 2011. This critique was not directed at the core curricula but at the subject syllabi in compulsory education. It was related to how the learning objectives and the knowledge requirements (i.e., criteria for grading) were formulated for compulsory education. All learning objectives stated that teaching should aim to develop the students 'capacity to', followed by a verb (often describing cognitive operations such as *to analyse, reason, reflect etc.*). The term 'capacity to' was chosen as a way of representing the integrative concept of knowledge stated in the core curriculum.

In the public debate this represented a degradation of conceptual and factual knowledge because 'knowing how' was seen to be emphasized at the expense of 'knowing that' (Ryle, 1945). Scepticism towards the notion of competences on this basis became quite commonplace. Therefore, in the revision of 2022, the SNAE made it one of its priorities to redirect the focus to conceptual knowledge. As a result, the wording 'knowledge about' was introduced in the learning objectives in the subject syllabi in compulsory education.

An issue that concerns transversal curricular elements, whether they are perceived as competences or not, is that the subject syllabi have certain advantages over the core curriculum when it comes to competing for teachers' attention. The subject syllabi express purposes, content, and assessment criteria that, quite naturally, are much closer to teaching and the classroom practices and thus easier for teachers to relate to. In Sweden, teacher assessment and grading is high-stakes and primarily regulated via the subject syllabi, which in turn makes the subject syllabi more prone to be regarded as the primary source for the curriculum.

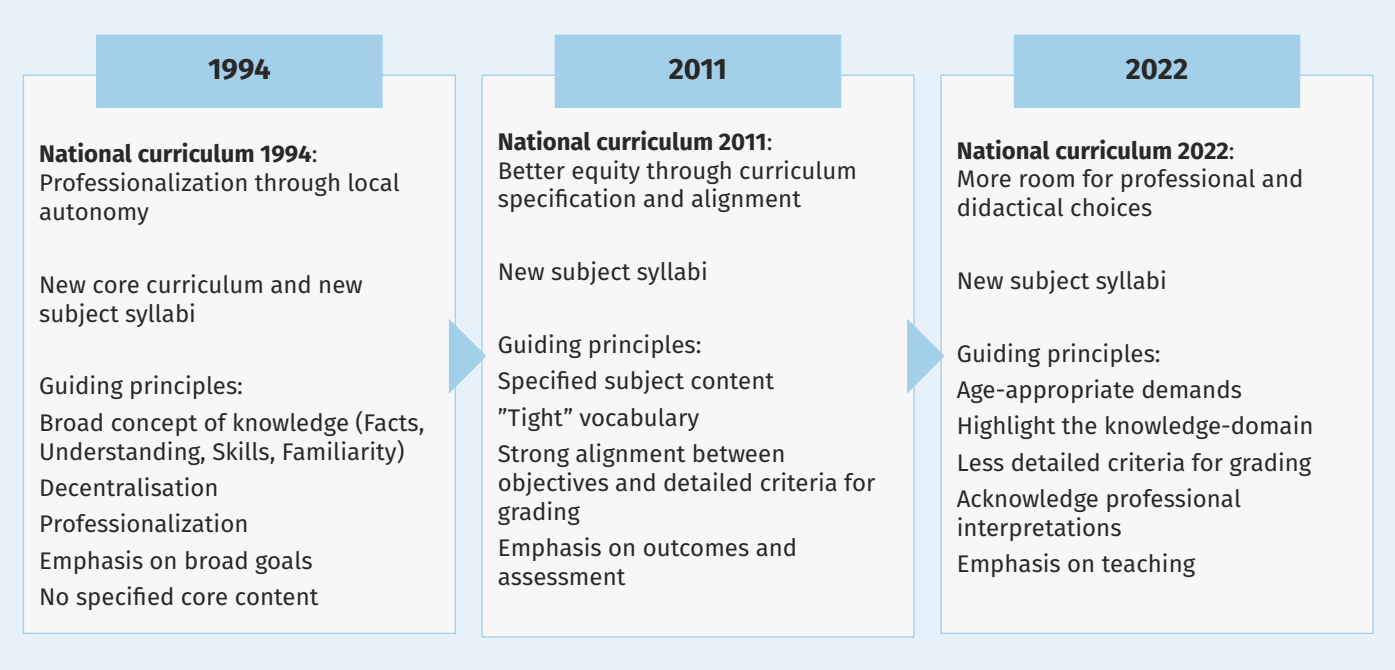

Figure 2: Timeline of changes to the curriculum

The core curriculum and the subject syllabi – patchwork or coherent whole?

A consequence of the different paths that the core curricula and the subject syllabi have taken since 1994 is that the *expectations* expressed in the core curricula have become harder to communicate. The significance that each element should be afforded was, and still is, up to the teacher or school to decide. When additions are made, they tend to be given more attention, which may result in imbalances. Novelty brings attention, which in turn may affect curriculum implementation.

To conclude, over time it has become harder to uphold the consistency and coherence of the core curriculum. There are indications of tensions between the core and the subject syllabi. The SNAE commissioned a research analysis of the curriculum and its coherence (Sundberg 2022). The analysis found that:

a. There was substantial room for different interpretations as to what specific transversal elements (competences, themes, literacies or otherwise) the core curricula contained.
b. Although the analysis distinguished around 20 such transversal elements, they differed a lot in character, scope, and status.
c. There were conflicting logics in the ways that the transversal elements operated, particularly in relation to the subject syllabi.
d. The curricula show signs of overload and lack of coherence.

A coherent and effective core curriculum must be in line with its time, be based on up-to-date ideas about the societal needs of education and depart from reasonable ideas about what knowledge, competences and values the students should develop as future citizens. From that perspective, maybe challenges such as the ones listed above are unavoidable. Even so, the question of curriculum coherence is an issue that the SNAE is currently trying to address.

3. The context and discourse surrounding the Swedish curricular framework

STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPMENT AND A PERCEPTION OF CRISIS

Curriculum research suggests that one, if not the main, driver for curriculum reform is a public perception of crisis (Landahl et al. 2021). Crises offer space for change, but they also demarcate the space for action depending on how the crisis is framed. From a political point of view, a perception of educational crisis can be attractive, as it can generate interest in political solutions that fit a certain narrative. Various crises have been important factors in the public debate about education for a long time (Landahl et al. 2021). Here we will offer a brief account of the last 20 years.

Already well before the Swedish PISA shock in 2012 (Ringarp, 2016), a narrative of crisis was established in Sweden. Lack of equity in education, negative trends in student achievement and reports of student misconduct were highlighted. The problems were seen by many as products of unclear or fuzzy expectations from the state, in turn explained by an influx of progressive pedagogical ideas undermining the traditional ways of schooling (Hultén 2019). A common catchword used was 'flumskola' which translates into 'fuzzy-school'. For many, the curriculum of 1994 was seen as both a manifestation of these ideas and as the main cause of the perceived crisis.

The governmental inquiry SOU 2007:28 *Clear objectives and knowledge requirements* suggested changes based on an idea that curriculum researchers later called 'The Clarity Doctrine' (Lindberg et al., 2018). This resulted in the aforementioned revisions of the subject syllabi in 2011. Informed by the notion of constructive alignment, it was expected that a more uniform and precise language and a stronger focus on the expected learning outcomes stated in the subject syllabi would solve the problems. The curricular framework came to emphasize subjects and outcomes (IFAU, 2015).

After 2011, new problems were identified by the SNAE. Despite more precise language and more elaborate descriptors of outcomes, the fairness of the grading system could still be questioned. The outcomes – used as criteria for grading – came to dominate the pedagogical discourse and classroom practice and became the focus of accountability (Sundberg, 2018). Teachers reported that they had become overburdened with documentation. Much time and energy were spent on deciphering how the outcome descriptors should be operationalised, often resulting in manuals and extensive rubrics on digital platforms. Despite heavily focusing on assessment, the grades showed no signs of increased national equivalence.

To address these issues the SNAE now tries to shift the focus from the assessment criteria to the content of the subjects and the value of rich and varied teaching in the latest revision of the subject syllabi in 2022.

MONITORING FEASIBILITY VS THE POLITICAL LOGIC: TWO CASES

Comprehensive evaluations of the education system used to be more common but today there is limited access to aggregated and synthesized data on feasibility. Of course feasibility is always an important perspective in curriculum development and evaluation, but we will try and show that other drivers may trump it when it comes to policy (and curriculum) change. The following two cases illustrate the different logics. The first case illustrates challenges with feasibility from the teachers' perspective. How can the curriculum respond when the time allocated is not enough to cover the mandatory content in a subject? The second case takes the students' perspective. How can the curriculum respond if a large proportion of the students fail to meet the objectives? The answers to these questions are not purely technical and up to the curriculum developers, because of the political nature of the curricula.

Case 1: Content overload and the difficulty of removing topics

In the process of revising all subject syllabi in the curriculum for compulsory education (SNAE 2022), one of the intentions was to adjust the amount of content in the syllabi to fit the number of teaching hours guaranteed to students. The subject where content overload was identified as most pressing was history. In the initial proposal, a paragraph on antiquity was removed. When the proposal underwent a public referral it created a massive outcry in the media and the SNAE was subjected to heavy criticism.

The line of reasoning behind the proposal was that something had to go, in order to increase feasibility. But the logic of politics rewards the *addition* of content and 'raising the bar'. Thus, any effort to address overload by *removing* content is likely to encounter resistance. But the more content to be covered, the less time there is for teaching, with the obvious risk that learning becomes superficial. In the end, antiquity was put back in the syllabus and some adjustments were made to the number of teaching hours.

Case 2. Standard setting the criteria for grading

In addition to the changes in 1994 discussed above, there was also a radical change in the basis for assessment. Grading changed from a norm-referenced to a criterion-referenced basis and the teachers were given full discretion. Another introduction was a sharp line between pass and non-pass (fail), as well as closer links between grades and admission to upper secondary school, and to higher education. Since the 90s, admission for entrance to the next level in the education system has been based on teacher-assigned grades. This meant that grades became more high-stakes than in the previous system. The intention was that all students should be entitled to a certain level of knowledge, that the schools were to be held accountable for. Another expectation was that the criterion-referenced grades would be used for evaluation and function as an incentive for schools to improve educational results.

When the first criteria were developed, it was expected that only a minor percentage of students would be unable to meet the criteria and thus not qualify for upper secondary or

higher education respectively (Hultén, 2019). But instead of the expected 5% or less, around 15% of pupils annually fail to qualify for upper secondary. Later research (Arensmeier, 2022) has shown that this proportion has been constant since 1994 to this day. The group of students that do not qualify for upper secondary (neither academic nor the VET tracks) follow a so-called introductory programme that prepares them for later entry.

After a public inquiry questioned this situation in 2020 (SOU 2020:43), there was a debate on whether the criteria for grading should be adjusted, so as not to exclude such a large proportion of students. A counterargument was put forward, where instead of lowering the threshold to upper secondary, the demands or standards should remain high, since they are the fundamental measure by which the state can hold schools accountable for their outcomes. Others argued that the price for this is quite high, since every year roughly around 17,000 pupils leave compulsory education without the qualifications to apply for upper secondary. The debate has not, yet, led to any policy implications.

What this tells us is that in practice the standards, as they were formulated in the criteria for grading in 1994, are difficult to change. Feasibility of the curriculum for the pupils is thus *not* the main driver for curriculum change. Instead, the standards are used as a lever to demand better and more efficient methods.

To conclude, the national policy level sets standards and holds municipalities and independent schools responsible for meeting the requirements. This division of responsibilities means that instead of a discussion on feasibility, the problem with dropouts tends to be framed as a question of deficiencies in the principals´ capacities, and in teacher competence. This is a contributing factor to more and more state-sponsored professional development efforts and various resources of support aimed at principals and teachers.

4. The future: competences and the Swedish curricular framework

In this chapter we have tried to show that the revisions and adjustments since the comprehensive curriculum reform in 1994 in Sweden have been influenced by different discourses. Although the original view of knowledge and Bildung as expressed in 1994 remains in the curriculum, the consequences of subsequent revisions and adjustments have created tensions in the framework. The international discourse on competences and the preparation of future citizens has had some influence but there is also scepticism toward it.

As new elements are introduced and the construction of subject syllabi and the guidelines for assessment are changed, coherence becomes harder to maintain. Perhaps we will see more fundamental changes to the curriculum framework in the forthcoming years. If we do, there are some challenges: the benefits of curriculum standardization have to be weighed against the value of teacher agency. Attention to domain-specific knowledge has to be weighed against the idea of generic competences. Feasibility has to be negotiated both from an empirical and a political point of view.

Subjects have formed a strong organizing principle since 2011, and will probably continue to do so.

> *As we have seen, Sweden´s position on the EU's key competences is that the Swedish curricula already cover the same domains. This position may become more difficult to maintain as more and more elaborate competence frameworks are institutionalized and consequently exert pressure to adapt.*

Competence-based frameworks remain an issue in Sweden – can it still be argued that the Swedish curricula *contain* them, do competence-based frameworks call for an *adaptive transformation* of the Swedish curricula, or should Sweden instead *reformulate* its stance?

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Hungary: fact box

This article focuses on:
☒ Primary education
☒ Secondary education

In Hungary the maximum **teaching time** in primary education is 24 or 25 lessons (45 minutes) per week, in lower secondary education it is between 28 and 30 lessons per week, and in upper secondary education it is 34 lessons per week. The academic year consists of 36 weeks in all three levels. In total, in primary education it is between 864 and 900 lessons per year, in lower secondary education it is 1,080 lessons per year, in upper secondary education it is 1,224 lessons per year. The core curriculum and the framework curricula were designed so that, on average, schools can teach the defined compulsory content in 80% of the teaching time. During the remaining 20% of the teaching time schools can decide the teaching content according to their teaching and learning profile including practicing, catching up, and talent development.

Hungary has a **central assessment**: *the national assessment of basic competences*. From 2022, the assessment of basic competences is organised from grade 4 to 11. The assessment tests the students' reading comprehension, mathematical, natural science and language competences, while the measurement of digital competences and historical thinking is under development. The *matriculation exams* provide pathways and admission to university.

	Core curriculum	Full curriculum
Subjects/topics/key competences	Focus on active learning as transversal competence, which frames all subjects in the core curriculum. Also in scope: Other transversal competences, such as learning competences, problem-solving skills, sustainability competences, active citizenship, entrepreneurship, moral and ethical, as well as digital competences.	In Hungary's content regulation system, the national core curriculum lays down the conceptual and substantive foundations and principles of public education. It is complemented by the subject-related framework curricula, which further specify and contextualize sub-competences, content and pedagogical tasks, prescribe minimum requirements for each subject for one or two grades, establish development tasks in skill areas and outline the available and recommended time frame for fulfilling the requirements. The National Core Curriculum amended in 2020, continues the tradition of the Hungarian education system in terms of content regulation (value-based approach), it aims to establish and develop learners' competences. This is applied at all levels of regulation in order to ensure the effectiveness of the educational process. Schools develop their local curricula based on the core and framework curricula. This is part of their pedagogical programmes.
Amount of detail	- Knowledge and skills are a bigger part of the core curriculum, while attitudes are included to some extent. - Primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education have their own detailed learning and knowledge goals, described in a two year period. - There are no didactic guidelines in the core curriculum, schools can use a wide variety of didactic strategies in order to achieve the established learning and knowledge goals.	The full curriculum includes knowledge, skills and attitudes augmented by learning goals and didactic suggestions. There are numerous framework curricula available (for all compulsory and optional subjects) and they are detailed documents offering support for teachers.

Who is involved in its development	An expert committee called Education 2030 (with members from the National Academy of Sciences, academic experts, and practicing teachers) which collaborated with the State Secretariat for Public Education. There was an open public debate on the renewal of the core curriculum, which also involved stakeholders such as teacher associations, churches, other professional organizations as well as teacher unions - the process was overseen by the State Secretariat for Public Education.	The frame curricula were developed under the coordination of the Educational Authority of Hungary, involving academic experts, practicing teachers and other experts form subject-related areas.

Hungary: biographies

Nikoletta Dóra Bagi

She graduated from the University of Public Service (Budapest) with a master's degree in governance and leadership. Before that she studied international public service management. In her thesis she wrote about the digitalization-related challenges of public education policy. She currently deals with digital education solutions at the Ministry of Interior which is responsible for public education.

Mónika Réti

She worked in various roles in education: as a civil educator, as a teacher, as a researcher, as a teacher educator, as an educational expert and as a policy officer. She carried on research on environmental competences in the very first National Core Curriculum in Hungary in 1995, then she took part in curriculum design and development processes in 2008, in 2012 and in 2020 at national level, in different roles and contexts – from content development to research, analysis and policy revision. She contributed to the renewal of matriculation exams, textbooks and initial teacher education linked to curricular revision. Her fields of interests include education for sustainable development and science education.

Hungary: biographies

He is the head of Digital Methodology and Development Unit in the Ministry of Interior which is responsible for public education. He is an expert in digital education, digital competences and digital content development. Between 2017 and 2020 he followed and supported the renewal process of the Hungarian National Core Curriculum and the framework curricula. He contributed to the development of new matriculation exam requirements in Digital Culture subject. He also contributed as a policy officer to the development and publishing of new textbooks and smart textbooks. He was involved in the renewal of pre-service teacher training requirements.

Gábor Rózsa

He participated in the legislative process of the most recent National Core Curriculum and coordinated the development process, as the head of the content development and regulation unit. He has 35 years of experience in various fields of education, he worked previously as a teacher, researcher, developer, trainer and tutor. He has many years of experience at all levels of public education, adult education and higher education, as well as in content and program development.

Péter Singer

He is a policy officer of the Digital Methodology and Development Unit in the Ministry of Interior which is responsible for public education. He is an active student currently attending to the Teacher Training Center of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of Pázmány Péter Chatolic University. He graduated from the same university in 2017 with a degree in Hungarian Language and Literature/History.

Krisztián Tőkésy

Reflection on the revision of content regulation in Hungary

Abstract

Content regulation changed in Hungary in 2020. In this article, we summarize the reasons and the main targets for the revision and renewal of the content regulation system in Hungary. The National Core Curriculum 2020 is a modified version of the previous National Core Curriculum introduced in 2012. The modified National Core Curriculum is a strategic reflection on the challenges brought about by the economic, natural and technical environment and by the changes in societal needs. The document's strategic objective is to modernize educational content, to reduce student workload, and to display the values of the nation and the family more prominently in the educational process.

Our analysis highlights the emergence, the relevance and the enforcement of competences, especially transversal competences in the document.

The paper also covers the presentation of tools supporting the introduction and implementation of the content regulators, as well as monitoring possibilities.

1. Historical overview

In Hungary, unlike in some other education systems, the NCC amended in 2020, is neither a syllabus nor an exclusively competence-based curriculum, but rather a *mixed-structure curriculum* as it is based on describing competences linked to so-called cultural domains (which are literacy areas broken down into subjects in the framework curricula) while – in the form of learning outcomes – it also prescribes a list of minimum content requirement (such as concepts, facts, definitions, phenomena, laws, formulas) in each cultural domain. There are practical (and historical) reasons for this.

Before the fall of the communist regime in Hungary, prescriptive, content-based, syllabus-type curricula dictated the process of school learning. Teachers were primarily prepared to dutifully and subserviently deliver the content included in the curriculum and textbooks, leaving little space for pedagogical freedom and learner-centred approaches. The concept of competence was not known at that time, and expectations towards teachers reflected the socialist model of the epoch: mighty treasurers of knowledge as well as obedient servants of the system.

Therefore, the formulation of the NCC in 1995 was a fundamental turning point, since this core curriculum was not prescriptive, and it also emphasized competence development by defining so-called 'common requirements' related to certain areas of literacy, while entirely eliminating learning content at this regulatory level. Competence as a concept already appears in the 2003 NCC, but it refers to competences as priority development tasks. In 2007, after a long period of professional consultation, the term competence was introduced, in the current version of the NCC and the *Act on National Public Education*, thus codifying the then new public education paradigm. The 2007 NCC formulated key competences (for students) and based on them, key development tasks (for teachers), which were relegated to pedagogical goals in the description of the individual literacy areas.

However, since a significant majority of teachers graduated before the regime change and was trained to accurately implement the content-based communist syllabus, the implementation of the curriculum reform progressed with difficulty. The pedagogical goals (based on competences) were difficult for the teachers to interpret, as the very concept was new to them and they lacked the didactic toolkit to establish a competence-based teaching style. As a result, instead of focusing on competence development, they tried to simply deliver content in accordance with the output requirements imposed by the matriculation exams.

Although in a few years' time, the concept of competence entered pedagogical thinking as a result of further in-service teacher training, and school practice also changed (switching to more learner-centred approaches), there was a clear need for the curriculum to present (and elaborate) the directions of competence development by adding specific subject content. Consequently, the 2012 NCC and the 2020 NCC have a mixed structure: they *prescribe content* elements in literacy areas to clarify and facilitate the work of teachers, but they also *retain* the model of *key competences* (as well as the development fields – educational goals), thus affording them greater importance and building the content regulation system around them. During the last revision in 2020, some key competences were amended. This was necessary for several reasons. On the one hand, because of the modification of the proposed competences formulated in the recommendation of the Council of the European Union, and on the other hand, due to changes in the educational ideal and vision of Hungary. In addition, the competence-type elements previously discussed in earlier curricula within the *'key development tasks'* and the 'common requirements' have also remained under the name of '*development fields – educational goals*'.

In the following, we reflect on the evolution of the Hungarian content regulation system (including the NCC, the framework and the local curricula, and the matriculation exam regulations), as well as efforts to harmonize the learning content and the competences to be developed for the sake of an effective educational process.

2. The content regulation system in Hungary

After the transition to a democratic system in 1989, the first NCC came into force in Hungary in 1995. This was replaced by the core curricula introduced in 2003, 2007 and 2012. The following analytical presentation focuses on the legislation[1] introduced in 2020, which is still in force.

Currently, Hungarian content regulation basically uses *process control* tools and an output control point. The system's process control tools are built upon each other hierarchically, thereby ensuring coherence. This is complemented by the output content control point: the system of *matriculation exam requirements* at the end of the public education system, closely linked to the pedagogical goals and content elements formulated in the NCC. The process regulation is based on the NCC, which is a strategic public education document and ensures – in accordance with the provisions of the Act on National Public Education – the content standards of school education, the interoperability between schools, while it also determines the literacy content to be attained. Furthermore, it establishes mandatory provisions for the educational organization with particular regard to limiting the weekly and the daily workload of students.

The NCC lays down the conceptual and substantive foundations and principles of public education, i.e., it defines the compulsory content of basic literacy for all public education and vocational training institutions in Hungary (in the latter, of course, only with regard to public education content).

The NCC forms the basis for preparing the framework curricula [2] for the succeeding level of the content control system. They define the principles, goals, pedagogical tasks and literacy content formulated in the NCC according to the specifics of the educational or the training phase. The framework curricula play a decisive role in the implementation of the goals and tasks elaborated in the NCC. They establish the goals of education and training in each school type and educational stage, describe the subject system, detail thematic areas and content in each subject, prescribe the minimum requirements of each subject for one or two grades, include the interdisciplinary knowledge, define development tasks in skill areas and outline the available and recommended time frame for fulfilling the requirements. Based on the NCC, the framework curricula constitute the development requirements in the learning-teaching process, as well as the depth and the prearrangement of the expected knowledge, while they serve as a basis for determining the output requirements (that is, the matriculation exam requirements). The framework curricula reflect the common values, the development fields – educational goals, key competences, and literacy content indicated in the NCC. They serve as a basis for monitoring and evaluation; they support differentiated and inclusive learning, thus promoting students' and children's rights and enforcing equal learning opportunities. They also provide didactic guidance for the development tasks and literacy content assigned to literacy areas, while leaving space for further development and adaptation of the goals.

Local curricula are the specific, content-regulating documents created by public education institutions (schools). The local curriculum corresponds to the framework curricula on which it is based, providing opportunities for each school to plan and fill the free time available to the school with content and activities in accordance with its educational vision. Moreover, in their local curricula, schools have the option to rearrange content specified in the NCC and the framework curricula (within grade pairs) to a certain extent over time. (Figure 1)

In summary: the Hungarian content regulation system includes the NCC, the framework curricula and the specific local curriculum of the institutions. In the case of institutions providing studies that end with a matriculation exam, the outcome regulation, as well as the matriculation exam requirements,[3] are related to this. This unified content regulation system is laid down in the 2011 Act on National Public Education. One of the important provisions of this law is that the current NCC must be reviewed every five years and, if necessary, amended. The revision of the 2012 NCC began in 2017, as a result of which the new, 5th NCC was introduced with amendments in 2020.

3. Preparatory process of the 2020 NCC

In accordance with the NCC's strategic importance, the minister responsible for public education set up a working group whose task was to review the 2012 NCC and develop a modernized NCC based on its values[4]. In the first phase of the NCC's revision, the preparatory work took place involving a narrower group of academic experts in curriculum design and general pedagogy. The planning of the work process, the implementation of the programme, and the development of the concept took place with the involvement of an increasingly wide-ranging group of experts, basically through

1 The legislation containing the National Core Curriculum is Government Decree No. 110/2012 of 4 June 2012, on the publication, introduction and application of the National Core Curriculum (amended in 2020).

2 The framework curricula are issued and published by the minister responsible for public education. The framework curricula can be accessed on the website of the Educational Authority of Hungary, in the Hungarian language: https://www.oktatas.hu/kozneveles/kerettantervek/2020_nat

3 The requirements of the matriculation examination system are contained in legislation: Government Decree No.100/1997 of 12 June 1997, on the issuance of the examination regulations for the matriculation examination. The detailed matriculation exam requirements prepared on the basis of the 2020 NCC and applied for the first time in the spring of 2024, were published in Hungarian on the website of the Educational Authority of Hungary by the minister responsible for public education: https://www.oktatas.hu/kozneveles/erettsegi/kozismereti_vizsgatargyak_2024tol

4 The efforts of the working group called the Education 2030 Learning Science Research Group (Education 2030) were overseen by psychologist and academician Prof Dr Valéria Csépe as the ministerial commissioner responsible for the content renewal of public education. This working group operated at Eszterházy Károly University of Eger.

Hungary

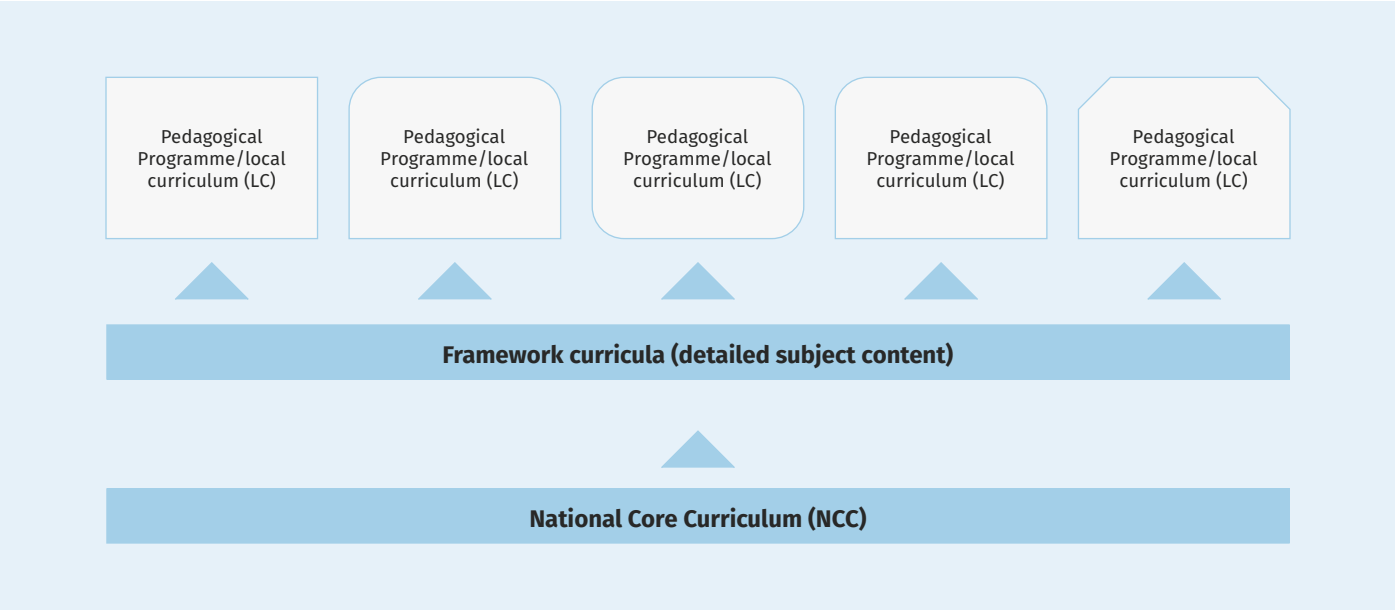

Figure 1: Levels of educational content regulation

the continuous expansion of the professional staff of the Education 2030 working group.

In parallel with the revision of the previous core curriculum, the theoretical foundation related to the educational content, as well as the mapping of relevant international examples and trends in the educational sphere, were also carried out (Halász, 2020; Csépe, 2020). The working group examined the content regulation system and curricula of several countries, prepared a summary report on the lessons that could be learned, then made suggestions for the inclusion of certain elements in the Hungarian core curriculum. These included the application of learner-centred and process-oriented approaches, considerations on student workload and structural/editorial changes in the NCC text to improve compliance and alignment with international trends.

The concept note[5] created by the working group, stated that when preparing the document, the different development pace of student abilities and other individual differences should be taken into account, talent care and the reduction of disadvantages should be supported at the same time, as well as prioritizing development of the most important skills and stable knowledge.

> *The concept document stated that it was an important aspiration for education to be connected to the acquisition of experience and everyday applicability in as many areas as possible, while development of the knowledge, attitudes and awareness necessary for everyday life was also a keystone.*

The authors of the concept considered the existence of digital competences to be a natural part of the modern learning-teaching process, in a certain sense a condition for both teachers and students.

> *It was an education policy expectation that the key competences included in the recommendation of the Council of the European Union would be included in the strategic document, so that the modern content and the traditional values of Hungarian education would be jointly incorporated.*

The concept was discussed with the involvement of professional organizations in education and training, and its final version was produced as a result.

Based on the concept, the working group, with the involvement of representatives of the subject areas (in total, more than 100 professionals – academics and teachers), began to elaborate the details of the document and the content of the literacy areas[6].

The working document version was submitted for a one-month social debate, and professional organizations along with private individuals interested in the document could express their opinions on the draft presented to the social and professional public on several platforms. Hundreds of comments were received, comprising more than 1,000 pages. Most opinions were professional and relevant, which initiated further consultation with the organisations involved.

The final version of the strategic document prepared for the adoption of the 2020 NCC was also reviewed by the group of experts appointed by the minister responsible for education, and amendments were proposed, through which the priority pedagogical goals were formulated more clearly in the preamble of the document, and changes were also made in the content of some subjects. The Hungarian Government finalized this version of the document and added it to the annex of the previously mentioned legislation (GD 110/2012).

5 The concept was a non-public working document on which the invited professional organizations expressed their opinions.
6 Literacy areas or cultural domains include the subjects in the academic system, which are more closely related to each other in terms of content.

4. Principles and aspects of content definition

Although the expectations of the education policy were clear in relation to the strategic document, the revision and renewal of the 2012 NCC, which proceeded from 2017, had to follow a complex set of criteria.

It was a priority for the review to focus on the modern aspect of the educational content, screening and eliminating potentially outdated and obsolete content, and to ensure some pedagogical goals were displayed more prominently. Shared social values (also reflected in the pedagogical goals in the previous NCC) that are crucial for the future of Hungarian society were displayed even more prominently in the document. Therefore, an overarching goal of the content regulation was to establish balance between competence development and value-based education.

The strategic goals of the NCC highlighted that the learning-teaching process – as modern knowledge building and sharing – encourages both the teacher and the student to improve their performance, and that the acquired knowledge is valuable and meets the needs of the age group. To this end, the document strives for a balance between the value-bearing traditions of education and the new development goals and content. It designates the following tasks, inter alia:

- Joint development of the abilities, skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for study and work;
- Stimulation of individual and group performance;
- Foundation of the pursuit of the common good;
- Strengthening cohesion and patriotism in national and local communities;
- Acting in cooperation with the family.

As a consequence, the NCC's objective is education that aims for a committed focus on value and to improve mental, emotional, moral, social and physical abilities necessary to develop a balanced personality.

The document takes a comprehensive view of the pedagogical process by defining development fields – educational goals. These – in accordance with the abilities and skills that form the basis of key competences, the knowledge acquired during education and training, and the attitudes that help the acquisition of knowledge – combine traditional values and new social needs that emerged at the beginning of the 21st century.

As one of the important pillars of content modernization, the working group used the Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (Council of the European Union, 2018, 2018/C 189/01). Accordingly, the 2020 NCC – while retaining the content elements of the eight key competences listed in the aforementioned document, but re-editing them somewhat – established the development of the following seven key competences as a strategic goal:

1. Learning competences,
2. Communication competences (in the mother tongue and in foreign languages),
3. Digital competences,
4. Mathematical and thinking competences,
5. Personal and social competences,
6. The competences of creativity, creation, self-expression and cultural awareness,
7. Employee, innovation and entrepreneurial competences.

As an example, the 2020 NCC prioritises learning competences[7], which lay the foundation for the effective functioning of the other competences.

Therefore, its role is all-encompassing, unavoidable, and serves as a basic condition for students' successful progress. Being a transversal competence, it contributes to motivation, self-evaluation and practical adaptability, creating the conditions for successful coordination in the accelerated world.

The 2020 NCC reinterprets and supplements this concept by assigning a privileged role to active learning, which not only means defining attitudes and pedagogical goals (that the student regulates and plans for his/her own sake, with the development of intrinsic motivation, in a regular and disciplined way and organizes his/her own learning goals, tools, etc.), but also raises the need for the transformation of the teacher-student relationship. In this set of conditions, the teacher appears as a facilitator of the student's self-regulated learning: the primary task being to monitor the student's progress, not direct it.

In addition, inquiry-based learning appears as an important aspect of developing learning competences, especially in the case of natural science subjects. Inquiry-based learning builds on students' acquisition of knowledge through experimenting and gaining tangible experiences, and organizes learning around learner-centred activities. The aim of this approach is to develop students' complex problem-solving skills, according to which: *"Lessons, sessions, thematic days, thematic weeks and projects are organized according to the principles of active learning; and topics and phenomena are introduced with the integration of several literacy areas, helping students to understand phenomena, and examine problems in a complex way."* This system can only function properly if the right set of conditions are created in public education institutions: they must have modern infrastructure, new strategies, didactics and proper teaching equipment must be used to improve teaching efficiency and increase students' motivation.

Everyone has the right to learn, and Hungary recognizes this as a primary policy[8]. This ethos includes individual development tailored to students' unique needs and abilities, the practice of acceptance, trust, love and empathy, the prominent role of talent development, and the goal of preventing social isolation. It is not only important, but also necessary, for future generations to transform this vision into an internal value at both cognitive and affective levels. To this end, Hungary treats it as a priority, and unlike before, cultural awareness is included in the key competences of the 2020 NCC[9].

7 The 2012 NCC already included a similar competence called *efficient and independent learning*, however, in this form, it only included the didactic and motivational aspect of the concept of lifelong learning.
8 The description of this basic principle can be found in Section 1 (1) and (3) of the Act on National Public Education.
9 In the 2012 NCC, this basic principle did not appear at the level of competences; 'cultural competence' refers to aesthetic education with the help of the

5. Highlighted values: development fields – educational goals

The development fields – educational goals listed above represent a unique component in the 2020 NCC. Values extend throughout the process of school education, so according to the intention of the curriculum developers, they are present in all elements of the pedagogical processes and receive special emphasis in the areas of setting examples, shaping attitudes and emotional education. The 12 areas of development fields – educational goals – are integrated in the pedagogical goals and expected learning outcomes of the literacy areas related to each subject, and in addition, these goals are sometimes also presented as separate (compulsory or optional) subjects (see: Table 1).

Development fields – educational goals – have targeted learning outcomes (indicated as Target in Table 1) in the form of attitudes, skills or behaviour as well as content-based knowledge elements (Content in Table 1). These elements appear in some or all subjects (indicated as Subject in Table 1).

	Development fields – educational goals	Representation in the 2020 NCC		
		Target	Content	Subject
1	Ethics	A	A	O
2	Sense of national identity; patriotic education	A	M	O
3	Education for democratic citizenship	M	M	C
4	The development of self-knowledge and community skills	A	A	–
5	Family life education	M	M	O
6	Physical and mental health education	M	M	–
7	Responsibility, volunteering	M	M	–
8	Sustainability and environmental awareness	M	M	O
9	Career guidance	A	M	O
10	Economic and financial education	M	M	O
11	Media literacy	M	M	O
12	Learning to learn	A	M	O

LEGEND:

A: represented in all literacy areas (with similar weight)

M: represented in most literacy areas

O: specifically linked to an optional subject

C: specifically linked to a compulsory subject

-: not specifically linked to a certain subject

Table 1: Comparative table on the appearance of development fields – educational goals

Development fields – educational goals – also thematise extracurricular activities described in the schools' pedagogical programme, and become part of multidisciplinary programmes (recommended by the NCC, and in practice often involving the whole institution), such as project days or thematic weeks. The 2020 NCC states the following about development fields – educational goals: *"The conscious pursuit of educational goals at the institutional level, as well as the implementation and execution of the tasks assigned to them, is a defining measure of institutional pedagogical culture and high-quality pedagogical work, and one of the important criteria for pedagogical-professional control."* (GD 110/2012, Section I.1.1.)

Development fields – educational goals – have a comprehensive effect on the entire educational process in a similar way to the function of transversal competences. They have an impact on the content and methodology of individual subjects, and they establish the direction for the implementation of purposeful school activities. However, they differ from competence definitions in that they primarily set tasks for the school and the teacher, rather than describing the elements of development expected from the student. Conversely, their cross-curricular nature makes them similar to competences. At the same time, the transversal competences included in the recommendations of the Council of the European Union - such as learning to learn, self-awareness, social skills and active citizenship - also appear among the key competences in the NCC.

The formulation of the pedagogical goals derived from development fields – educational goals, include the characteristics of the learning environment, along with the classic competence elements (knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes, values), but not in the same way in each case. For example, due to the central role of emotional learning in family life education, affective elements and values feature more prominently than knowledge or skill components (such as conflict management) in this case. In other areas, such as taking responsibility for others, in the case of volunteering, the extracurricular activities primarily determine the pedagogical work, which means shaping attitudes is highlighted among the competence elements.

Based on the above, it can be concluded that transversal competences appear in the 2020 NCC in two ways: on the one hand, among the key competences formulated following the recommendations of the Council of the European Union, and on the other hand, in the description of the development fields - educational goals, which are basically 'translated' for school pedagogical work, and which can also be interpreted as competences. These competences permeate not only the content of individual (compulsory or optional) subjects, but also other areas of school life, as the document provides guidance on how to organize comprehensive activities adapted to the individual needs of the students on this basis. The ministry responsible for public education supports the implementation of these kinds of activities with various free central programmes that can be chosen by schools: for example, the so-called thematic weeks, such as the Sustainability Thematic Week.

Closely related to the above is the fact that the 2020 NCC introduced the planning of the learning environment to

mediation of culture. This is still part of the 2020 NCC, although it does not appear among the key competences, but is integrated in the literacy areas as a basic guideline.

the pedagogical practice of public education as a design and implementation tool. Learning environment models in pedagogical practice proved to be effective means of implementing active learning (Manninen 2007).[10] Well-founded planning of learning environments helps the involvement and participation of students in the pedagogical process and supports the implementation of transversal competences. It means the learning environment can ensure that the educational goals and transversal competences listed in the 2020 NCC are a comprehensive part of the fabric of school life. Two examples of this (in line with European Commission green and digital priorities) are included in the following text box.

EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE 2020 NCC

In this example, we show the complex way competences are included in an educational area, and how the policy and related activities support the achievement of the pedagogical goals.

The preamble of the 2020 NCC declares sustainability not only as a transversal competence, but also as a prominent goal and value of national public education. ESD is not listed as a key competence but is included in development fields – educational goals in the 2020 NCC. At the same time, all the classic ESD sub-competences are incorporated in its definition, which also includes the social, economic, environmental and cultural aspects of sustainability. Based on this, ESD appears both as a development task and as a content element related to the topics of sustainability in several compulsory subjects (in addition to all the natural science subjects: history, civics, ethics/religious and moral studies, arts, moving image culture and media knowledge). Since the student undergoes complex development upon completion of individual subject programmes, it is not the aim for all competency elements to receive the same focus in the subjects. In addition, sustainability is also offered as an optional subject: schools are free to decide if they offer it to their students.

Multidisciplinary work in ESD is typically implemented in the form of thematic days, projects and thematic weeks. This is supported by the Sustainability Thematic Week event, which is coordinated by the ministry responsible for public education, and which approximately one third of the schools regularly join each year. This programme offers free lesson plans, lectures, campaigns, quizzes, project plans and other programme elements for schools, including several institution-wide activities. The success of the programme shows the institutional demand and the teachers' commitment to the topic and helps ensure that this transversal competence is properly integrated in the pedagogical programme and life of the schools. The assessment of knowledge and skills related to sustainability is included in the assessment of natural science competences of the national competence assessment, while the attitudinal elements are revealed by a voluntary and anonymous survey related to the Sustainability Thematic Week.

DIGITAL COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT

The content regulation requirement of Informatics did not change significantly between the 1995 NCC and the 2012 NCC. This certainly did not mean that students learned out-of-date knowledge at school. The expansion of the school infrastructure, the development of the Internet network and the increase in the bandwidth of schools, as well as the spread of smart devices and own mobile Internet subscriptions from the 2010s, greatly influenced the range of knowledge to be imparted at school.

Textbook publishers also adapted and new tools and methods appeared in textbooks. The initial informatics teacher training and in-service training ensured that teachers could acquire the new knowledge needed to teach the Informatics subject and develop their appropriate methodology.

In response to the experiences of the past two decades, the IT development of the 2010s and the digital transition of society, new development directions had to be defined when developing the 2020 NCC. The subject of Informatics was replaced by the subject of Digital Culture. The change in subject name also refers to the change in subject focus. Computer science theory and the history of informatics has been pushed to the background in school education. Teaching the use of both software and hardware tools has become a transversal task and the goal of all subjects, and Digital culture focuses on the development of problem solving skills, algorithmic thinking, and competences related to digital society and digital citizenship, such as the development of critical thinking and use of online services. The literacy area goals are aligned with the competences defined in the European Union's The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp framework). The topic of algorithms and programming appears in a significantly larger number of lessons than before from the 3rd grade, using age-appropriate tools. In primary education, programming is taught playfully, even without the use of a computer, in lower secondary education in a block programming environment with a graphics interface, and in upper secondary education, programming is taught in a high-level programming language. Critical thinking can be effectively developed together with the subject of Motion Picture Culture and Media Knowledge, and social effects and the use of services provided by the state can be effectively developed together with the subject of Civic Studies.

The curricular changes were followed by a change in the exam requirements of the matriculation exam. The topics of algorithms and programming appeared in the exam requirements of the matriculation examination, while dry theoretical knowledge and aspects of the history of IT were left out. The introduction of the 2020 NCC guarantees that the education system graduates employees with a level of digital competence corresponding to the labour market's expectations, who can become prepared, reflective, and active participants in society.

10 This was supported by numerous domestic educational development experiments and related research. The pilot programmes in Hungary, as well as the related teacher training courses, were the ones that offered a suitable basis for designing the learning environment in the 2020 NCC.

6. Supporting the implementation of content regulation

The implementation of the content regulation traditionally means the renewal of textbooks, their adaptation to the content regulations, updating the requirements and programmes of the matriculation examination system and higher education teacher training. However, it also includes the renewal of national assessments. The renewal of content regulations entails the renewal of the pedagogical programme of public education institutions, including the local curriculum.

Textbook supply in Hungary is a state task, which, as of December 2019, is performed by the central office serving public education, the Educational Authority of Hungary (hereinafter EAH), under the control of the minister responsible for public education. EAH is the developer and publisher of the vast majority of public education textbooks. Textbooks were renewed in an ascending system in parallel with the introduction of the 2020 NCC in an ascending system.

The renewal of the *examination regulations for the matriculation examination* was also timely with the renewal of the NCC. In 2021, one year after the announcement of the NCC, the matriculation exam requirements aligned with the new content regulations appeared, which must be applied in the spring exam period of 2024.

From 2022, the *IT system supporting the national assessment of basic competences* made it possible to extend assessments from grades 6, 8, and 10 to grades 4-11, to each grade. In the assessment, in addition to previous reading comprehension, mathematical, natural science and language competences, it is also possible to assess digital competences and historical thinking. In this way, in addition to the competence level of the students, the level of mastery of the 2020 NCC and the framework curriculum content, as well as the fulfilment of the requirements set by the content regulators, can be monitored in the assessment results.

In order for the teachers working in public education to be able to teach the content and development tasks included in the NCC and the framework curricula with appropriate didactics, the *initial teacher training system* and the training content were also renewed. The goal of initial teacher training is to prepare student teachers with the knowledge and modern methodology needed for the effective pedagogical work based on the knowledge set and contents of the NCC and the framework curricula. In addition, *in-service teacher training programmes* were launched.

7. Summary

The revision of the Hungarian NCC and its resulting amendment in 2020 aimed to define the content framework of the public education system in a way that continues the Hungarian education system's content regulation tradition (value-based). At the same time it enables the educational process to provide modern, usable knowledge (competence development) to the upcoming generations and to find effective solutions to the expected challenges. It aims to achieve these goals by improving the effectiveness of learning, by developing students' competences and transmitting the values of Hungarian and common European culture. The three levels of Hungarian content regulation provide opportunities for intervention at several points in the public education system, and rely heavily on local innovation, pedagogical culture, teachers' professional knowledge and responsibility, in addition to central regulation.

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Montenegro: fact box

This article focuses on:
☒ Primary education
☒ Secondary education

In primary education approximately 75/80% of the **teaching time** is defined by the government in a core curriculum and 20/25% is allocated to the full curriculum. In secondary education approximately 80/85% of the teaching time is defined by the government in a core curriculum and 15/20% is allocated to the full curriculum.

Teaching time:

- Primary education
  - » First cycle (1st to 3rd grade) 19 hours per week
  - » Second cycle (4th to 6th grade) from 21 to 24 hours per week
  - » Third cycle (7th to 9th grade) from 27 to 28 hours per week
- Secondary education
  - » Gymnasia 32-35

In primary education there 19 to 28 hours per week and 34 to 36 weeks per year. In secondary education there are 32 to 35 hours per week and 34 to 36 weeks per year.

As for **central examinations**, there is an assessment of primary education students' achievements (Mother tongue, Mathematics, English). In secondary education there are central exams for Mother tongue, Mathematics or English and two subjects chosen by the student.

	Core curriculum	Full curriculum
Subjects/topics/key competences	Mother tongue, Mathematics, English, II Foreign language, Arts, Musical culture, Nature and society, Knowledge of society, History, Geography, Nature, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Informatics with technology, Physical Education, Philosophy, Psychology, Sociology ...	Elective subjects, transversal competences: physical and mental health, digital competences, social competences, citizenship, sustainability competences, learning competences, self-awareness, entrepreneurship and cultural awareness and expression.
Amount of detail	• Knowledge, skills and attitudes are explained in detail for all educational levels. • There are detailed learning goals for all educational levels. • There is a specific guideline for the core curriculum.	Apart from the learning outcomes designed for the subject programmes by the government, teachers are obliged to integrate 15% to 25% of the open part curriculum both in their annual and lesson plans • The school-based curriculum covers each school year, both in primary and secondary education. • Didactical recommendations for a specific subject are available on two places in the curriculum, along with all the educational outcomes specified as necessary for its realization, as well as general didactical recommendations that emphasise what is important for the realization of the subject in general. • Didactical recommendations provided for each educational outcome contain three elements: content of the learning process, activities of the learning process, number of classes necessary for class realization. Apart from these recommendations teachers use special guidelines prepared by the Bureau for Educational Services.
Who is involved in its development	Bureau for Educational services, VET Centre, representatives from University and schools.	Bureau for Educational services, VET Centre, representatives from University and schools.

Montenegro: biographies

Nevena Čabrilo

Nevena Čabrilo is a highly experienced and accomplished professional in the field of education. With over 30 years of experience and master's degree in biochemistry, she currently holds the position of senior advisor at Montenegro's Bureau for Educational Services. Throughout her career, she has gained extensive expertise in curriculum development for primary and secondary schools, as well as in the integration of key competences into the education system of Montenegro.

In addition to her role as a senior advisor, Nevena is an active member of various international and national bodies for education, and has authored numerous publications. Furthermore, she is teacher trainer and coordinator of many important projects, including improving the quality and inclusiveness of education in the digital environment, Integration of key competences for lifelong learning into the Montenegrin education system, The 21st Century Schools educational program, Digital textbooks, and introducing the UN Sustainable Development Goals, among others.

Integration of key competences for lifelong learning in the Montenegrin education system

Abstract

The quality of education is a crucial aspect of education development in Montenegro. Over the past two decades, various improvements have been implemented to enhance the education system. The focus is on individual subjects at all levels of education. However, it also provides the opportunity to integrate competences necessary for personal development, sustainability, inclusion in society and employment, and the development of values and integrity. To achieve this, the Montenegro Key Competences Framework Programme has been developed as a strategic document to guide the integration of key competences in the current curriculum.

The programme has been designed to support lifelong learning at all levels of education. To ensure its successful implementation, guidelines have been developed for teachers and more than 40% of all teachers and school management have completed a training programme.

1. Introduction

The comprehensive reform of the education system implemented in Montenegro from 2004 to 2008 was based on the need to adapt new educational programmes to the developmental needs of the child, emphasizing quality over quantity of knowledge and active teaching and learning methods. The aim was for every child to acquire lasting and applicable knowledge and to be educated in line with their abilities. Since then, Montenegro's education system has invested continuous efforts in overcoming differences in student achievement, improving the quality and inclusiveness of education, and building student competences that enable them to adapt quickly and effectively to changes in labour markets and new technologies.

In its continuous pursuit of achieving fundamental social and educational objectives, Montenegro consistently enhances its educational system. Notably, significant changes were implemented in 2017, focusing on the integration of learning outcomes and key competences for lifelong learning in the curriculum across all levels of education. It is mandatory for all teachers to incorporate these competences in their annual planning and lesson plans, fostering their integration in the overall educational framework. At the school level, the integration of key competences takes place within the year plans, ensuring a holistic and cohesive approach to education. These competences include civic competence, sustainable development competence, entrepreneurial competence, and digital competence. The curriculum also develops numerous other competences that belong to the concept of key competences, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, socio-emotional skills, and more.

In collaboration with the European Union, Montenegro implemented the 'Integration of Key Competences in the Educational System of Montenegro' project in 2019 through the IPA 2 programme, which promoted the development and integration of key competences in a comprehensive manner. The focus was on developing a sustainable methodology for elaborating, integrating, and monitoring the development and integration of key competences.

The continuous professional development of teachers is included in all educational strategic documents and takes place in a very organized and well-designed manner. In the previous period, teachers underwent a significant number of training programmes related to the integration of cross-cutting themes/key competences in the curriculum.

As part of its training programmes, the Bureau for Education Services has developed didactical guidelines for teachers and published numerous examples of good practices on its website to enhance the integration of key competences.

External quality assessment of work in educational institutions is an integral part of the support provided by the education system to educational institutions in the teaching process and thus in the integration of key competences.

The text explains the structure of education in Montenegro, with primary education being mandatory for all children from six to fifteen years, lasting 9 years, and ending with an external exam. Secondary education lasts three or four years, with students taking an external matriculation exam after completing the fourth grade of high school. Students who complete four-year secondary professional education programmes also take an external professional exam.

2. Core Curriculum

Primary education is mandatory for all children between the ages of six and fifteen and lasts for nine years, followed by an external exam. Secondary education lasts for three or four years, with students taking an external matriculation exam after completing the fourth year of high school. Students who complete secondary professional education programmes lasting four years take an external professional exam.

The education process is based on the core curriculum[1,2], which is adopted by the Ministry of Education on the proposal of the National Council for Education. The core curriculum includes information such as the name of the programme, the level of education, teaching plan[3], aims of the programme, conditions for enrolment, duration of education, mandatory methods of examination and evaluation, conditions for advancement and completion of education, level of education, and conditions for completion of individual programme modules.

Overall, the text provides a brief overview of the education system and core curriculum in the country described.

An example of a teaching plan for primary school is shown in Table 1: Teaching plan for primary school.

Educational subjects /activities	**Grades and number of lessons**									
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	Total number of lessons
Compulsory part: Compulsory subjects										
Mother tongue	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	41
Mathematics	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	36
English	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	23
II Foreign language						2	2	2	2	8
Arts	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	12
Musical culture	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9
Nature and society	2	2	2							6
Knowledge of society				2	2					4
History						2	1	2	1	6
Geography							2	2	1	5
Nature				2	2					4
Biology						2	2	1	1	6
Chemistry							1	1	2	4
Physics							1	2	2	5
Informatics with technology					1	1	1	1		4
Physical Education	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	24
Elective subjects							**1**	**1**	**1**	3
Compulsory activities										
Class meetings				1	1	1	1	1	1	6
* Number of subjects	7	7	7	8	9	10	**14**	**14**	**13**	
Number of lessons per week	19	19	19	21	23	24	27	28	26	206
Number of working weeks	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	31	
Days of culture, technique and sport	7 days	7 days	5 days	5 days	5 days	5 days	5 days	5 days	5 days	
Extended part										
Optional activities				2	2	2	2	2	2	
Additional classes for advanced students	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
Additional classes for students with low achievement				1	1	1	1	1	1	
Outdoor school * **Student excursion** **	Outdoor school is provided as an opportunity for students from 1st to 8th grade in the scope: 1st and 2nd grade up to 3 days, from 3-8, up to 5 days. A student **excursion** is planned as a possibility for students of the 9th grade for a duration of up to 5 days									

Table 1: Teaching plan for primary school

1 General Law of Education, art. 19 (*https://www.paragraf.me/propisi-crnegore/opsti-zakon-o-obrazovanju-i-vaspitanju.html*)
2 Detailed core curriculum available on *Obrazovni program za osnovno obrazovanje i vaspitanje (www.gov.me)* and *Obrazovni program za gimnazije (www.gov.me)*
3 See Table 1: Teaching plan for primary school

Montenegro

The subject programmes were revised for the 2017/2018 school year in order to introduce an outcome-based learning model, which resulted in a reduction of the number of classes per subject and the content of the subject programmes. The subject programmes are open, which means they cover 75-85% of the available annual number of lessons for a specific subject, with the remaining part defined by the school based on the interests, needs, and initiative of the students, teachers, parents, and the local community.

The revised subject programmes allow for a greater representation of various active forms of teaching and learning, including project learning, laboratory work, argumentation, critical thinking, data interpretation, formulating conclusions, teamwork, and other activities that require higher cognitive levels. The subject programmes aim to achieve expected educational outcomes so that each student is qualified for further studies and active involvement in the community.

The introduction of elective subjects allows students to choose subjects that align with their interests and creativity, which are evaluated the same as compulsory subjects. The educational programmes are adapted to children with special educational needs to ensure greater access to education. For each child with special educational needs, at the school level teachers prepare specific educational programmes in accordance with the child's specific educational needs (disability and gifted students). Programmes for specific subjects include the subject name, definition, aims, connection with other subjects and cross-cutting themes, educational outcomes, didactic recommendations, adaptation to special needs, evaluation of outcomes, and conditions for implementation. Methodological instructions for the programmes for specific subject development based on outcomes[4] were created to assist subject committees in preparing subject programmes and describe all the elements of the subject programme content in detail.

Methodological instructions for the programmes for specific subject development based on outcomes were created with the intention of making it easier for members of the subject committees to prepare subject programmes, and describe all the elements that make up the content of the subject programme in detail (Lalovic et al., 2017).

Table 2 shows the definitions of the Chemistry subject programme for elementary school.

Grade	Number of classes per week	Number of classes per year	Compulsory part of subject (80-85%)	Open part (15-20%)	Theoretical classes/new content	Practical examination
VII	1	34	28	6	11	17
VIII	1	34	28	6	11	17
IX	2	62	52	10	21	31

Table 2. Chemistry for primary school

Connections with other subjects and cross-cutting themes describes correlations between subjects, and the role of a specific subject in the implementation of cross-cutting themes, e.g. for the development of entrepreneurship, civic activism, responsible attitude towards one's own health, sustainable development, etc.

Table 3. provides the organized outcomes for the Biology subject for students from grades VI to IX

Educational outcome 4

At the end of the study, the student will be able to explain the characteristics and importance of bacteria and preventive protection measures.

Learning outcomes

During learning, the student will be able to:

- Compare the structure of prokaryotic and eukaryotic cells;
- Describe the structure and way of life of bacteria;
- List the basic characteristics of cyanobacteria;
- Etc.

Didactic recommendations for achieving the educational outcome:

a) Contents/concepts:

monera, prokaryotes, bacteria, forms of bacteria, water blooms, infectious bacteria, antibiotics.

b) Learning activities:

Observe the shapes and structure of bacteria on a microscopic preparation or drawing and compare them with an eukaryotic cell;

On the picture describe a representative of cyanobacteria;

A group task: negative influence of bacteria - search the Internet, professional literature, talk to health workers;

Etc.

Within the given learning outcomes, goals from the cross-cutting themes of Education for Sustainable Development, Entrepreneurial Learning and Education in the field of emergency situations caused by natural disasters can be attained.

c) Number of hours of implementation (approximate): 1+3

Table 3. Biology subject for students from grades VI to IX of primary school (Educational outcome 4.)

Didactic recommendations can be presented in both individual educational outcomes and as a separate chapter in a subject programme. In individual educational outcomes, the recommendations are tailored to the specific learning goals or objectives of that particular outcome. In a separate chapter, didactic recommendations are provided for the realization of the subject programme as a whole.

The chapter **Adapting the programme to children with special educational needs** is divided into two parts: Adapting programmes for children with special educational needs and Adapting programmes for gifted students.

Assessment of the achievement of educational goals and subject outcomes is carried out in accordance with the Rule Book on the manner and types of assessments[5] of pupils

4 Methodological guidance for writing subject programmes based on outcomes https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/c098fce4-767d-4de2-9f7b-37733e62cb73

5 Rule Book on the manner and types of assessments at the end of education cycles https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/0025a6ed-1dc9-4831-b965-24c0eb5a38e0

in primary school through internal (school) and external assessment of pupils' achievements. Methodological guidance for writing subject programmes based on outcomes describes in detail how the students' achievements are monitored and evaluated through internal evaluation. In order to improve process evaluation, the Evaluation Manual for student development and improving teaching and learning in school[6] was created. The manual also describes how cross-cutting themes and generic competences can be evaluated.

In the Evaluation Manual for student development and improving teaching and learning in school Lalovic (2020) says:

> *..."Generic competences cannot be realized by learning one or two isolated subjects, but teachers of most or all subjects must be engaged in their realization (e.g. ability to learn, ability to think critically, creativity is the result of the influence of teachers of all subjects)... Generic competences and cross-curricular topics in the curriculum of Montenegro represent a set of knowledge, skills and values that are necessary for life and work in the modern world, which are not individual school subjects, but should be learned and developed through all subjects and other activities at school"....*

3. Integration of key competences in Montenegro's education system

The modernisation of the Montenegrin education system to meet the needs of lifelong learning, i.e. the acquisition of professional knowledge and transferable skills necessary for the labour market, has led to the need to introduce a general, integrative approach, which would connect existing fragmented efforts focusing on the development of key competences.

The development of transversal key competences was realized through cross-curricular topics, while language and STEM competences were realized as part of subject programmes.

In preschool education, entrepreneurial competence and education for sustainable development are realized as part of the primary programme for this age group. The Education for Sustainable Development programme is implemented in primary and secondary schools through eight cross-curricular topics: Climate change, Green economy, Environmental protection, Sustainable cities and settlements, Biodiversity, Health education, Education for and about human rights and Entrepreneurial learning. The integration of key competences within VET education was achieved by reforming the curriculum based on professional and qualification standards (2016).

The development of students' social and emotional skills continuously takes place in cooperation with UNICEF. The UNICEF Montenegro research Education for Life: Key Competences for the 21st Century in the Curriculums in Montenegro[7] mapped key competences and issued recommendations for their cross-curricular development. The goal of this research was to examine how socio-emotional and key competences are targeted, planned and systematically incorporated in the curricula of primary schools, general secondary schools (gymnasiums) and teaching faculties in Montenegro.

As we can see, the previous reforms of the education system have significantly developed a system for the implementation of key competences but have not ensured synchronization of all key competences in the same way, as well as for all levels of education as parts of a whole. However, these activities have contributed to creating the conditions for vertical and horizontal coherence and cohesion of the education system.

Within the framework of the implementation of the IPA project *Integration of key competences in the education system of Montenegro,* the Montenegrin key competences framework programme[8] was developed to functionally connect and integrate key competences that already exist in the education system. The *Framework programme of key competences* is a strategic development document, representing the basic starting point for a unique approach to the development of key competences for lifelong learning in preschool, primary, secondary and university education in Montenegro. It provides clear recommendations for action, while leaving enough space for different specific solutions for each of the key competences and for each level of education.

The framework programme is based on fundamental recommendations of European policies and current education practice in Montenegro. It has been harmonized to a great extent with the European Reference Key Competence Framework for Lifelong Learning[9], except that it is adapted to the specifics of the Montenegrin education system. The national framework programme contains the definitions and descriptions of the eight key lifelong learning competences (Literacy competence, Multilingual competence, Mathematical competence and competence in science, technology and engineering, Digital competence, Personal, social and learning competence, Civic competence, Entrepreneurial competence and Cultural awareness and expression competence) and student learning outcomes by ISCED levels. The framework programme establishes descriptions (definitions), based on the descriptions of competences from the EU reference framework, as well as authentically formulated outcomes for each level of education of the entire education system in Montenegro.

The outcomes of key competences are formulated in relation to the description of competences (definition and descriptions of knowledge, skills and attitudes adapted from the EU reference framework), and provide a dynamic combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes that the student applies in different contexts and develops throughout

6 Evaluation Manual for student development and improving teaching and learning in school, *https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/5dd9760b-9051-4745-b56c-c200e23a3cd6*

7 Education for life: Key competences for the 21st century in the Montenegrin curriculum *https://www.unicef.org/montenegro/media/2431/file/MNE-media-MNEpublication13.pdf*

8 Montenegrin key competences framework programme (*https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ikces.me%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2021%2F12%2FCrnogorski-okvirni-program-kljucnih-kompetencija_fv.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK*)

9 Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning, OJ 2018/C 189/01.

his or her life. Their goal is to determine the level of knowledge, skills and attitudes that should be achieved by a person who is learning (child, pupil, student) for use in life situations that include all circumstances: personal, civic-social and areas of economic and professional engagement.

Key competences include attitudes and feelings, awareness of a connection with the environment, conceptual and procedural knowledge, as well as the processes of applying knowledge and skills to real tasks and challenges. Bearing in mind such 'lifelong' and broadly understood competences, learning outcomes for key competences are formulated without separating cognitive, affective and 'soft' skill domains, but broadly, with 'embedded' knowledge, skills and attitudes.

The framework programme is the starting point for further developing teacher training and educational concepts, and at the same time the assumption of the structured integration of key competences in all levels of education in Montenegro.

Digital competence was introduced in a systematic way through the Montenegrin key competence framework. In the Framework, digital competence is said to include safe, critical and responsible use of digital technologies and handling them for learning, in work and for participating in society.

In accordance with the Education System Digitalization Strategy 2022–2027 with the action plan for 2022 and 2023[10] and in order to support the personal and social development of students more effectively and underline the importance of developing digital literacy, digital competence is more specifically defined and described in the interdisciplinary curriculum Digital Competence Framework[11], which was implemented as of the school year 2020/2021.

PLANNING THE INTEGRATION OF CROSS-CUTTING THEMES/KEY COMPETENCES IN SCHOOL

According to Čabrilo & Lalović (2015)[12], cross-cutting themes/key competence outcomes should be carefully planned to achieve student progress. The basic precondition for their successful implementation in the educational process is the inclusion of the developed outcomes in the complete school curriculum. It should be possible to include cross-cutting themes/key competences in all key areas of learning, through different subjects or groups of subjects (compulsory and optional subjects), through compulsory optional content and extracurricular activities (field trips, excursions, nature classes, school projects), teacher training, etc.

Cross-cutting themes/key competences should be planned in the *institution's annual work plan, teachers' annual planning, as well as when creating lesson plans and extracurricular activities.*

ANNUAL PLANNING OF THE INSTITUTION'S WORK

The first step towards creating a culture of developing key competences at the institution level is their inclusion in the annual work plan, which implies:

- Introducing learning outcomes to the complete school curriculum/areas of activity
- Training teachers and other staff
- Planning the development of cross-curricular topics/key competences in all areas of learning and extracurricular activities
- Creating a culture of developing cross-cutting themes/key competences in the institution
- Involving parents and the local community.

ANNUAL PLANNING OF TEACHERS' WORK

The achievement of the outcomes defined in the aforementioned programmes is planned by the teacher in the annual work plan together with the outcomes of the subject programme. For example, when planning lessons, in addition to planning the learning outcomes of the subject chemistry programme in the annual plan, the chemistry teacher also plans the learning outcomes related to cross-curricular topics/key competences previously determined, which are compatible and complementary with the learning outcomes in the subject chemistry programme. This means that when planning classes based on the outcome of their subject, a teacher or active teacher at the school level includes educational outcomes from the programme of cross-curricular topics/key competences that can be realized together with the subject outcomes in the annual plan.

LESSON PLANS

Compiling lesson plans for teaching is a key point in realizing the idea of developing learning outcomes that are defined in cross-curricular topics/key competences. Creating a lesson plan involves developing a connection between the objective of the lesson, i.e. the learning outcome that is to be achieved and practical implementation.

Immediate lesson plans for teaching is an important and mandatory part of the work activity of every teacher.

At a minimum, it should contain:

- Subject name and class
- Time period for its realization
- Learning outcomes/goals
- Learning activities
- Implementation review.

It can refer to one or more lessons. Learning outcomes and learning activities are the key points for compiling lesson plans.

10 https://www.unicef.org/montenegro/media/22611/file/Education%20System%20Digitalization%20Strategy.pdf
11 Framework – digital competence https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/cd28c672-4b11-4870-b43b-4c1be654d0eb
12 Methodological guidelines for integrating ESD in education, https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/8bf2bfc7-76ee-459f-92d4-4b76d292891d

Table 4 shows the basic elements of a lesson plan for any subject, while Table 5 shows the basic elements of a lesson plan that includes the learning outcomes of cross-cutting themes/key competences.

Learning outcomes in the subject
Student activities for outcome achievement
Checking learning outcome achievements

Table 4: Basic elements of a lesson plan for any subject

Learning outcomes in the subject
Key competence outcomes
Students activities for both outcome achievements
Checking learning outcome achievements

Table 5: Basic elements of a lesson plan that includes the learning outcomes/key competences

In the first case, the teacher plans learning activities as well as methods for the outcome achievements. In the second case, the planned activities and the methods for the outcome achievements should lead to both learning outcomes (subject and key competences).

More than 300 examples of annual school work plans and 500 examples of lesson plans are published on the platform *https://www.ikces.me/*.

4. Continuous professional development for teachers

Continuous professional development for teachers is essential to ensure high-quality education and improve student learning outcomes. It is important for teachers to keep up to date with new teaching methodologies, technologies, and approaches to education. In Montenegro, various programmes have been implemented to train teachers and provide them with the necessary knowledge and skills to deliver effective teaching.

One of the significant challenges in implementing new educational programmes and reforms is ensuring that teachers are adequately prepared to meet the demands of the new approach. In Montenegro, teacher training has been an essential mechanism for introducing new programmes and familiarizing them with the key principles and competences required.

More than 50% of teachers and all principals and school management passed the training programme that trains teachers to integrate entrepreneurship as a key competence in regular teaching activities. 30% of teachers passed the training programme for integrating the cross-cutting themes of education for sustainable development.

As a result of the project Integration of key competences in the educational system of Montenegro, key competences were introduced in all primary and secondary schools in Montenegro, 1, 870 teachers were trained (which is approximately 24% of the total population of teachers in primary and secondary schools in Montenegro) and 300 representatives of school management teams.

All segments of the **Improving quality and inclusive education in the digital environment**[13] programme, which the Bureau for Education Services in cooperation with the UNICEF Representative Office in Podgorica, implemented during the previous two years, was related to providing support to schools, teachers, students and parents in order to optimally respond to new challenges imposed by the modern concept of social development. During 2021/2022, training for 1, 400 teachers was carried out through three two-day modules (144 two-day seminars). The training sessions were given using the Microsoft teams platform.

The programme improved the competences of teachers for teaching in a digital environment and represents great potential for the application of various teaching strategies that also stimulate and support students in discovering their own learning style, which leads to the improvement of the digital competences of teachers and students, increasing the quality of teaching and learning, and raising the level of student achievements.

Through the programme, a Guide for improving quality and inclusive education in a digital environment[14] was developed, in which the modules created for teacher training were described, and a large number of teaching scenarios were published that include the integration of digital competence in the teaching process.

In order to provide support to teachers for the integration of cross-curricular topics/key competences, the guides Methodological instruction for the implementation of the cross-cutting theme of entrepreneurial learning[15] and Methodological instruction for the implementation of Education for Sustainable Development[16] programme were prepared, which provide clear instructions with concrete examples.

The publication Key Competences - A Guide for Primary and Secondary School Teachers with Guidelines for Formative Assessment[17] was produced through the Integration of Key Competences in the Education System of Montenegro project, and serves as support for primary and secondary school

13 Improving quality and inclusive education in the digital environment *https://www.gov.me/clanak/unapredivanje-kvaliteta-i-inkluzivnosti-obrazovanja-u-digitalnom-okruzenju-2*

14 Guide for improving quality and inclusive education in a digital environment (*https://www.gov.me/clanak/unapredivanje-kvaliteta-i-inkluzivnosti-obrazovanja-u-digitalnom-okruzenju-2*)

15 Methodological instruction for the implementation of the cross-cutting theme of entrepreneurial learning *https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/e40d7f19-6940-46d2-931e-7235505d6900*

16 Methodological instruction for the implementation of Education for Sustainable Development, *https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/8bf2bfc7-76ee-459f-92d4-4b76d292891d*

17 Key Competences - A Guide for Primary and Secondary School Teachers with Guidelines for Formative Assessment (*https://www.ikces.me/kljucne-kompetencije_-vodic-za-ucitelje-osnovnih-i-srednjih-skola-sa-smjernicama-za-formativno-ocjenjivanje/*)

teachers to improve the education and upbringing of students through the integration of key competences in teaching and learning.

5. Quality Assessment

Continuous monitoring and evaluation of educational work is essential for ensuring the quality of education provided by educational institutions. External evaluation is usually carried out by external bodies, such as the Bureau for Education Services or the Centre for Vocational Education, to provide an objective assessment of the institution's performance, while internal evaluation or self-evaluation is conducted by the institution itself to identify areas for improvement and implement appropriate strategies.

External quality assurance is defined by the provisions of the General Law on Education[18], the Rule Book on the Content, Forms and Ways of Determining the Quality of Educational Work in Institutions[19] and the Methodology for Quality Assurance of Education in Preschool Institutions, Schools, educational centres, resource centres, adult education organizers and student dormitories[20].

In accordance with the Quality Assurance of Education, external determination of the quality of work, quality assessment is carried out at the level of the educational institution and in all segments of its work, instead of focusing on determining the work of an individual teacher. The evaluation system, which includes external evaluation, contributes to improving the quality of the school's work because it includes the assessment of all segments of the school's life and work that affect the teaching process and learning outcomes.

Quality assurance is carried out within five defined key areas of quality (teaching and learning, management and leadership of the institution, ethos of the institution, student achievements and student support) in accordance with the adopted standards. Indicators presenting the definitions, according to which the standard achievement is measured, are used for standard descriptions.

The following standards and indicators have been introduced for the achievement of learning outcomes for the key area of teaching and learning related to the verification of learning outcomes:

Standard A 1. 1 Planning satisfies the requirements of the curriculum and the standard

- A.1.1.2. The teacher plans cross-curricular topics and the open part of the subject programme/module

Standard A 1.2 Teaching is adapted to the developmental characteristics, needs and capabilities of students and is aimed at achieving learning outcomes in the key area of teaching and learning, defined by indicators:

- A.1.2.11. The institution focuses its activities on the development of key competences

Through the 'Integration of Key Competences in the Education System of Montenegro'[21] project, a Guide for Quality Assurance, Self-Evaluation and Improvement of Educational Institutions was prepared based on the 'Framework for the Integration of Key Competences'. The guide not only aims to ensure improvement in the quality of teaching that integrates key competences; it also describes indicators for monitoring the integration of key competences in the curriculum, which will help supervisors and quality assurance consultants to monitor the development of key competences.

As previously described, the achievement of educational goals and subject outcomes is assessed through internal (school) and external assessments of student achievements.

In accordance with the changes in the law on education in 2017, national knowledge tests were introduced at the end of the II cycle. In accordance with the law on basic education[22] and upbringing and the Rule Book on the method and procedure of checking student knowledge,[23] student achievements in Montenegrin, i.e. their mother tongue, mathematics, English or selected chapters in natural and social sciences are tested at the end of the educational cycle at the end of the second cycle, based on externally prepared tasks (Examination Centre of Montenegro).

> *The primary function of national testing after the second cycle is evaluation, and the results are used for monitoring educational reforms and corrections of the educational system. It's important to note that student performance in these tests does not affect school grades.*

Through the 'Integration of key competences in the educational system of Montenegro'[24] project, 50 test tasks (divided into 25 exam topics and 150 questions) were completed, which include STEM key competences based on the PISA test. All questions are classified according to the narrower areas of STEM disciplines and according to the outcomes of key competences at ISCED 1 and ISCED 2 level, in relation to the National Framework of Key Competences.

The planned target group for these tasks are sixth grade elementary school students who will participate in the national knowledge test at the end of the II cycle of the 2023 school year.

18 General Law on Education (*https://www.paragraf.me/propisi-crnegore/opsti-zakon-o-obrazovanju-i-vaspitanju.html*
19 Rule Book on the Content, Forms and Ways of Determining the Quality of Educational Work in Institutions (*https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/8c01b77e-b191-4b5a-8ffd-958c0d656a68*)
20 Methodology for Quality Assurance of Education in Preschool Institutions, Schools, educational centres, resource centres, adult education organizers and student dormitories (*https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/410dfbd3-c202-48a6-90e4-ced271ee8482*)
21 Integration of Key Competence in Montenegrin curriculum *www.ikces.me*
22 Low on primary education *https://www.paragraf.me/propisi-crnegore/zakon-o-osnovnom-obrazovanju-i-vaspitanju.html*
23 Rulebook on the method and procedure of testing students' knowledge on the end of education cycles *Pravilnik-o-nacinu-i-postupku-provjere-znanja-ucenika-na-kraju-obrazovnog-ciklusa.pdf (iccg.co.me)*
24 Integration of key competences in the educational system of Montenegro *www.ikces.me*

6. Conclusion

Montenegro has implemented a comprehensive reform of its educational system, with a focus on quality education, active teaching and learning methods, and the integration of key competences for lifelong learning. The country has made continuous efforts to improve the inclusiveness and quality of education, as well as to provide professional development for teachers. The core curriculum serves as a guideline for the education process and emphasizes the importance of individualized learning plans, evaluation, and completion criteria. Overall, Montenegro has made significant strides in developing a modern and effective educational system that prepares students for success in the changing world.

The modernisation of the education system has led to the need for the introduction of a general, integrative approach to connect existing fragmented efforts focusing on the development of key competences. The development of transversal key competences was realized through cross-cutting themes, while language and STEM competences were realized as part of subject programmes.

The Montenegrin key competences framework programme was developed to functionally connect and integrate already existing key competences in the education system. The framework programme is the starting point for further developing teacher training and educational concepts and assumes the structured integration of key competences in all levels of education in Montenegro. Digital competence was introduced in a systematic way through the Montenegrin key competence framework. Cross-cutting themes and key competence outcomes should be carefully planned to achieve student progress.

The Ministry of Education of Montenegro has taken extensive steps to implement a comprehensive reform of the education system, which are partly based on the results and recommendations of the UNICEF Education sector analysis 2015-2020, international research dealing with student achievements (PISA and TIMSS), as well as the results of national research, which deal with determining the quality of educational practice in Montenegro. In 2022, the Bureau for Educational Services conducted research on the quality of subject programmes with primary school teachers, which will serve as a starting point for future curriculum improvement.

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Slovenia: fact box

This article focuses on:
☐ Primary education
☒ Secondary education

In Slovenia the **teaching time** in primary education is 22 hours and in secondary education 20 hours per week. The gymnasium programme comprises 35 weeks of school per year. The ratio between the core and the full curriculum is 80/20.

In grades 6 and 9 of primary education, pupils take the *national assessment of knowledge*. Subjects assessed are: mother tongue and mathematics, plus a foreign language in grade 6. In grade 9 the additional subject is determined by the minister responsible for education. These assessments are compulsory for all pupils except for migrant students in the first year of integration. The results do not affect pupils' school marks. They serve as additional information about their level of knowledge, which means the national assessment is a low-stakes test.

Slovenia has a **central examination** at the end of secondary education. The Matura is a school leaving exam required for the completion of secondary education and for admission to university. Thus, the Matura represents not only a final exam but also a continuation regulating the transition from secondary to tertiary education, as is the case of educational systems in many European countries.

The Matura is a national exam with equal conditions for all candidates: they take the exam simultaneously, following the same procedures and rules and in accordance with the same assessment criteria. Achievement in the Matura and achievement in the last two years of schooling are taken into consideration where there is a limit to the number of students in higher education.

	Core curriculum	Full curriculum
Subjects/topics/key competences	Focuses on mathematics, languages, history, and sports education. Compulsory subjects taught for less than four years are geography, biology, chemistry, physics, music, fine arts, psychology, sociology and philosophy and informatics. In the gymnasia programme, citizenship is also part of the core curriculum, but it is not a classical subject, it is a content section.	Optional subjects represent 14% of the entire programme; other forms of teaching, including content sections, representing 6% of the entire programme (300 hours over four years) so-called 'elective compulsory activities'.
Amount of detail	The core curriculum is goal-oriented and includes knowledge, skills and competences. The depth depends on the subject. Didactic guidelines and suggestions and recommendations for assessment and evaluation are also included.	The full curriculum Includes the knowledge, skills and attitudes regarding optional subjects. Didactic guidelines and suggestions are included as well.
Who is involved in its development	National education institute with teachers and experts from faculties.	National education institute with teachers and experts from faculties.

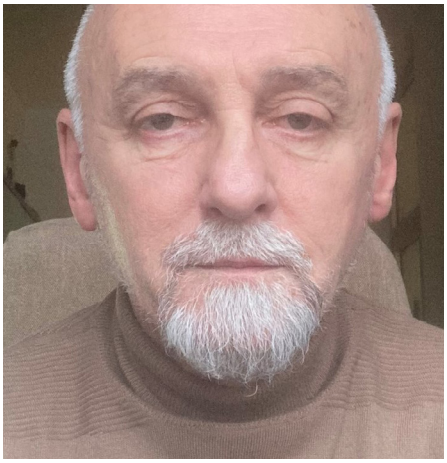
Slovenia: biographies

Jasna Rojc graduated in Art History and Comparative Linguistics. She has 23 years of experience in secondary and higher vocational education as a teacher and principal. In addition to her school work, she participated in numerous projects with various professional institutions in the field of education.

Between 2019 and 2022, she was employed at the Institute of Education of the Republic of Slovenia as a Senior Advisor in the Secondary Education Department. Her field of activity included secondary education development, development of curricula and teacher professional development.

Since August 2022, she has been Director General of the Directorate for Secondary, Higher Vocational and Adult Education at the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport.

Jasna Rojc



Branko Slivar, PhD, psychologist, is working with teachers and school leaders on the national and international level. His main professional interest is in the area of curriculum planning and development, implementation of changes in schools and teacher stress management.

He was also resident Twinning adviser in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the field of strengthening institutional capacity of the Agency for Pre-primary, Primary and Secondary Education.

Last 2 years he coordinated the expert group that prepared the starting points for curriculum renewal in primary and upper secondary schools.

Branko Slivar

Ada Holcar is an educationalist, specialized in assessment for learning in primary and secondary subject Music. Before becoming a Senior Consultant at the National Education Institute of the Republic of Slovenia, Ada spent almost 20 years teaching music, much of that time at the IBO International School in Ljubljana.

Throughout her career, she has maintained an intense interest in curriculum design, implementation and assessment. She has travelled extensively during her professional life and participated internationally at various workshops and is a regular presenter at international conferences. Ada has been recently given the responsibility of leading a team of practitioners in taking forward a national programme for Assessment for Learning in Slovenia.

She completed her Ph.D. studies in formative assessment at the Faculty of Education at the University of Ljubljana. Ada continues her research on the holistic assessment approach, publishing and contributing widely to research journals, magazines and academic papers.

Ada Holcar

How Slovenia reduced curriculum overload and incorporated cross-curricular competences

Abstract

The Slovenian education system has been facing pressure from a range of sources to expand the curriculum by adding new subjects, content and/or competences (digital literacy, sustainable development, etc.) to the curriculum. The purpose of the development work in the general upper secondary school curriculum is to maintain the existing coherence of the curriculum, prevent an overload of subjects and content/competences, while at the same time addressing the needs of modern society. In response to these demands, the National Education Institute is undertaking a systemic approach to developing the general upper secondary school curriculum. This is supported by a National Curriculum reform, which emphasises the importance of integrating cross-curricular competences in all subject-specific goals of primary and secondary schools as the key strategy for tackling and mitigating curriculum overload in Slovenia.

It also aims to introduce an active and authentic approach to the development of civic competences and strengthening integration across subjects through an interdisciplinary thematic strand.

1. Introduction

The Slovenian education system has constantly faced various social pressures. There is relatively strong public opinion that many social or economic problems could be solved by appropriately adapting educational programmes or by adapting the curriculum in primary school, and even more so at the secondary level. Such expectations are not based on professional foundations and do not consider the findings of pedagogy, psychology, sociology and other sciences related to educational research and development. They also do not consider either domestic curricular traditions or results from the international arena. Yet, at the same time, they are almost always linked to broadening the range of school subjects or at least the content or competences. Such initiatives are also accompanied by expectations in an increase in the number of lessons, which would increase demands on pupils and students in terms of content and time burden.

But on the other hand, we must admit that social changes also dictate adjustments in the field of education. In recent years, there has been a significant need to boost learner competences in digital literacy, sustainable development, active citizenship and other social skills, such as cooperation and teamwork, communication, leadership skills, as well as independence, creativity and critical thinking. In this paper, we focus on presenting the latest established or planned changes in the curricula of Slovenian primary and secondary schools, with which we follow modern global trends in education.

2. Basic information about the education system in the Republic of Slovenia

Professionally considered and planned education in Slovenia begins in kindergarten, i.e., before entry into compulsory nine-year primary school. After finishing primary education, practically the entire population continues with education at the upper secondary school level, although this is not compulsory. Primary and secondary school education and training are provided by primary schools, secondary schools, music schools, primary schools with an adapted programme, institutions for educating children and adolescents with special needs and student dormitories. Most educational institutions are public. In addition to these, the public network in education consists of individual educational institutions with a concession. Secondary education in Slovenia is made up of a multitude of diverse educational programmes organized into a comprehensively thought-out system that enables the acquisition of proper education with different goals: for further education in university programmes or for entering the labour market, for further education with the aim of specializing in a chosen professional field within postsecondary and higher professional education. Consequently, secondary schools are divided into two groups: gymnasia and vocational and technical schools. In vocational and technical education programmes, the emphasis is on practical, flexible, specific, and transferable knowledge for use in concrete problem situations, which equips students with the broadest range

of skills related to the particular problem and professional challenges. On the other hand, in gymnasia, which ends with the general matura, the goals are set at a higher level in terms of the complexity and abstractness of the content. In these programmes, the emphasis is on general knowledge that can be transferred to different fields, critical thinking, and humanistic and natural science literacy, as well as a methodological and conceptual approach. Education in gymnasia and some vocational/technical programmes lasts four years and in some vocational programmes two or three years. Students attend four-year secondary school programmes between the ages of 15 and 19.

The chart below shows the structure of the Slovenian school system.

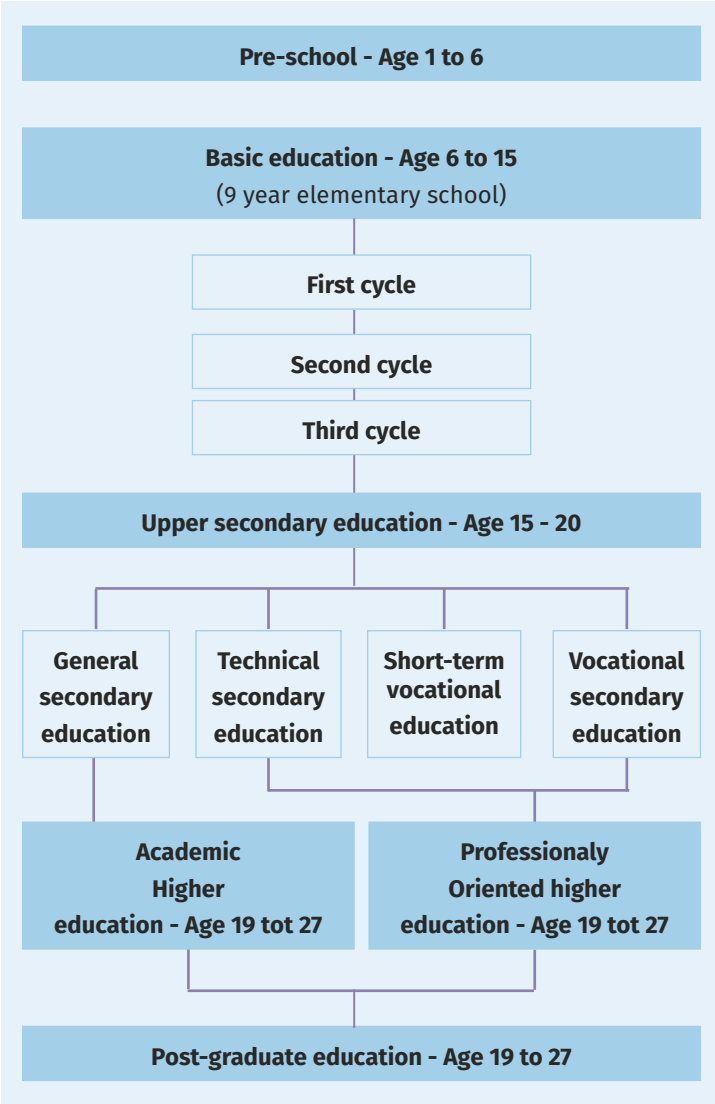


Table 1: The structure of Slovenian school system

3. Description of the gymnasia programme – summary

The gymnasia programme is the most general secondary education programme that prepares students for further studies (Krek et al., 2011).

The curriculum of the general gymnasia programme consists of three essential parts:

a. **Compulsory subjects** where the number, scope and content of the courses are determined (almost 80% hours of the gymnasia programme);
b. **Optional subjects,** they represent 14% hours of the entire programme and are aimed at deepening knowledge in areas closer to individual students and preparation for the matura;
c. **Other forms of teaching,** including content sections, representing 6% hours of the entire programme (300 hours over four years). This part of the programme differs in its implementation method and content. It is about different knowledge and skills, which are only partly included in classical school subjects, but which satisfy the individual preferences of students. This form is the so-called 'open lesson' (Blažič et al., 2003), characterized by the goals, contents, and methods, which are adapted to the interests and abilities of the students, oriented to the life of the local community and the anticipation and participation of the students.

Compulsory four-year subjects are Slovenian, mathematics, a first and second foreign language, history, and sports education. Compulsory subjects taught for less than four years are geography, biology, chemistry, physics, music, fine art, psychology, sociology, philosophy, and informatics.

The fundamental emphasis in the design of the programme is on:

- general education orientation and
- developing the knowledge, abilities, skills and habits necessary for further academic studies.

In addition to the aforementioned general gymnasia programme, current legislation also establishes a professional gymnasia, which includes the fields of economics, technical skills and the arts. In this case, part of the programme maintains the curriculum structure typical of the general gymnasia programme, but the number of hours for optional subjects is lower. Professional subjects are also included in the curriculum as part of the compulsory subjects. The ratio between the essential parts of the gymnasia programme (hours of subjects) is set at the national level.

Based on national research (Borstner, 2007) and the activities of the National Education Institute of Slovenia[1] (hereinafter, the NEIS), some weaknesses in the implementation of the gymnasia curriculum have been identified, especially in the didactic field: *the lecture method* prevails, the relationship between the teacher's activity and the students' activity is in favour of the teacher's activity. During preparation for the Matura exam students are successful in consolidating the acquired knowledge, but they develop independent thinking

to a much lesser extent and teachers often equate goals with learning content, etc. Furthermore, teachers' cross-curricular planning and implementation is extremely low or is totally lacking. As a rule, teachers of different subjects focus solely on implementing their subjects and are reluctant to connect. The issue of curricula/syllabi should also be highlighted. For example, an analysis of the curricula for compulsory subjects in the gymnasia programme (Bačnik et al., 2021) showed that knowledge is insufficiently connected, that knowledge of lower taxonomic levels dominates, that there are insufficient authentic learning situations and connecting theory with practice, with real life and with other subjects, in order for students to build a 'big picture of the world'. There is insufficient development of independent, critical and creative thinking and other transversal skills and a low emphasis on the development of both mental/cognitive and emotional-motivational and metacognitive activities. Moreover, too much content is specified in the curricula, so the real meaning of the subject/discipline is lost.[1]

4. Approaches to reducing curriculum overload

The NEIS approaches curriculum reforms thoughtfully and professionally with the aim of achieving society's expectations, by considering modern trends in education and the findings of national research and preventing the overload of students and teachers. It implements innovations gradually, with the constant involvement of all stakeholders (teachers, principals and other professionals, experts in the field of education, school policy and students and their parents). In recent years, the NEIS has introduced changes to the gymnasia curriculum with a systemic approach to preserve the existing structure of educational programmes or the curriculum. The NEIS wants to prevent the expansion of subjects and contents mainly because of the demands of modern society, which are politically or economically motivated. It should also be noted that most teachers and principals do not favour changes to the gymnasia curriculum (Krek, 2011). This change is supported by a National Curriculum reform, which emphasises the importance of integrating cross-curricular competences into all subject-specific goals of primary and secondary schools as the key strategy for tackling and mitigating curriculum overload in Slovenia. The curriculum reform is based on:

a. strengthening the interdisciplinary connection between subjects through the interdisciplinary thematic strand (gymnasia curriculum),

b. introducing an active and authentic approach to the development of civic competences (gymnasia curriculum),

c. integrating cross-curricular competences in all subject-specific goals of primary and secondary schools.

Below we present the aforementioned approaches in more detail.

5. Interdisciplinary thematic strand

The beginnings of planned interdisciplinary teaching in Slovenian schools date back to the period of a large-scale project called 'European classes', which also included the planned enforcement of the principle of interdisciplinary knowledge and the active implementation of cross-curricular connections (Pavlič Škerjanc, 2011). However, despite the recognized advantages of this type of teaching, the project was not followed by a systematic approach. Thus, interdisciplinary teaching was limited to individual episodes (class lessons, project days), organised on the initiative of individual teachers. In practice, despite the efforts of the teachers and the team approach, interdisciplinarity was not achieved; as a rule, team teaching was multidisciplinary. Therefore, the NEIS proposed a systemic solution, not only at the level of changing the curriculum but also with a normative arrangement that enables this type of teaching to be carried out in smaller groups and with support for teachers through training and counselling.

The NEIS implemented the interdisciplinary thematic strand (ITS) in a sample of schools in the 2018/19 school year. Since the 2020/21 school year, ITS has been an integral part of the gymnasia programme. ITS is a content package, with which the interconnected goals of at least three disciplines or subjects are realized and addressed in more depth.

> *The essential purpose of this type of teaching is to stimulate student acquisition of knowledge at higher taxonomic levels, i.e., to strengthen complex thought processes and skills while enabling verification and assessment of complex achievements and results.*

The main objectives of the ITS are:

1. to facilitate the development of quality knowledge;
2. to enable the promotion of student's' specific interests and potential;
3. to promote the integration of knowledge from different subjects or disciplines and the solution of complex problems;
4. to facilitate the development of knowledge and skills to manage one's own life (functional skills), to understand and participate meaningfully in society, and to facilitate the choice of studies;
5. to link schoolwork to authentic life situations and to active learning and action in the immediate and wider social environment;
6. to encourage the development of independence, innovation and creativity in students;
7. to promote the achievement of excellence and the provision of high quality general education in the chosen field;
8. to promote teamwork and a collaborative culture.

1 Conversations with teachers at seminars, study groups, in projects, interviews with upper secondary school principals at conferences, regional meetings, etc.

Therefore, the design and implementation of ITS are based on:

- teacher teamwork and collaborative teaching and student teamwork,
- complex (interdisciplinary) student achievement,
- the development of applied knowledge and skills or competences and the integration of the school with the environment (school as an open learning environment),
- modern didactic approaches and working strategies.

INTERDISCIPLINARY THEMATIC STRAND PLAN
NAME of ITS **Consumerism with Responsibility for Sustainability**
KEY RESEARCH QUESTION Are we critical consumers? Do we have enough knowledge to assess our own consumption habits and change them?
DESCRIPTION (GIST, SUMMARY) OF THE PROBLEM Consumerism can have a profound impact on the quality of our daily lives. Advertising creates new needs and promotes the expression of one's own identity through certain consumer behaviour. Young people form habits during adolescence that become established and change little in adulthood. As they often do this unconsciously, it is important that they learn to recognise and control these patterns of behaviour. Through the cross-curricular integration of psychology, chemistry, philosophy and geography, students learn about the factors that influence the formation of consumption habits, acquire the skills to critically evaluate information and become aware of the consequences of consumption habits for their health and well-being and for the environment.
INTERDISCIPLINARY OBJECTIVES • To become aware of the importance of sustainable development and anticipate action (from an environmental, social and economic point of view) on an environmental/consumer issue. • To collect, organise, interpret, and evaluate data in a reasoned way. • To solve authentic problems and develop a plan to raise consumer awareness. • To develop critical thinking and entrepreneurial competences.
THE SUBJECTS COVERED AND THEIR GENERAL OBJECTIVES Chemistry (33 hours), Psychology (26 hours), Philosophy (24 hours), Geography (22 hours) CHEMISTRY: General objectives and competences: • To develop the ability to apply scientific knowledge for critical evaluation, • To develop a responsible attitude towards themselves and the environment in the use of substances, • To develop an awareness of the interdependence of social, socio-economic, and natural-technical processes. PSYCHOLOGY: General objectives and competences: • To acquire a critical attitude towards consumerism and its impact on the individual, • To develop an understanding of the criteria of good advertising, • To develop an attitude towards themselves in relation to consumerism, • To develop research skills. PHILOSOPHY: General objectives and competences: • Orientation towards independent, creative thinking and judgement, • To encourage reflection on oneself and on the world, society and nature, • To develop a tolerant dialogue based on rational arguments, • To form an orientation for life. GEOGRAPHY: General objectives and competences: • To know the meaning and the difference of the technical terms ecology, sustainable development and environmental protection and the role of environmental legislation and professional services in the field of the environment, • To understand environmental problems and be aware of the importance of man as a transformer of the environment, • To develop an awareness and sensitivity to the environment and environmental problems and recognise its value and vulnerability, • To develop the research skills and abilities to identify, investigate and critically assess the harmful changes resulting from human irresponsibility towards nature and to promote sustainable solutions to environmental problems, • To seek new ways of acting sustainably, • To develop research skills.
THEMATIC CONTENT 1. Environmental/consumer authentic situations 2. Critical consumerism - research tasks 3. Consumerism in health, well-being and the environment

Table 2: An authentic example of ITS on the topic of Consumerism with responsibility for sustainability (Kregar et al., 2020).

1. Thematic content: Environmental/consumer authentic situations Number of hours planned: 42					
EXPECTED OUTCOMES	**STUDENT ACTIVITIES AND EVIDENCE OF LEARNING**	**CHEMISTRY (18 hours)**	**PSYCHOLOGY (10 hours)**	**PHILOSOPHY (8 hours)**	**GEOGRAPHY (6 hours)**
		Curriculum objectives	**Curriculum objectives**	**Curriculum objectives**	**Curriculum objectives**
Ability to identify and resolve a range of authentic situations by demonstrating an understanding of the impact of lifestyle on health.	Comparison and evaluation of different advertisements, explanation, working with sources, discussion. Watching the movie 'Captain Fantastic'; after the movie, guided debate on the issues of consumerism and its impact on the environment (unhealthy lifestyles, the importance of education, relationship with material goods – the importance of clothes, housing, books, luxuries, the importance of coexisting with nature). Watch the movie - Climate Change / Truth or Lies.	To identify and prevent health hazards.	To become aware of their own motivation and develop self-motivation strategies for different activities.	A tolerant dialogue based on rational arguments. To create an orientation for life.	To receive and understand daily information that has a spatial dimension and influences one's own responsible behaviour and decision-making.
Ability to identify the effects of ingredients on qualitative properties. Ability to recognise the impact of consumption habits on addressing environmental impacts. Ability to critically evaluate their consumption habits.	Chemical analysis of consumer products and production of a report. Direct observation of situations in an authentic environment (waste collection and recycling centres, shopping centres, re-use centres, institutes, etc.). Direct and indirect observation of natural and social factors, phenomena, and processes in the landscape. Present their views and insights in an interview.	To develop experimental skills.	To develop the ability to self-reflect and change themselves and their behaviour. To develop lifelong learning skills.		They learn how to use simple geographical methods and techniques and the necessary tools.
They analyse, interpret and critically evaluate the data collected in an appropriate way; they present their findings to their classmates. Ability to analyse different declarations on consumer products. Ability to critically evaluate the results of a survey. Ability to present the results of the analyses in an argumentative manner.	They find information from different sources, identify substances, understand their importance for the functioning of the body, and learn about daily nutrient requirements and labelling systems. They look for and analyse declarations on different consumer products. Prepare a questionnaire, conduct a survey, and interpret the results (prevalence and use of a variety of drinks and sugary-salty snacks school pupils). Using worksheets summarising topical articles from the Internet, students work in groups to research and discuss environmental problems and find solutions. They present their findings to their classmates in the form of a debate. They collect data on a variety of drinks, record it, analyse it chemically, interpret it and critically evaluate it. They produce a report.	Health and healthy living.	To relate theoretical psychological knowledge to everyday experiences and situations.	To encourage critical reflection on everyday experience, knowledge, values and action. To develop students' linguistic expression.	They can use geographical resources and literature on their own.

Table 3: Authentic example of ITS: thematic content: environmental/consumer authentic situations

Therefore, the introduction of ITS is intended to promote the acquisition of knowledge at higher taxonomic levels or to enhance complex thinking processes and skills; at the same time, ITS allows for the identification or verification and assessment of such - complex - achievements and outcomes.

In addition to ensuring higher standards of knowledge and raising the quality of learning achievements, with ITS, the NEIS also strengthens the optional aspect and internal coherence of the gymnasia programme, as the school can allocate hours for elective subjects in the 2nd and 3rd years. Therefore, the ITS implementation plan is formed based on the syllabi of elective subjects or special (elective) knowledge from the syllabi of compulsory subjects. Furthermore, this type of teaching considers the students' areas of interest and excellence, updating school contents and connecting the school with the environment.

By implementing ITS, the NEIS promotes the process by which students, as individuals and in groups, connect the views and ways of thinking of different disciplines or established fields and deepen understanding beyond individual disciplines (Kregar et al., 2020). Various connections can emerge here, from the level of methods and tools through synthesizing and combining diverse views on the same problem to using diverse skills and approaches to solving problems generated by different disciplines. The NEIS stresses that an excellent disciplinary and substantive basis is necessary for an effective interdisciplinary connection. Interdisciplinary integration in schools is also encouraged by the latest guidelines in European and national documents, including the Starting points for the reform of the upper secondary school programme, adopted in 2007 (Borstner, 2007). Considering the diverse, flexible and open forms of demonstrating achievements and their complex interdisciplinary nature, the NEIS believes that ITS can capture the broadest range of knowledge and skills with an emphasis on higher taxonomic levels and complex thought processes and skills. These processes and skills are more complicated and impossible to cover with classic and only mono-subject knowledge tests (Kregar et al., 2020).

ITS allows us to gain a lot from a slight change in the established method of schoolwork: increasing the opportunities for 'non-classical' forms of work with students, which is a rarity in schools with gymnasia programmes. This approach increases the chance of developing essential skills and competences in more depth. The result of this type of lesson organization is the integration of knowledge, a view of the problem from different perspectives, achieving higher taxonomic levels of knowledge, learning through authentic problem situations, the inclusion of topical issues in school lessons and integration in the environment.

> *Besides positive effects for students, ITS is also an opportunity for the collaborative, innovative and creative work of teachers and their professional growth, as well as for greater recognition and involvement of the school in the environment.*

There is some resistance to implementing ITS in practice. However, ITS is a well-planned form of lesson, the guidelines for its implementation are clear and tested, and the NEIS provides professional support for the implementers. Most often, the reasons for resistance are:

- a lack of understanding of the purpose and basic requirements for ITS,
- different past experiences of schools with the organization of lessons,
- diverse experience of teachers with teamwork, project work and cooperation in the community,
- the inevitable interdependence of teachers – ITS providers,
- lack of understanding by colleagues who are not involved in ITS,
- unwillingness for external partners to co-design the lessons (they are not just guests at the classes).

6. Active citizenship

In Slovenia, there have been constant questions in recent decades about whether and in what way and to what extent citizenship education should be included in secondary school education programmes. This area has also been the subject of research, e.g., Civic and Homeland Education in Slovenian education, conducted in 2008 by the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Ljubljana (Haček, 2008). In 2016, the NEIS conducted an in-depth analysis of the elements of civic and homeland education in the curriculum documents of secondary school education (Šipuš, 2016). The study shows that the syllabi of some subjects contain goals and contents needed for developing and strengthening students' civic competence. To achieve these goals, recommended forms and methods of work (didactic recommendations) are prepared for the teachers. Using these recommendations, the teacher can enable students to make sense of knowledge, use it, connect it, upgrade it independently, critically evaluate the results and, last but not least, develop their attitude regarding environmental, social, societal, cultural and art issues. In addition to the goals and content of single subjects and cross-curricular content, other activities are also essential during schooling, which significantly co-shape citizenship competence. Many of them make a key contribution to knowledge and understanding of the political system, social reality and current socio-political issues, while encouraging young people to be active citizens. The findings described show that civic education was present in specific segments of secondary school programmes but not in a way that would ensure a certain standard of quality of knowledge and competence necessary for the responsible functioning of young people in today's society. Therefore, in 2019, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports decided on the systematic integration of active citizenship in the secondary school curriculum.

When searching for a solution regarding the inclusion of active citizenship in gymnasia programmes, the NEIS took into account the education legislation and, at the same time, wanted to preserve and also encourage the teaching practices developed during the implementation of the contents of citizenship at individual schools (Slivar et al., 2019). Therefore, the NEIS prepared a new programme element called Active citizenship, not a classical subject, but the content section.

The leading idea behind the content section is that active citizenship promotes active, informed and responsible democratic citizens. During classes, students systematically

acquire knowledge about the structure of society and purposefully develop the ability to understand the complexity of personal and social life and the connections and contradictions between individual, social and global. Within the school curriculum, students are offered opportunities for participation and co-decision-making in democratic processes in and outside the class. Compared to subjects, the content component is based on a different organization and delivery of lessons. By setting up authentic learning situations and providing high-quality feedback to the student, the teacher encourages students' active role, planning and reflection on learning. Therefore, when planning and conducting lessons, teachers focus on the activity of students, who plan and implement various activities, especially authentic tasks in connection with the environment. To achieve the objectives of the curriculum, teachers guide students by taking into account their interests and previous experiences and the social, economic, cultural and political context in which they live. Also, they consider current events in society, political challenges, and various forms of communication through which the media report problems and events (Rojc et al., 2021).

Here we present an authentic example from the set of activities on the topic of Ecology and climate change prevention, which is implemented as a 'project day' (the entire daily lesson is organised as project work, focusing on a chosen question, topic, or activity).

Example of a teacher's activity plan in Active Citizenship

A partial representation of an example, prepared by gymnasium teacher Andrej Adam (Rojc and Šipuš, 2021, pp. 25-31).

Description of the activity (content, methodical and implementation emphases, or the role of the teacher in the activities)	Student activities (preparation, performance, and reflection) and evidence	Expected results that show standards of knowledge
Preparing students for the activity The teacher asks a problematic question that connects the fields of ecology and human rights, and with the help of a discussion and explanation, prepares the students to watch the film Upor - Lafarge. At the same time, he presents the objectives of the activity, and provides instructions for recording thoughts and self-reflection, which the students write down at the end of the individual activities (lessons). (1st school hour – approx. 30 min.)	At the end of the introductory activity (hour), the students write down their introductory thoughts (what they know about the topic, what their classmates said in the brief discussion, what questions they are asked, what opinions they have about solving environmental issues, etc.).	Students use the basic elements of critical thinking. During the discussion, they touch on issues of social justice. They assess the reliability of the information. They think about the concept of citizenship, etc.
Upor – Lafarge* The teacher prepares a projection of the film in its entirety or selects only key sections of the film for viewing. (1st and 2nd school hours - approx. 60 min.)	After watching the film/individual excerpt, the students summarize the content. They write down summaries.	
Discussing the movie The teacher conducts a Socratic discussion. (3rd school hour – approx. 45 min.)	Students join the discussion. In doing so, they explain, define, cite examples, cite supports, formulate arguments, look for implicit sub-meanings (assumptions), give reasons, and examples, reformulate what has been said (if necessary), notice different perspectives and alternative views, look for and notice counterarguments, establish differences, ensure consistency, generalize, check, look for the consequences of statements, ask questions, analyse, connect, suspect, conclude, etc.	Students demonstrate use of the basic elements of critical thinking and argumentation by engaging in discussion (with cooperation). Using the example, they recognize the functioning of the political system of the Republic of Slovenia at the (state and) municipal level and its impact on the lives of the inhabitants. They recognize a local problem as part of a global problem (Lafarge - the largest cement producer in the world); draw conclusions about the effects of globalization and its processes on people and the environment.

Social game - role play The teacher prepares a social game based on the example from the Kompas manual (2005). If he knows the students well, he can include students who are already able to partially lead the discussion in the group of 'judges'. (4th and 5th school hours - approx. 90 min.)	Students are divided into groups. Through group work, they prepare for the role play according to the instructions written on the cards. They can use online and other resources when creating a logical argument. Students engage in role play: they present the arguments of the default role in the allotted time frame: - the leading managers of the company, - local government officials, - eco-activists, - judges who rule on activist lawsuits against the company.	During the activity, students become familiar with the fundamental principles of the functioning of the modern economy. With the social game, they get to know the aspect of different roles in the economy (owners, employers, workers...).
Discussion after the social game (interview method) The teacher connects the situation under discussion with specific content of the Constitution (e. g. Article 35, which talks about the right to security and dignity, etc.). (6th school hour - approx. 45 min.)	After the role play, they engage in discussion. As part of this discussion, they also formulate questions for discussion with the activist.	Students demonstrate use of the basic elements of critical thinking and argumentation by engaging in discussion (with cooperation). During the discussion, they touch on the question of what contributes to greater justice in society and defend their views with arguments. The constitutional provision is judged in the case of a practical situation.
Conversation with an activist In planning the event, the teacher can give students the opportunity to suggest which activist to invite. After an agreement is reached or a guest is chosen, students can also organize a meeting under the guidance of the teacher (tasks are distributed to individuals or groups). The teacher predicts the course of the interview and decides whether he will conduct/coordinate the interview himself or allow selected students to conduct it. (7th and 8th school hours - approx. 90 min.)	Students listen to the activist's arguments and discover the basis for forming their own reasonable opinion. They ask questions formulated after the role play.	
Self-reflection of students According to the teacher's instructions; as homework.	The students reflect on the experience of the activity, referring also to their introductory thoughts. According to the instructions: - they evaluate their own introductory notes and assess how their view of the discussed topic has changed and why, as well as whether they got answers to their questions, - they write down any new questions that have arisen, - briefly describe a related case from the local environment, - present some other ways of (co)operation in the community and evaluate their importance.	Based on the case in question, the student, according to the teacher's instructions, in the context of reflection: - presents the functioning of the political system of the Republic of Slovenia at the national and municipal level and demonstrates its impact on the lives of the inhabitants using an example, - presents ways of (co)operation in the community and evaluates their importance.

* The documentary *Upor - Lafarge (in English Rebellion – Lafarge)* recounts the events in 2012 in the students' home environment. It describes the local community's rebellion against the pollution from the hazardous waste incineration that has been going on at the local cement plant since it was taken over by the French multinational company Lafarge.

Table 4: Example of a teacher's activity plan in Active Citizenship

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the content, it can be taught in the gymnasia by teachers who otherwise teach sociology, philosophy, history, or geography. However, especially from the point of view of integrating knowledge and implementing interdisciplinarity, it is justified and therefore recommended that a team of teachers teach students active citizenship.

7. Integrating cross-curricular competences in all subject-specific goals of primary and secondary schools

The fact is that the education system, which is based mainly on conveying knowledge of the disciplines that traditionally form general education, organized into mutually unrelated subjects, finds it increasingly difficult to meet the expectations of modern society. Such a system does not respond to the key challenges of the time, as it does not systematically address areas vital for active participation in contemporary society, e.g. issues of sustainable development, health and well-being of the individual and community, entrepreneurship competences, and digital literacy. As a result, despite modern teaching methods, educational content is becoming more and more distant from authentic challenges, and the acquired knowledge lacks a meaningful context. In this way, education does not prepare or motivate students for lifelong learning.

A revision of the curricula of primary school and gymnasia programmes in Slovenia is currently ongoing (2022–2026). The starting point for the revision is represented by the document called *Framework for the renewal of curricula in primary schools and gymnasia* (Ahačič et al., 2022). This document was prepared by a group of experts, theorists and practising teachers led by the NEIS. Among other things, the document foresees a solution that addresses the integration of cross-curricular competences in a core curriculum of all subject-specific goals of primary and secondary schools. The expert group introduced and defined the term common goals which stand for cross-curricular competences: "Common goals are not the general goals of the programmes defined in the Primary School Act and the Grammar School Act or the general goals of the subjects defined in the applicable curricula, but rather, they are goals that arise from cross-cutting thematic areas, transversal skills, key competences, literacy, etc., which are common to all educational programmes and subjects and relevant at all levels of education." The following common goals have been recognised as essential and every student will be offered them in Slovenia: Sustainable development, Entrepreneurship, Health and well-being, and Digital competences. And maybe in the future, from other areas depending on national interest.

A group of experts are currently preparing a curriculum document *Common goals for primary and lower secondary education, which will*:

- identify the role and relevance for each Common Goal Area in the context of general education,
- identify **key objectives** (make a selection of objectives) for each of the Common Goal Areas and
- provide operational guidance for including the **key objectives** of the Common Goal Areas in the curricula of the individual subjects.

The group highlighted that those different competences, transferral skills, and literacies are often ignored in the curricular documents and in practice. In this respect, the curricula do not address the teachers explicitly enough and do not empower them to achieve them in the lessons of the subject they teach (Bacnik et al., 2021). Therefore, one of the guidelines of the curricular reform that has just started is the meaningful inclusion of common goals in the subject-specific goals and, consequently, in the knowledge standards and/or in didactic guidance. This does not mean the common goals should be included in all subjects to the same extent and in the same way, but that they should be reasonably and professionally justified in the curricula. In various programmes, these goals can be realized differently and reflected in goals and topics of varying complexity.

The demands of the curriculum will be monitored by an online application in which each subject will need to define the teaching time needed for each topic. In addition to the compulsory elements of the curriculum, the App will also include self-regulatory mechanisms for curriculum developers: a set of ways of demonstrating knowledge together with descriptive assessment criteria. These elements, which will not be part of the curricula, are a tool for curriculum committees to:

- regulate the scope of the objectives in relation to the number of hours of the subject in the curriculum,
- reflect on the appropriate formulation of objectives and knowledge standards.

8. Conclusion

Despite pressure from the public to add new subjects to the curriculum or change the number of hours in existing subjects, the professional public doesn't support it. For example, the last attempt to change the gymnasia curriculum was in 2006, when the designated Commission did not get support for such proposals (Krek et al., 2011). In the past few years, however, there has been increasing pressure to include new or additional content from the field of key competences in the existing curricula, which the NEIS found too extensive. This is reflected in proposals to have financial literacy, digital competence, critical thinking, well-being, etc., as content in the curricula. In the existing conditions, some teachers have already successfully developed key competences in students and looked for different didactic solutions. However, this was not a systematic approach, but was left to the knowledge and personal engagement of the individuals or principals, who encouraged those teachers.

With the proposed changes, the NEIS wants to achieve the objectives of the gymnasia programme as a whole without

interfering with its structure. With this aim, in recent years, the NEIS has managed to include an interdisciplinary thematic package and the introduction of an active and authentic approach to the development of civic competences as a systemic part of the gymnasia programme. Monitoring the implementation of the interdisciplinary thematic package demonstrated positive results and the satisfaction of teachers and students (Rojc et al., 2019). The NEIS started monitoring the implementation of an active and authentic approach to developing civic competences in the 2022/23 school year.

In the National Curriculum reform the NEIS is taking into account modern trends in education, such as the development of student competences with the added intention of not causing curriculum overload. In the coming years, a significant challenge awaits us, namely how to implement the idea of connecting the key objectives of common goals with the goals of individual subject-specific goals in the curricula.

The challenges of implementing curricular and pedagogical changes involve changes in professional beliefs, values, and behaviour, including interaction with students, colleagues, and stakeholders. The shift to competences, which encompass knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, all of which lead to action in a specific domain and context, may involve fundamental shifts in teacher mindsets and in their approaches to teaching, learning and assessment. The complexity of change in multilayer, multi-actor education systems is extremely high (Looney et al., 2022).

In this context, the way teachers take part in professional development and how willing they are to engage in this innovation will be very important.

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Wales: fact box

This article focuses on:
☒ Primary education
☒ Secondary education

In Wales, the Education (School Day and School Year) (Wales) Regulations 2003 ("the 2003 Regulations") apply to schools maintained by local authorities and to special schools (whether or not so maintained). They make provision for a school day which is ordinarily to be divided into two sessions with a break in the middle, and for schools (other than nursery schools) to meet for at least 380 sessions, which equates to 190 days, during any school year.

Sessions must allow sufficient lesson time to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum in line with Curriculum for Wales Framework. Schools are free to decide the length of each lesson.

Wales has **central examination**, but only for secondary education. At 16 learners will complete a range of qualifications, predominantly at UK Level 1 and 2. Future qualifications to reflect the principles and ethos of the Curriculum for Wales are part of an ongoing consultation process by the independent regulator Qualifications Wales. The aim is for qualifications to reflect learner progression at age 16 as they develop the characteristics described in the Four Purposes, but that these qualifications do not define their education as they are only one element of a learner's overall attainment.

	Core curriculum	Full curriculum
Subjects/topics/key competences	Curriculum for Wales is a purpose led, process curriculum. Teachers and other experts have developed a national framework. Each school/setting is responsible for designing its own curriculum and assessment arrangements within the requirements set out in the national framework to enable them to reflect their context and the needs of their learners. Through a range of learning experiences, all learners will develop knowledge and skills integral to the Four Purposes of the Curriculum for Wales. A curriculum must be designed at school/setting level paying due regard to the mandatory elements of the Principles of Progression and Statements of What Matters in addition to statutory codes on Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE). Learners must experience learning in all six Areas of Learning between age 3-16, including Expressive Arts, Health and wellbeing, Humanities, Languages, Literacy and Communication, Maths and Numeracy and Science and Technology.	
Amount of detail	The Curriculum for Wales Framework outlines the mandatory and statutory elements required for schools to translate the national framework to their school level designed curriculum. In addition to the requirements of the national framework that enable schools/settings to design the content of their school level curriculum, descriptions of learning outline the progression of a learner between ages 3-16 in each Area of Learning and Experience and in Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE). The ultimate goal is to support learners to realise the four purposes – the aim of Curriculum for Wales.	The mandatory and statutory guidance to support schools to design a curriculum that meets the needs of their learners and context. In addition, frameworks to support the design of literacy, numeracy and digital competence are included in guidance.
Who is involved in its development	An ongoing co-construction approach includes all aspects of the curriculum framework being designed with a range of stakeholders including learners and young people, practitioners, international experts, higher education institutions, independent regulatory bodies such as Qualifications Wales and Estyn (the education inspectorate in Wales), regional professional learning partners and government.	The article highlights the role of school practitioners, learners, parents and community groups in supporting the implementation of the national framework within a local context. Professional learning to support curriculum realisation involves similar ways of working.

Wales: biographies

David Egan was a secondary school teacher and school leader before returning to higher education where he progressed to become Head of the Cardiff School of Education at Cardiff Metropolitan University. From 2005 to 2007 he was seconded to the Welsh Government to serve as Special Adviser for Education and Lifelong Learning to the First Minister and Cabinet and since 2022 he has been a Professional Adviser to the Education Directorate of the Welsh Government. He has published extensively on aspects of education policy in Wales since devolution and is a Fellow of the Learned Society of Wales, the Royal Historical Association, the Royal Society of Arts and the Chartered College of Teachers.

David Egan

Yvonne Roberts-Ablett is currently seconded to Welsh Government as a Professional Advisor for Curriculum for Wales. Working on curriculum and assessment design, she is a passionate advocate of the Curriculum for Wales reform having been part of the co-construction process to create Curriculum for Wales. She has been a senior leader for the last decade in a large Welsh secondary school, having taught history and politics in multiple schools across England and Wales over the last 20 years. As a EdD student with University of Wales, Trinity St David, her research is focused on developing a theoretical framework for curriculum design within the context of Curriculum for Wales.

Yvonne Roberts-Ablett

Developing a purpose-led curriculum for Wales

Abstract

This chapter describes the unique way in which Curriculum for Wales has been developed and how this transformational change is being supported. Since 2014 Wales has been engaged in developing, for the first time, its own curriculum, moving from a product orientation to a process oriented curriculum model. Following the 2015 Successful Futures report, which set the direction for Curriculum for Wales, all parts of the education system, led by teachers from 'pioneer schools', have co-constructed the curriculum. Pioneer groups developed a Digital Competency Framework, a curriculum framework and an approach to pedagogy based on teacher professional enquiry. Curriculum for Wales is based around four purposes, supported by a national framework that sets out the skills and knowledge for schools to design their own curriculum through a process of 'subsidiarity'. Key elements of the framework include the Areas of Learning and Experience, Statements of What Matters, Principles of Progression, Descriptions of Learning, the Relationships and Sexuality Education Code and guidance on human rights and careers and work-related experiences. These are supported by non-statutory frameworks for literacy, numeracy and digital competence. Approaches to assessment are based on the principles of assessment for learning. As part of the process of curriculum implementation that began in September 2022, work continues to support practitioners in the development of research-informed pedagogy and to share effective practice.

1. Introduction and context

Since the devolution of powers over education to the National Assembly of Wales by the UK Government in 1999, education policy in Wales has passed through various phases (Egan, 2022). A new phase began in 2010, when following a disappointing performance for Wales in the 2009 PISA tests (Bradshaw et al, 2010), a twenty-point action plan was introduced with intention to improve future performance in these tests (Andrews, 2011 and 2014). As a result of these changes, levels of accountability over schools in Wales were significantly increased, in a similar fashion to that occurring in many other education systems as part of what has been described as a 'Global Education Reform Movement' (Sahlberg, 2011).

Ultimately, however, a range of negative consequences appeared to result from the change in policy direction. These included deleterious impacts on pupil wellbeing and teacher morale (National Assembly for Wales, 2018; Egan, 2017; Welsh Government, 2018a), a narrowing of the school curriculum and greater prescription of teacher pedagogy such as the *National Literacy and Numeracy Framework* (Welsh Government, 2014).

As a result, in 2014 a new period in policy direction began, leading eventually to the reform programme described as *Our National Mission* (Welsh Government, 2017a). The development of a new school curriculum for Wales became a major part of this programme. Wales had never previously had its own curriculum, inheriting after the onset of devolution in 1999 the England and Wales version that had been introduced in 1988.

Initial work was undertaken by Graham Donaldson, a former Chief Inspector of Schools in Scotland. In the report, *Successful Futures*, published following his review, he noted that at their most extreme, the results of the previous period of high-stakes accountability led to the 'mission of primary schools being almost reduced to the teaching of literacy and numeracy and of secondary schools to preparation for qualifications' (Donaldson, 2015:10).

The recommendations made in his report were accepted in full by the Welsh Government leading to the development of a *Curriculum for Wales* (Welsh Government, 2015). Further reforms including changes to initial teacher education (Furlong, 2016), developments in professional learning for practitioners (Welsh Government 2018b) and new accountability arrangements (Welsh Government, 2022b), were intended to support the introduction of the new curriculum.

The introduction of the curriculum would also need to be aligned to the existing structure of the education system in Wales. Figure 1 illustrates the various roles and responsibilities of organisations that support just over 1400 schools, including Welsh medium, English medium and bilingual schools. These schools provide education for around 474,000 learners between the ages of 3-16. Sitting between Welsh Government and schools is what is known as the 'middle tier'. This is made up of local authorities which exercise local control over schools, regional consortia which have responsibility for school improvement and professional learning, an inspection body (Estyn), qualifications body (Qualifications Wales), registration and regulatory body for the school workforce (EWC), an educational leadership organisation (NAEL) and Wales's universities which provide initial teacher education, professional learning and research capacity. All these organisations contribute in different ways to the realisation of the curriculum and the wider reform programme.

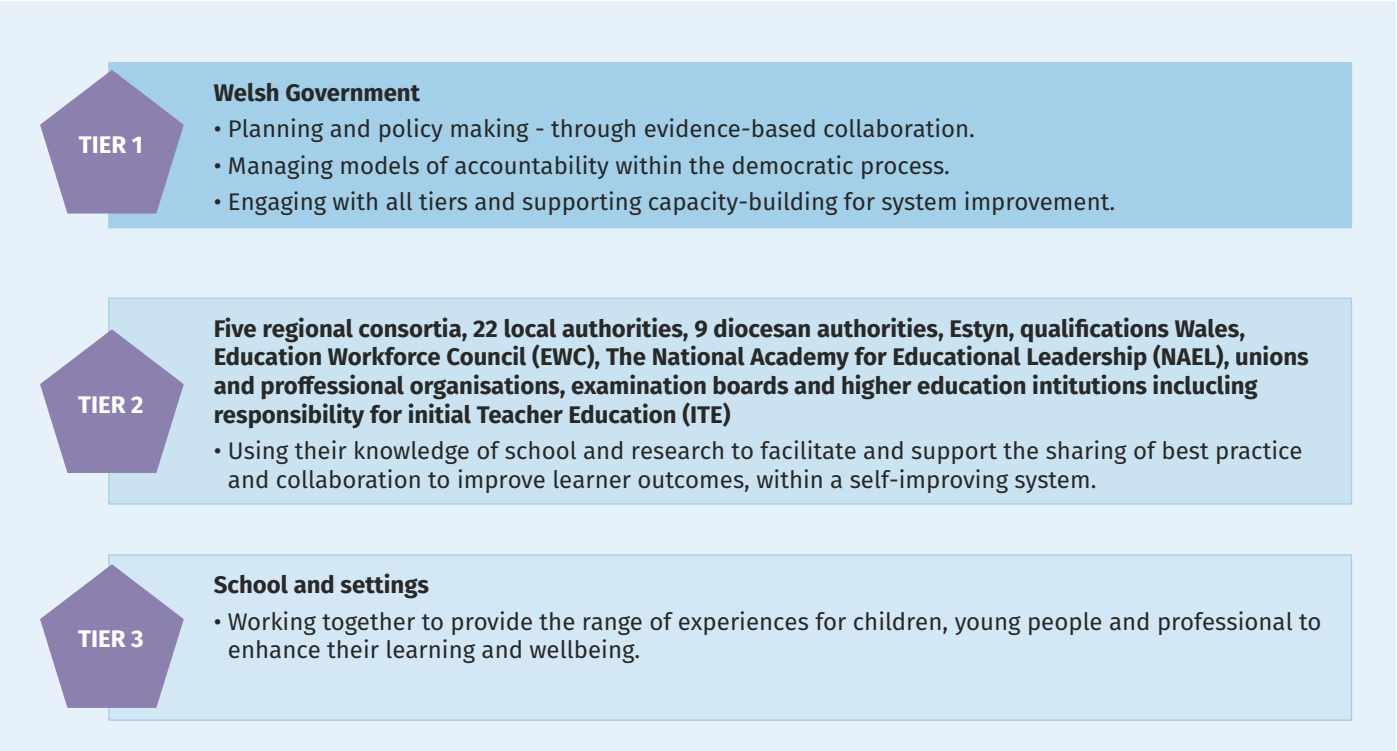

Figure 1: Structure of the education system in Wales

2. Pioneering Approach to Curriculum Co-construction

A unique feature of curriculum reform in Wales has been the process of co-construction by which the national curriculum framework has been designed. This has included the involvement of learners and young people, practitioners, international experts and the organisations in the middle tier. The aim has been to ensure that all parts of the education system in Wales has an equitable voice in shaping the reform. This was, achieved through a shared ownership and understanding of its purpose intended to enable successful realisation from policy to classroom practice. This led to the legislation to establish the Curriculum for Wales being simultaneously developed alongside the curriculum framework itself. It was important to the integrity of the reform to ensure that legislation did not presuppose the outcomes of the co-construction process or wider consultation exercises. (Welsh Government, 2021b)

A major feature of this process of co-construction was the establishment of the pioneer schools' network. Groups of curriculum and professional learning pioneer schools were created. The curriculum pioneers were selected by a national panel from nominations received from the regional consortia. Pioneer schools were selected to represent a range of contexts across Wales including a geographical spread across the country, phases of education, Welsh and English language education, and special schools. Ultimately 83 professional learning pioneer schools were selected, alongside 13 digital pioneers and 117 curriculum pioneers (Welsh Government, 2017c). One remit of these schools was to share their reflections in their own local networks, to widen ownership of and participation in the reform.

Initially in 2015, the 'Digital Pioneers worked closely with industry experts and higher education providers to create the *Digital Competency Framework* (Welsh Government, 2016). The curriculum pioneers worked with a range of experts and representatives from middle tier organisations to draft the initial curriculum framework for public consultation in 2019. They then utilised the feedback from the consultation and practitioner experiences during trial phases to refine the guidance. The Professional Learning pioneers began to identify the pedagogical approaches that would be required to successfully implement the new curriculum as described below.

A group of 16 'innovation schools' were tasked with trialling approaches to curriculum design within the schools and clusters, helping to test the practical application of the framework prior to curriculum rollout in September 2022. The impact of Covid 19 limited the outputs of this work, with any further dissemination by national and regional bodies taking account of the local pressures and the wellbeing of learners and practitioners across Wales.

The Welsh Government commissioned a formative evaluation of the pioneer model. Its report (Welsh Government, 2018c) noted that the model was a 'multi-faceted and complex' one that 'shaped and influenced by schools and other partners in a whole range of ways'. It found that whilst the pioneers

had secured 'strong support' for the vision set out in the new curriculum in their own schools, they had been less successful in engaging other schools (Ibid: 9).

3. The Professional Learning Pioneers and National Professional Enquiry Project (NPEP)

As part of the *National Approach to Professional Learning* (Welsh Government 2018b) and the development of *Schools as Learning Organisations* (Welsh Government, 2017b), the Welsh Government has promoted the development of teacher professional enquiry (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009; Evans *et al.*, 2022).

The role of the professional learning pioneers represents one aspect of this wider approach. Initially, the professional learning pioneers were focused on supporting the development of the new *Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership* (Welsh Government, 2017d) and the Organisation for Economic Co-ordination and Development (OECD) led project to develop *Schools as Learning Organisations* (Welsh Government, 2017b). They had not, therefore, begun to focus on the curriculum, leading to the formal evaluation finding that up to this point there had been a lack of 'collaboration to ensure coherence across the curriculum, professional learning and digital activity areas' and recommending that this should become a focus for the next phase of the curriculum development (Welsh Government, 2018c:10).

To this end, the Welsh Government procured three of Wales's universities (Bangor, Cardiff Metropolitan and Trinity Saint David) to work with the professional learning pioneers and the Regional Education Consortia. They were asked to develop the enquiry skills of the professional learning pioneers so that they could utilise these in contributing to the curriculum development process (Welsh Government, 2018d).

During the 2018-2019 school year, the pioneers, working with their university partners, undertook professional enquiry work in their own settings and with clusters of schools focused on curriculum design and implementation and the professional learning that would be required for teachers to realise Curriculum for Wales (Cardiff Metropolitan University, 2019). In the view of one of the schools, this 'supported leadership within our school and our capacity to be able to spread the vision and principles of Curriculum for Wales' and from the perspective of one of the Regional Education Consortia enabled 'teachers to be knowledgeable and confident in how to access and use educational research and to have the methodological skills to undertake their own robust enquiries' (Cardiff Metropolitan University, 2021).

During this initial year of professional learning activity undertaken through school-based enquiries, the Welsh Government commissioned researchers from the three universities to produce a report that would inform the next phase of the work and locate it within the *National Approach to Professional Learning [NAPL]* (Welsh Government, 2018b) and *The National Strategy for Educational Research and Enquiry* (Welsh Government, 2021c). The report drew upon the experience gained through working with the pioneers in 2018-2019, the research literature in this field, the views of key stakeholders in the Welsh education system and the experience of schools where professional enquiry was firmly embedded in their pedagogical practice (Egan, Evans and Hughes, 2019).

The recommendations of this report were accepted by Welsh Government leading to them being scaled up in 2018-2019 into what became designated as a *National Professional Enquiry Project (NPEP)* that involved a greater number of schools. From 2019-2020 the initial pioneer schools became *Lead Enquiry Schools* working with clusters of *Partner Enquiry Schools* in each of the local authorities and regions of Wales. To accommodate the expansion of the programme, all of Wales's universities were now invited to participate in NPEP and four additional institutions [Swansea, Wrexham Glyndwr, Aberystwyth and South Wales] became involved.

From 2020-2021 onwards NPEP has been developed with almost 300 schools in Wales (c 19% of the total number of schools]. It has focused first and foremost on developing the professional enquiry skills of teachers, but through an annual 'core brief' these have been aligned to various aspects of curriculum, assessment, pedagogy and wider educational practice. The core briefs also set out the overall direction for the project and the roles and responsibilities of each of the partners in the programme.

The outcomes of the enquiries undertaken by the teachers, supported by their university partner, are shared through Hwb [the Welsh Government provided digital platform for learners and practitioners in Wales], within and between school networking and at professional learning events. Inevitably, the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020 impacted upon NPEP and over the next two years slowed down the pace of its development. It adapted to the new context, however, with, for example, more emphasis being placed upon enquiries into distance and blended learning, well-being, and parental engagement. The core brief for 2022-2023 has re-asserted the central focus of NPEP on curriculum realisation through the curriculum itself, its assessment, pedagogy, equity of experience for learners and the importance of leadership.

External evaluations of NPEP have been generally positive. An OECD study in which Wales participated, noted the significant investment being made to promote professional enquiry as a 'key mechanism' for professional learning, curriculum realization and future school improvement arrangements to enable a self-improving system. It suggested, however, that whilst the features of effective enquiry highlighted in the research literature were implicit in NPEP, they could be 'articulated more explicitly' (OECD, 2021:9-10 and 34-35).

An evaluation commissioned by Welsh Government and undertaken by the Australian Council for Education Research found that NPEP had 'helped teaching to become a more research informed profession, promoted staff development, enhanced the purpose of teacher work and enabled them to make evidence-based decisions'. It also noted that it had allowed much closer ties to be developed between universities and schools in Wales. Less positively it reported that a lack of 'buy-in' from senior leaders had hampered attempts to develop whole-school cultures of enquiry and that the time required to engage in enquiry was a challenge

in persuading all practitioners to make this part of their daily practice. (ACER, 2022)

4. Curriculum for Wales: Curriculum Model

As Successful Futures had recommended, Curriculum for Wales is a *purpose led* curriculum intended to enable all 3–16-year olds' in Wales to become:

- Ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives.
- Enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work.
- Ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world.
- Healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

(See Appendix 1 for further details)

This is supported by a national curriculum framework that includes the fundamental knowledge and skills to be developed and experiences to be provided, for all learners. Within these national expectations, schools would design a curriculum for their own context through a process of 'subsidiarity, encouraging local ownership and responsibility' (Welsh Government 2015:99).

Successful Futures (ibid) in its evaluation of curriculum and assessment arrangements throughout Wales, highlighted a range of shortcomings with the previous National Curriculum (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008). Supported by a range of evidence from the OECD (2014), the case was made to step away from a content and product curriculum model that had become increasingly 'overloaded, complicated and, in parts, outdated' (Donaldson, 2015, 11). The Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021, secured the rollout of Curriculum for Wales from September 2022, including reform of qualifications for Year 11 (age 16) learners sitting examinations in 2027. The aim is to move from a content led curriculum and outcomes driven assessment system, to a purpose led process curriculum that supports the developmental needs of all learners in Wales, bringing continuity in learning from the age of 3 to 16. When developing an understanding of curriculum reform in Wales, the definitions used in the Curriculum for Wales framework are essential. Wales has clearly defined, for its context, what curriculum means for the next generation of learners in Wales.

> *''A school's curriculum is everything a learner experiences in pursuit of the four purposes. It is not simply what we teach, but how we teach and crucially, why we teach it''*
> *(Welsh Government 2021a).*

Curriculum for Wales consists of:

- *a na*tional level framework outlining mandatory learning.
- school-level design and planning to meet contextual and learner needs (Figure 2)

Schools and settings are expected to design their curriculum within the mandatory elements. The *What Matters Code* (Welsh Government, 2021a) sets out expectations of learning across 27 Statements of What Matters organised within six *Areas of Learning and Experiences:*

- Expressive Arts.
- Health and Wellbeing.
- Humanities [including mandatory expectations for religion, values and ethics (RVE)].

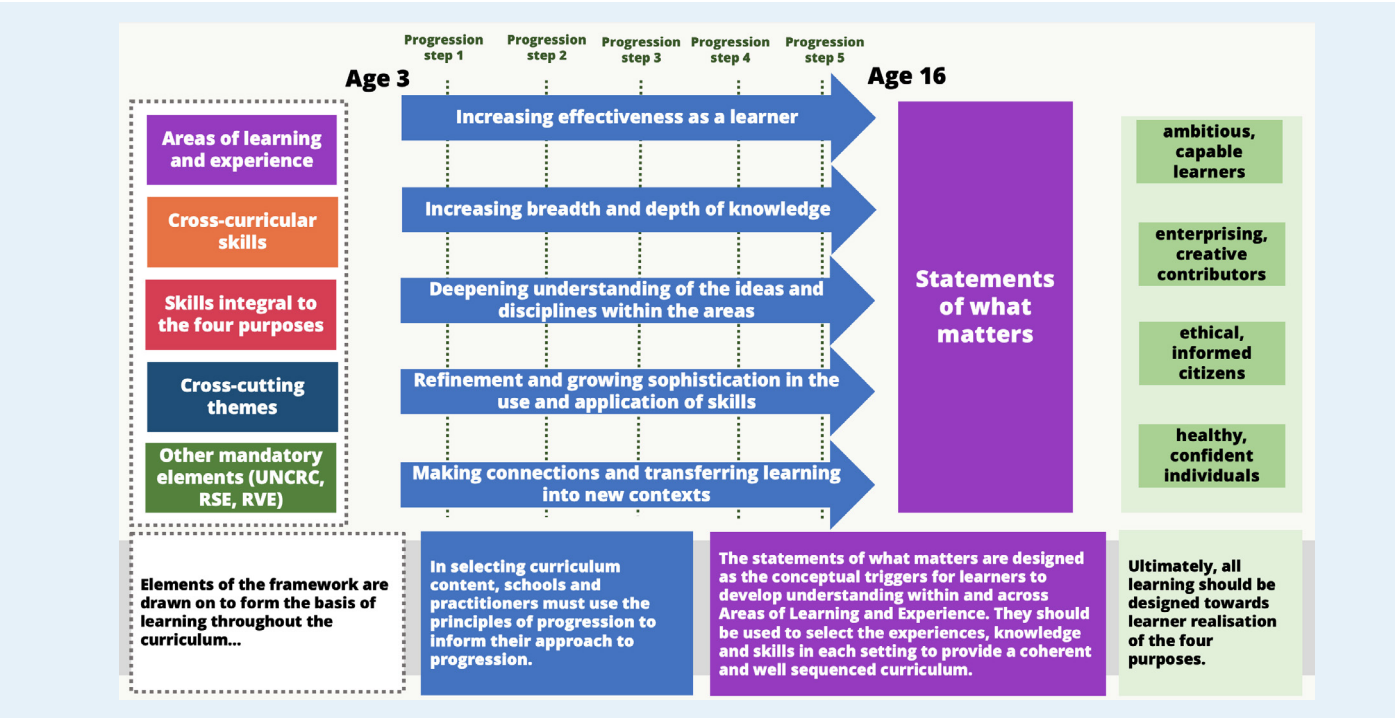

Figure 2: Principles of curriculum design

- Languages, Literacy and Communication (including mandatory expectations for Welsh and English).
- Mathematics and Numeracy.
- Science and Technology.

Within each Area of Learning and Experience progression will be determined by developing, the conceptual understanding articulated within the Statements of What Matters, identified as the essential learning within those subject disciplines. Within Descriptions of learning provide guidance on how learners should progress within each statement of what matters as they journey through the continuum of learning. Descriptions of learning are designed to sustain learning over a period of years and this gives practitioners scope to use them to select content that provides both breadth and depth of learning.

In addition, the mandatory cross curricular skills of literacy, numeracy and digital competence are the collective responsibility of all practitioners. They are supported by non-statutory frameworks for schools and practitioners to develop, extend and apply these skills across all aspects of the curriculum. The frameworks build on earlier changes to curriculum as outlined above and are intended to support learning in and across all Areas of Learning and Experience.

The Literacy Framework outlines expected progress in translanguaging, reading, writing, speaking and listening. *The Numeracy Framework* supports progression in number, geometry, statistics and mathematical proficiency. *The Digital Competence framework* supports all learners to safely utilise an increasingly digital world through the lens of citizenship, interacting and collaborating, producing, and data and computational thinking. Provision is intended to support learners to become conscientious digital citizens who contribute positively to the digital world, being able to critically evaluate their place within it.

Guidance for cross curricular skills exemplifies the expectations in the context of each Area and supports practitioners to develop authentic experiences for learners within and across disciplines. There is an expectation that all learning supports the skills integral to the four purposes: creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem-solving, personal effectiveness and planning and organising. It is expected that learners will be provided with a range of opportunities and contexts to develop these skills. Collectively, they allow learners to make connections between the knowledge, skills and experiences provided within their curriculum.

Practitioners are supported in their curriculum design decisions by mandatory cross cutting themes: Relationships and Sexuality Education, Human Rights, Diversity, Careers and Work-Related Experiences (CWRE) and Local, National and International contexts.

The Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Code provides for the mandatory learning within this area, including an expectation for developmentally appropriate learning across the three strands of Relationships and identity, Sexual health and wellbeing and Empowerment, safety and respect. Practitioners are supported in this area with indicators of mandatory content alongside a programme of professional learning.

CfW guidance states that 'supporting learners to know their rights and respect those of others through human rights education enables a curriculum driven by the four purposes' (Welsh Government, 2021a). All school curricular should be designed to reflect the theme of human rights, guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

In addition, it is expected that all learning should reflect these key themes, ensuring that diversity and diverse identities are reflected in a school curriculum. It is a mandatory requirement for schools to plan, design and implement (CWRE) within authentic contexts to support learners to understand the relationship between their learning and the world of work.

It is expected that all learning should provide ongoing perspectives from local, national and international contexts for learners to realise the four purposes.

The purpose led curriculum framework encourages teachers to question 'why' they teach what they do, using professional learning to determine 'how' and 'what' should be taught to enable learners to make progress. This allows practitioners to utilise their expertise in making purposeful links across and between subject disciplines, enabling learners to build their knowledge, skills and experiences to realise the four purposes. Professional responsibility determines not only what learners need to do to make progress, but to also design assessments (prior to external qualifications) that identify the depth of understanding developed so far and inform plans for the next steps in learning.

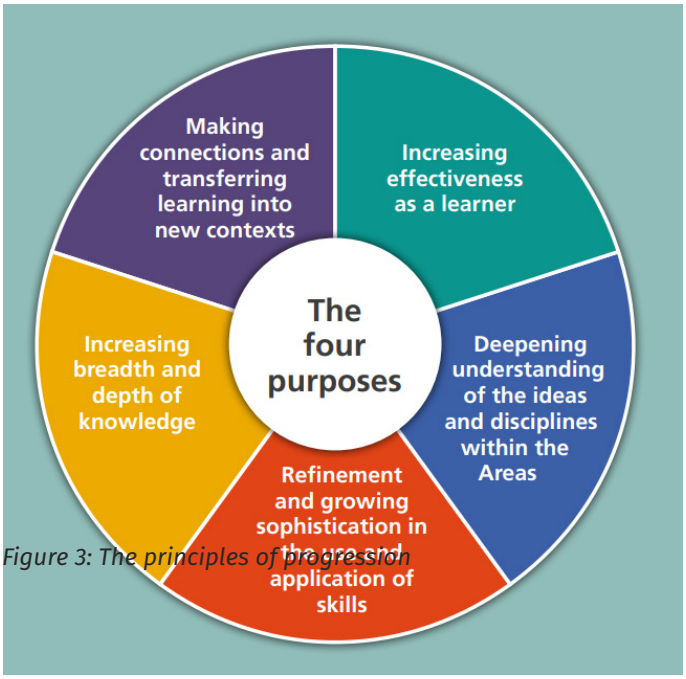

Figure 3: The principles of progression

Statutory guidance on progression and assessment supports practitioners to design assessment arrangements that support development of their learners. The mandatory Progression Code (Welsh Government, 2021b) sets out the mandatory expectations for learners to progress along the 3-16 continuum. The overarching principles of progression (Figure 3) set out the expectations for learners across the whole curriculum as well as exemplifying learning within and across disciplines in each Area of Learning and Experience:

> *'Assessment plays a fundamental role in enabling each individual learner to make progress at an appropriate pace, ensuring they are supported and challenged accordingly'*
> (Welsh Government, 2021b).

Curriculum for Wales is rooted in an understanding of child development alongside practitioner agency to plan purposeful developmentally appropriate learning for the learners in their care. This provides an opportunity to reset the understanding of assessment for learning, supporting learners to develop an improving understanding of their strengths and areas for development, restoring the utility of metacognitive strategies in our classrooms for learner progression. Practitioners' planning must be the key to establishing a purpose led curriculum, to give learners continual opportunity for improvement with a range of supporting materials at regional and national level helping to guide decision making at each level within the system (Welsh Government, 2022).

The national framework is developed with the principle of subsidiarity, with the decision making around curriculum design being taken closest to the process of learning and teaching. The challenge for practitioners in Wales is to ensure that they engage with this new way of working; to challenge preconditioned ways of planning backwards from predetermined assessments and specifications in the previous outcome driven curriculum, to restoring the joy of learning and successfully building deep understandings of challenging, inspiring and most importantly, purposeful learning.

5. Implementation and Next Steps

September 2023 saw all primary schools in Wales and around 50% of secondary schools adopt the Curriculum for Wales framework for learners aged 3-11, with ongoing rollout for learners up to age 16 by 2027. In response to the demands placed on the education sector by the Covid 19 pandemic, Welsh Government provided an opportunity for secondary schools in Wales to delay curriculum implementation until September 2023. Other recent announcements that have a bearing on curriculum realisation include an extension to implementation of the Additional Learning Needs Act (Welsh Government, 2023b) and the commitment to tackle the impact of poverty on attainment through achieving high standards and aspirations for all learners (Welsh Government, 2023a).

The Welsh Government is committed to expanding the NPEP programme so that every school in Wales can become involved in professional enquiry. This is intended to support the ongoing realisation of Curriculum for Wales and more generally to support the development of teacher pedagogy as a key aspect of professional learning and school improvement. This will be an evolutionary process designed to embed research and enquiry at the heart of educational practice in Wales.

This includes the commitment to research informed practice. The *Camau i'r Dyfodol* project continues to support co-construction of a national understanding of progression and assessment. (Welsh Government, 2022c) A joint project between the University of Wales Trinity St David and University of Glasgow, this project aims to provide a research base for decisions being taken within schools across Wales. It is supported by the permanent creation of a National Network for implementation that seeks to provide for an open platform to discuss the successes and challenges of curriculum reform. Regular national conversations designed and facilitated by practitioners, support the ongoing intelligence gathering from the sector to shape future policy commitments and future iterations of the curriculum framework. As implementation of Curriculum for Wales develops pace, early indications demonstrate widespread commitment across the sector. As part of the process of curriculum realisation, intelligence is being constantly shared around the education system on what is working well and what challenges schools are facing. The Welsh Government is committed to providing an annual report on the progress of curriculum reform.

6. Conclusion

The introduction of Curriculum for Wales represents a significant turning point for education in Wales. For the first time in its history, Wales will have its own curriculum. This has been developed through a co-construction process involving all parts of the system, led by teachers. What has ensued is a highly innovative approach to curriculum design, pedagogy and assessment. A purpose-led approach within a national framework enables schools to design curriculum for their own context and to support it through professional enquiry, with their own signature pedagogy. As implementation commences, the process of curriculum realisation will continue to rely on the sharing of effective practice and the support of all parts of the education system.

APPENDIX 1: THE FOUR PURPOSES

The four purposes should be the starting point and aspiration for schools' curriculum design. Ultimately, the aim of a school's curriculum is to support its l*earners to become:*

- ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives
- enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work
- ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world
- healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society

All our children and young people will be supported to develop as:

Ambitious, capable learners who:

- set themselves high standards and seek and enjoy challenge
- are building up a body of knowledge and have the skills to connect and apply that knowledge in different contexts
- are questioning and enjoy solving problems
- can communicate effectively in different forms and

settings, using both Welsh and English
- can explain the ideas and concepts they are learning about
- can use number effectively in different contexts
- understand how to interpret data and apply mathematical concepts
- use digital technologies creatively to communicate, find and analyse information
- undertake research and evaluate critically what they find

and **are ready to learn throughout their lives**

Enterprising, creative contributors who:
- connect and apply their knowledge and skills to create ideas and products
- think creatively to reframe and solve problems
- identify and grasp opportunities
- take measured risks
- lead and play different roles in teams effectively and responsibly
- express ideas and emotions through different media
- give of their energy and skills so that other people will benefit

and **are ready to play a full part in life and work**

Ethical, informed citizens who:
- find, evaluate and use evidence in forming views
- engage with contemporary issues based upon their knowledge and values
- understand and exercise their human and democratic responsibilities and rights
- understand and consider the impact of their actions when making choices and acting
- are knowledgeable about their culture, community, society and the world, now and in the past
- respect the needs and rights of others, as a member of a diverse society
- show their commitment to the sustainability of the planet

and **are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world**

Healthy, confident individuals who:
- have secure values and are establishing their spiritual and ethical beliefs
- are building their mental and emotional well-being by developing confidence, resilience and empathy
- apply knowledge about the impact of diet and exercise on physical and mental health in their daily lives
- know how to find the information and support to keep safe and well
- take part in physical activity
- take measured decisions about lifestyle and manage risk
- have the confidence to participate in performance
- form positive relationships based upon trust and mutual respect
- face and overcome challenge
- have the skills and knowledge to manage everyday life as independently as they can

and **are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society**.

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Albania: fact box

This article focuses on:
☒ Primary education
☒ Secondary education

In primary and lower secondary education 93% of the **teaching time** is devoted to the core curriculum and 7% to the elective curriculum. In upper secondary education (grade 10 – 11) 93% of the teaching time is devoted to the core curriculum and 7% to the elective curriculum. In upper secondary education (grade 12) 57% of the teaching time is devoted to the core curriculum and 43% to the elective curriculum.

In primary education there are 22 to 25 hours per week and 35 weeks per year. In lower secondary education there are 28 to 32 hours per week and 35 weeks per year. In upper secondary education there are 30 to 32 hours per week and 36 weeks per year (grade 10) or 34 weeks per year (grade 12).

As for **central examinations**, there is an assessment of primary education students' achievements (one test for language, maths and science) in grade 5. In grade 9 there are national basic education examinations (three tests: language, maths and foreign language). In grade 12 there is the state matura (four tests: language and literature, maths, foreign language, optional subject from the sciences and social sciences).

	Core curriculum	Full curriculum
Subjects/topics/key competences	The core curriculum contains the following key competences: • Communication and expression competence • Thinking competence • Competence of learning to learn • Competence for life, entrepreneurship and the environment • Personal competence • Civic competence • Digital competence Learning fields and subjects are as follows: • Languages and communication: Albanian language, foreign language • Mathematics: maths • Natural Sciences: physics, biology, chemistry • Society and environment: history, geography, civic competences, philosophy, sociology, psychology • Arts: music, theatre, visual art, dance • Physical education, sports and health • Technology and ICT	The full curriculum contains the same key competences and learning fields as the core curriculum. In addition, we have: • Elective curricula, that must be developed in all schools. The students can choose topics based on their interests. • School-based curricula, in which the students can also develop community service or practical modules. These modules are designed and developed by the schools themselves based on the students' interests.
Amount of detail	The core curriculum has a curriculum framework, national teaching plan and syllabi for all subjects, for all classes in pre-university education. These syllabi include: • Knowledge, skills and attitudes • A detailed learning path/intermediate learning goal; • Didactic guidelines and suggestions that are supporting materials for teachers and students.	The full curriculum has the same amount of detail as the core curriculum.
Who is involved in its development	Politics, administration, school representatives, representation of teachers, representation of academics, inspectorate and parents are involved.	The school-based curriculum is drafted by schools and teachers. The partners involved in the core curriculum, are the same as those involved in the full curriculum.

Albania: biographies

Dorina Rapti received a master's degree in teaching in social sciences (psychology – pedagogy department) from the University of Tirana in 2003 and a PhD in school leadership from the University of Tirana in 2013. During 1995 - 2007, she has worked as a mathematics teacher/head teacher at the pre-university education system and since 2010 as lecturer at the Department of Psychology and Pedagogy in the Faculty of Social Science at the University of Tirana. During 2010 - 2013 she has worked at the Ministry of Education and Science as head of the Vocational Education and Training department and head of the teacher training and qualification commission. Since January 2014, she has been the Head of the teacher qualification and carrier department in the ex-Institute for Educational Development, today Quality Assurance Agency of the Pre-university Education, part of the Albanian Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth. Her research covers the themes of educational policy, school leadership organization, continuous professional development, curriculum and external and internal quality assurance tools. She has co-ordinated research projects funded by World Bank, European Delegation IPA and several UN agencies.

Dorina Rapti

Gerti Janaqi received a master's degree in social sciences from the University of East London in 2006 and a PhD in psychology from the University of Tirana, department of psychology in 2013. Since 2002 he has worked as a lecturer at the department of Psychology and pedagogy in the Faculty of Social Science at the University of Tirana. From November 2013 he is the General Director of the Quality Assurance Agency of Pre-university Education. His research covers the themes of educational policy, educational governance, professionalism and organizational behavior, curriculum designation, external and internal quality assurance tools etc. He has coordinated commissioned research projects funded by secondary and primary education sector organizations, and several UN agencies.

Gerti Janaqi

Albania's core curriculum in primary and secondary education

Abstract

The implementation of curricular reform with competences in Albania began in 2014, and was motivated by the needs, current developments and goals of the education system. These can be found in the various documents of European education policies and beyond, and in the tradition of our education system. This reform was of great importance due to the need to increase the quality of education and training, to guarantee equal opportunities for quality education and training for all, to open up the education system to the world, improve student results and academic achievements, the best way of learning and to include students with different learning abilities, etc. The curriculum based on competences required a big change in terms of pedagogical practices and student assessment in Albania. The curriculum is organized as a core curriculum and an elective curriculum, creating opportunities for more flexibility in development. This curriculum also requires teachers to evaluate whether the student has demonstrated subject competences and key competences and to adapt learning strategies to improve student performance. To facilitate the implementation of the new curriculum, we launched a pilot phase. The Quality Assurance Agency of Pre-University Education (QAAPUE) has continuously focused on teacher training in the implementation of the curriculum with competences in order to ensure optimal quality.

1. Introduction

Reform of the pre-university education curriculum was undertaken by the Ministry of Education and Sports in 2014, to comply with and implement the requirements of law no. 69/2012 'On the pre-university education system in the Republic of Albania', as amended, and the Recommendations of the European Union and of the Council of Europe on the development of lifelong learning competences (2006/962/EC-2018, updated document).

The recommendations of the European Union and the Council of Europe on the development of lifelong learning competences (2006/962/EC - 2018, updated document), emphasize the need to prepare individuals to respond successfully to the challenges of society's development and the demands of the global market. Today, the way people access information and services is constantly changing. For this reason, all ages need to be equipped with new competences that help them master today's digital world. Skills such as problem solving, critical and creative thinking, the ability to collaborate, self-regulation and entrepreneurship are more important than ever in our rapidly changing society. The key competences as defined in the European Reference Framework aim to lay the foundations for achieving more equal and democratic societies. They respond to the need for inclusive and sustainable growth, social cohesion and the further development of democratic culture. Referring to this document, competences are defined as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes. They should cover all levels of education. The Albanian framework sets out recommendations regarding teaching and learning methodologies, student assessment and teacher support for their implementation.

Based on these recommendations, the primary and secondary education curriculum in Albania develops the key competences for lifelong learning, which enable individuals to manage changes and new situations, help them adapt to today's digital world, not only through the acquisition of knowledge and technical skills, but also through a deep understanding of the opportunities, challenges and ethical, legal and social issues that arise or accompany new economic, social and technological developments. Key competences are expressed through the use of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. They are developed at all levels of pre-university education (preparatory class, primary education, lower secondary education and upper secondary education).

The Albanian Curriculum Framework for primary and secondary education is the basic document that guides actors and stakeholders on the main aspects of the curriculum, including teaching and learning methodologies and student assessment, as a basis for ensuring quality education for all.

Currently, this curriculum fully complies with the European Council Resolution for the strategic framework 2021-OJ C 66, 26.2.2021, p. 1–21, specifically with Annex III Priority areas for European cooperation in education and training during the first cycle: 2021-2025, priority area 1 - Quality, equality, inclusion and success in education and training - concrete issues and actions: i) Promoting the mastery of key competences, including basic skills, which are prerequisites for thriving in life, finding or creating fulfilling jobs and becoming engaged citizens.

In order to design and develop the curriculum according to the competence-based approach, the experiences of representative models from EU countries, as well as countries in the South-Eastern and Central European region and non-European countries, have been analysed and used, based on the criteria established for selection, such as: competence-based approach, structure of the education system, reformed curriculum, curriculum organization, PISA results, immigration/mobility, etc. As part of this process, comparative analyses have been carried out for specific elements of the curriculum, which include learning areas, the concept of competences and their number, the methodology of developing competences, their assessment, etc. Comparisons were made with countries such as Finland, France, England, Scotland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Croatia, Switzerland, Australia, New Zealand and Quebec, etc.

Moreover, the Quality Assurance Agency of Pre-university Education (QAAPUE) is a member of the European network of public educational institutions under the Ministries of Education, CIDREE (http://www.cidree.org/about/), which work and exchange experiences in the field of curriculum development. This is achieved through meetings, conferences, online communication and publications, which have been used as opportunities to obtain information, to discuss and share dilemmas and experiences on various issues, both during the curriculum development phase and during implementation.

2. Authorities that establish the curricula in preschool, primary and secondary education

The design, development and implementation of the curriculum is ensured through the cooperation and coordination of all the responsible actors engaged in this process. The competent authority for the curriculum is the Quality Assurance Agency of Pre-University Education (QAAPUE), which coordinates the development of the national curriculum at all educational levels (figure 1). QAAPUE sets up working groups whose composition depends on the object of the work (e.g., drafting the Curriculum Framework, drafting subject programmes, drafting student evaluation documents, drafting orientation programmes for national exams, etc.). This takes place with the participation of lecturers, representatives of the Faculties of Education according to the relevant study tracks, education specialists/experts at the Ministry of Education and Sport (MoES), the Regional Directorate of Pre-University Education, school principals and teachers of relevant subjects and levels of education. Working groups are coordinated by QAAPUE specialists and leaders. The process of developing the competence-based curriculum was based on broad participation, engagement and discussion. This objective involved meetings, discussion tables and presentations with partners and various interest groups, such as the National Council of Pre-University Education, universities and faculties of education, parents - representatives of school boards and parents' councils, etc.

QAAPUE also develops all other materials to assist teachers, such as guidance on curriculum implementation, explanatory materials, planning formats, and other supporting documents for teachers.

Decisions on the curriculum are made at the central level, at the local level and at the school level as follows:

- **At the central level**, MoES approves the documents related to the core curriculum: Curricular framework, learning field of the curriculum, teaching plan, syllabus of subjects/learning field, the ratio between core and elective curriculum hours and the list of core and elective subjects. The elective curriculum is a list of subjects offered by the school and the student is obliged to choose one or several subjects depending on the number of hours for each class. MoES approves this after examining the materials prepared by QAAPUE and after discussing them in commissions (councils) composed of external experts, well-known figures in the relevant fields of science, with vast experience in education.
- **At the local level,** local educational units facilitate schools' efforts to meet student demands for the elective curriculum by determining the number of new grades to be opened in each school, the elective curriculum on a school-by-school basis, and teaching staff needs. Local educational units also approve the school-based curriculum. In the school-based curriculum, unlike the elective curriculum, the student can choose a module or subject according to his/her interest and need, but is not obliged to.
- **At the school level,** the school meets the needs and interests of students for elective subjects, designs curriculum modules for the school-based curriculum in which it responds to the interests of students, and carries out curriculum planning (annual planning, period planning, daily planning, etc.) for the core and elective curriculum.

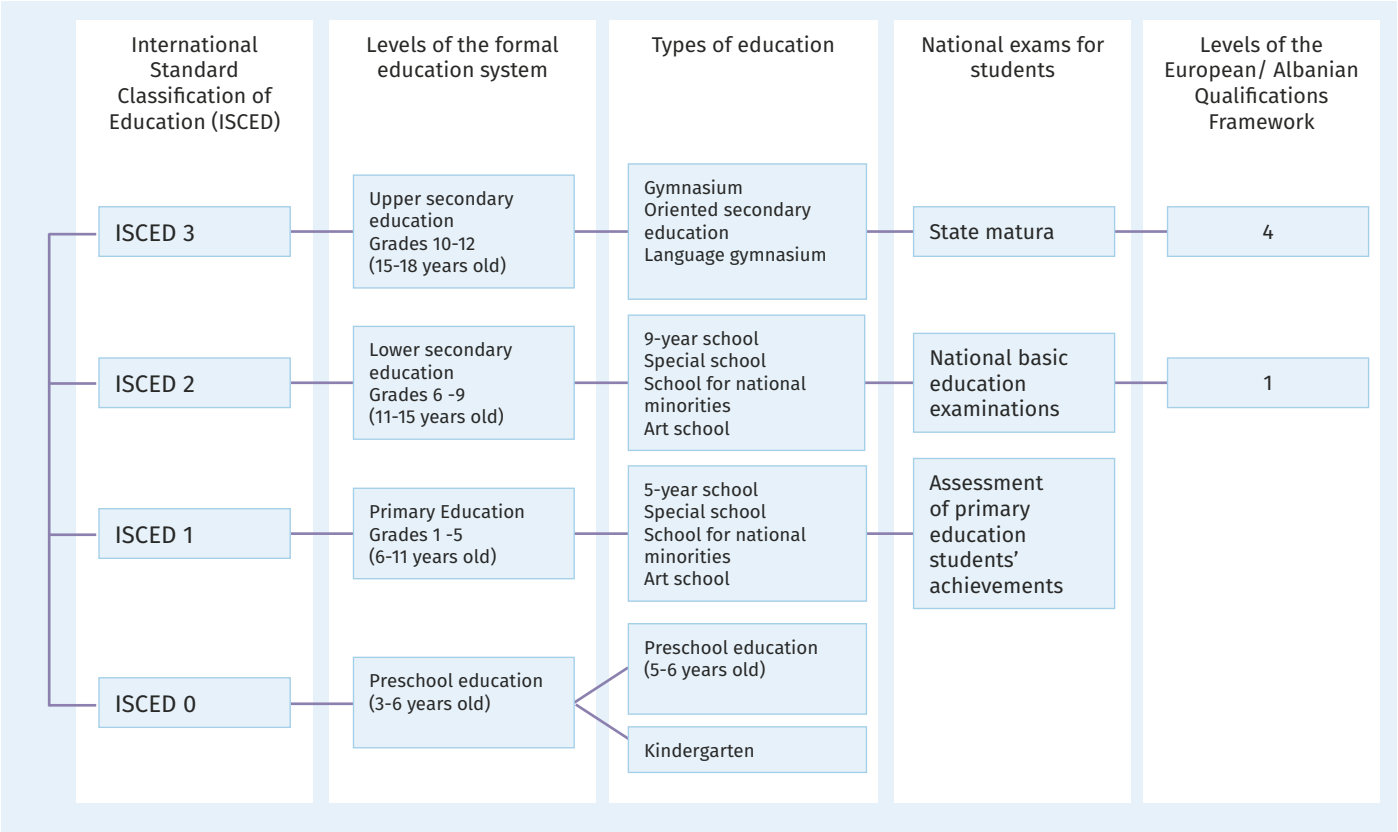

Figure 1: The structure of the education system in the Republic of Albania

3. Organization of the curricula in primary and secondary education

The competence-based curriculum is implemented in accordance with the basic education (primary and lower secondary education) and upper secondary education curricula, approved by the ministry responsible for education. It also complies with the syllabi they consist of, drawn up by QAAPUE and approved by MoES. The lesson plans also define the core curriculum that must be implemented by all schools, as well as the elective curriculum or the school-based curriculum developed by the schools themselves. In the competence-based curriculum, the ratio between the core curriculum and the elective curriculum is balanced. Thus, in **primary education,** the core curriculum accounts for about 93% of the curriculum (which must be implemented by all schools) and is common to all students, while the elective curriculum accounts for approximately 7% and is developed by the school itself. New syllabi have been designed, according to the teaching approach that develops competences, for all subjects of the core curriculum in primary education (also for the elective curriculum).

In **lower and upper secondary education**, the curriculum is organized as a core curriculum, elective curriculum and school-based curriculum.

The *Core curriculum* in the three years of upper secondary education is compulsory and the same for all students. During the first two years of upper secondary school, grades 10 and 11, the core curriculum accounts for 93%. The focus on the core curriculum during the first two years gives students time to choose a specialization and consolidate it. In the 12th grade the core curriculum includes the subjects of the Albanian Language, Literature, Foreign Language, Mathematics, Physical Education, Sports and Health and Economy as mandatory national exams and educational priorities (57%).

The *Elective curriculum* focuses on the choice of subjects and modules, based on the students' needs, interests and choice for further education and employment. The elective curriculum is offered in all three grades, but it increases in the 12th grade by a significant percentage (about 43%). In the elective curriculum, the natural sciences subjects (Physics, Chemistry, Biology), as well as the subjects of History, Geography, of the field 'Society and environment', etc. are each offered for four hours per week. The school has the autonomy to offer these subjects to students who choose them in the 12th grade, in the best interests of their career.

In *the School-based curriculum* Gymnasiums can conduct community service activities in the form of voluntary support as well as practical modules, according to the needs and interests of students to develop the skills needed for the labour market or for further studies. The school-based curriculum is not compulsory for students (except for community service), but if they want to develop their skills, they can choose curriculum modules suggested by QAAPUE

or modules designed by the school and approved by the relevant local educational unit. Curricular modules can be one hour or two hours per week.

Curricular modules or other activities that take place within the school-based curriculum are not graded. They are simply marked as 'completed'.

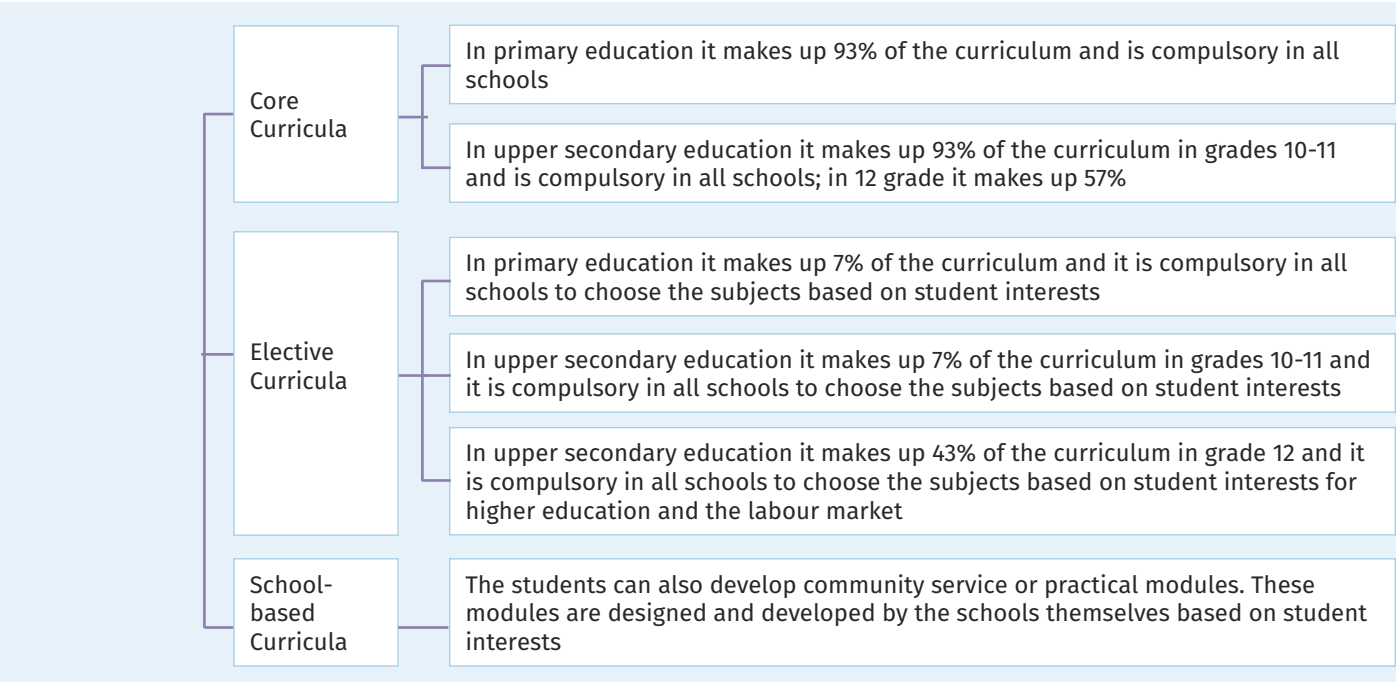

Figure 2: Curricula in primary and secondary education

4. The core curriculum in primary and secondary education

The **core curriculum** (or compulsory curriculum for all) in primary and secondary education consists of:

- Key competences of lifelong learning
- Learning fields, organised into:
  - Subjects for each learning field
  - Subject and field competences
  - Learning outcomes per subject and competence

The **curriculum package of the core curriculum** of primary and secondary education developed to support the implementation of the curriculum reform, is composed of:

- Curricular framework;
- Competence-based student assessment framework;
- Core curricula for each level of education: preschool education, primary education, lower secondary education, upper secondary education;
- Achievement levels for competences in each level of pre-university education;
- Syllabi for each subject, class, educational level;
- MoES instructions for implementing the curriculum;
- QAAPUE teacher's guidance and supporting materials for implementing the curriculum.

The **key competences** part of the core curriculum at all levels of primary and secondary education are:

- Communicative and expression competence;
- Thinking competence;
- Learning to learn competence;
- Life, entrepreneurship and environment competences;
- Personal competence;
- Civic competence;
- Digital competence.

Transversal competences or cross-curricular competences are certainly afforded an important place in the core curriculum.

In Albania, three core curriculum documents have been drafted for each educational level: primary education, lower secondary education and upper secondary education. In these documents, transversal competences are itemized as detailed indicators. Moreover, the cross-curricular competences as well as the subject competences are explained in the programmes of each of the subjects for each class. Competences are integrated in the curriculum in a meaningful and practical way. This is achieved by introducing them in existing subjects or by creating new subjects or modules that specifically focus on developing these competences.

Transversal competences refer to knowledge, skills and attitudes that cut across different subject areas and are applicable in a variety of contexts. They include skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication, teamwork, digital literacy and social and civic responsibility.

Albania

In general, the inclusion of transversal competences in the core curriculum is a necessary step in preparing students for the challenges of the 21st century. By providing students with the skills, as they need to be successful in a variety of contexts, we can help them become lifelong learners equipped to tackle the complex problems of our rapidly changing world.

The **learning fields of the core curriculum** for all levels of primary and secondary education are:

- The learning field Languages and communication with the subjects: Albanian language-literature and Foreign languages)
- The learning field Mathematics with the subject Mathematics
- The learning field Natural Sciences with the subjects: Biology, Chemistry, Physics
- The learning field Society and environment with the subjects: History, Geography and Social Sciences
- The learning field Arts with the subjects: Visual Art, Music, Theatre, Dance
- The learning field Physical education, sports and health with the subject Physical Education, Sports and Health
- The learning field Technology and ICT with the subjects ICT and Technology.

At all educational levels, the competence-based curriculum is broken down into: the core curriculum and elective curriculum/school-based curriculum.

- The core curriculum consists of areas/subjects that society (the state) establishes for everyone who completes preschool, primary and secondary education. The core curriculum is the same for all students in terms of type, number and learning outcomes.
- The elective curriculum is offered by the school and chosen by students according to their interests in the curriculum and their career. The choice of subjects starts in the first grade and increases throughout subsequent school years.

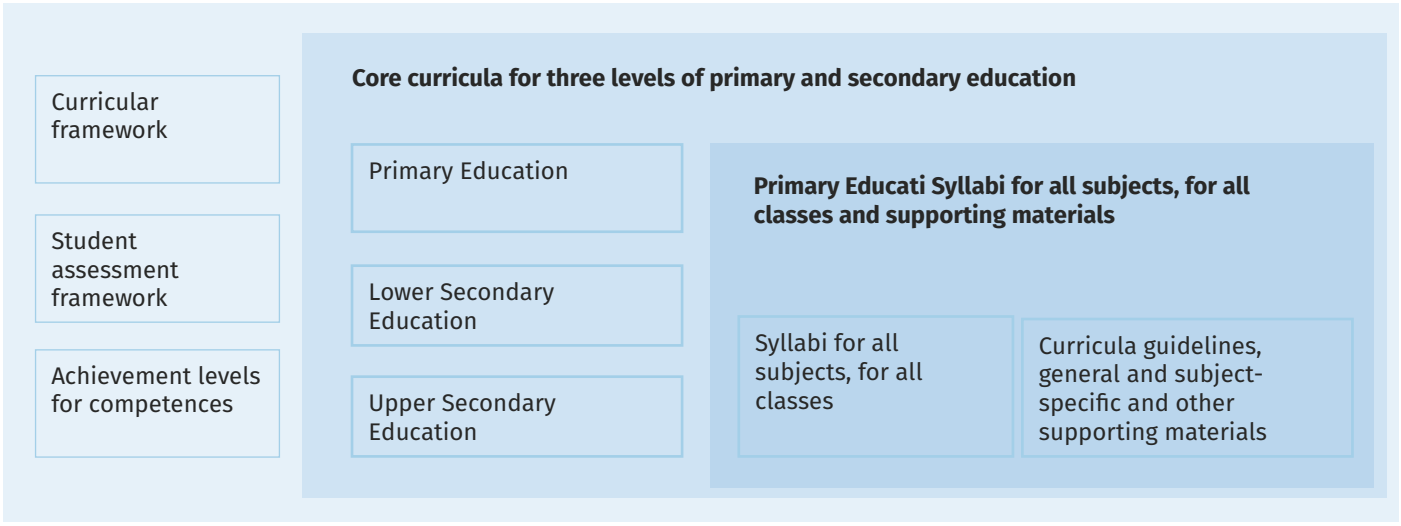

Figure 3: The framework of primary and secondary education documents

Albania

No.		GRADES									
	FIELDS/SUBJECTS	**I**	**II**	**III**	**IV**	**V**	**VI**	**VII**	**VIII**	**IX**	**Total hours**
1	**LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION**	**10**	**10**	**9**	**8**	**8**	**10**	**10**	**10**	**10**	**85**
1.1	Albanian language	8	8	6	5	5	5	5	5	5	**52**
1.2	English language	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	**25**
1.3	Second foreign language						2	2	2	2	**8**
2	**MATHEMATICS**	**4**	**4**	**4**	**4**	**4**	**4**	**4**	**4**	**4**	**36**
3	**NATURAL SCIENCES**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**4**	**6**	**6**	**25**
3.1	Science	1	1	1	2	2					**7**
3.2	Physics						1	2	2	2	**7**
3.3	Chemistry								2	2	**4**
3.4	Biology						1	2	2	2	**7**
4	**SOCIETY AND THE ENVIRONMENT**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**2**	**2**	**3**	**5**	**5**	**5**	**25**
4.1	Education for society	1	1								**2**
4.2	Citizenship			1	1	1	1	1	1	1	**7**
4.3	History				1	1	1	2	2	2	**9**
4.4	Geography						1	2	2	2	**7**
5	**ART**	**2**	**2.5**	**3**	**2**	**2.5**	**3**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**21**
5.1	Music	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	**9**
5.2	Visual art	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	**9**
5.3	Dance		0.5	1							**1.5**
5.4	Theatre					0.5	1				**1.5**
6	**PHYSICAL EDUCATION, SPORTS AND HEALTH**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**27**
7	**TECHNOLOGY AND ICT**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**9**
7.1	ICT				1	1	1	1	1	1	**6**
7.2	Practical technological skills				1	1	1				**3**
8	**SCHOOL-BASED CURRICULUM (grades 1-3 develop the ICT subject)**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**9**
	Total (hours per week) 35 weeks	**22.0**	**22.5**	**22.0**	**24**	**24.5**	**28**	**30**	**32**	**32**	**237**

Table 1: Core curriculum of preschool education + primary education + lower secondary education

Albania

No.	Learning field/Subjects	Grade 10 *(hours/week)* *36 weeks*	Grade 11 *(hours/week)* *36 weeks*	Grade 12 *(hours/week)* *34 weeks*
I.	**LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION**	**7**	**7**	**7**
I.1	Albanian language	2	2	2
I.2	Literature	2	2	2
I.3	First foreign language	3	3	3
II.	**MATHEMATICS**	**4**	**4**	**4(B) or 6(A+B)[1]**
III.	**NATURAL SCIENCES**	**6**	**6**	
III.1	Physics	2	2	
III.2	Chemistry	2	2	
III.3	Biology	2	2	
IV.	**SOCIETY AND THE ENVIRONMENT**	**6**	**6**	**3**
IV.1	Social sciences (Citizenship[2], Philosophy[3])	2	2	
IV.2	History	2	2	
IV.3	Geography	2	2	
IV.4	Economy			3
V.	**TECHNOLOGY AND ICT**	**2**	**1**	
V.1	ICT	2	1	
VI.	**PHYSICAL EDUCATION, SPORTS AND HEALTH**	**3**	**3**	**3**
CORE CURRICULUM (TOTAL)		**28**	**27**	**17-19**
ELECTIVE CURRICULUM		**2**	**3**	**13-11**
SCHOOL-BASED CURRICULUM[4]		**0-2**	**0-2**	**0-2**
TOTAL (No. of total weekly hours)[5]		**30-32**	**30-32**	**30-32**

In Albania the number of teaching hours per week defined in legislation is: primary education: 22-25 hours per week, low secondary education: 28-32 hours per week, upper secondary education: 30-32 hours per week. In the meantime, the weeks of school per year defined in legislation are: 35 weeks for compulsory education, 36 weeks for upper secondary education grades 10-11 and 34 weeks for upper secondary education grade 12.

Table 2: Core curriculum of upper secondary education (gymnasium) compulsory curriculum for all

1 In the 12th grade, in Mathematics, within the core curriculum students can choose programmes according to levels: A (the advanced level) and B (the basic level).
2 Citizenship is taught in the 10th grade.
3 Philosophy is taught in the 11th grade.
4 Community service is also conducted within the scope of the school-based curriculum. Community service is required to be completed in 18 hours, in 10th grade and/or 11th grade. Other school-based curriculum hours are not compulsory for students; they enable the school to implement the curriculum in relation to cross-curricular projects/other school activities.
5 The teaching week consists of 30-32 teaching hours. 30 hours per week are devoted to the core curriculum and the elective curriculum, while the other 2 hours enable the school to implement the curriculum on a school basis in connection with cross-curricular projects/other school activities. The student is obliged to develop 30 hours per week for each school year as well as 18 hours of community service.

5. National examinations in primary and secondary education

Assessment of students' achievements (VANAF). After 5th grade a national class-based study is carried out that aims to provide information on the level of knowledge and skills that students acquire at school on the following subjects: the Albanian language, Mathematics, and Natural Sciences. This assessment is conducted among 5th grade students, at the end of primary education. VANAF serves as an assessment instrument only, and does impact students moving on to the next level.

National Basic Education Examination (PKAB). A national exam that takes place at the end of lower secondary education and provides students who complete this cycle of education with a certificate. Students are 14-15 years old, except for students subject to grade retention. These exams measure their knowledge and competences in three fields: the Albanian language, Foreign language, and Mathematics. Students who pass the exam are awarded a school leaving certificate, which is required for admission to upper secondary education, as the next educational level.

State Matura Examination. This is a national exam taken at the end of upper secondary school after 12th grade, providing students who complete this cycle of education with a certificate, comprising an important factor for entering/pursuing university. These exams measure their knowledge and competences in four fields: the Albanian language and literature, Foreign language, and Mathematics, which are compulsory, and an elective subject from the natural sciences, social sciences.

Maintaining a balance between the breadth and depth of a curriculum is a challenge that teachers face. There are several approaches used to achieve this balance:

- *Prioritization of learning outcomes:* teachers can prioritize the most relevant and important learning outcomes for a particular subject or level of education. This helps ensure that the curriculum covers the most important topics in depth, while still covering a wide range of content.
- *Developing interdisciplinary connections:* integrating different subjects or topics and exploring their connections can help make the curriculum more meaningful and engaging for students. By doing so, teachers can also cover a wider range of content without compromising on its depth.
- *Adopting a spiral approach:* subjects in the core curriculum are characterised by a spiral approach and as such review key concepts and skills over time, building on previous learning. This allows for a deeper understanding of key topics while still covering a wide range of content.
- *Differentiated teaching:* differentiated teaching allows teachers to meet the needs of all students by tailoring lessons to their individual needs and interests. By doing so, teachers can ensure that students are engaged and motivated to learn, while also covering a wide range of content.
- *Use of technology:* technology is currently a priority and can be used to supplement traditional learning and provide students with access to a wider range of content. By incorporating technology in the curriculum, teachers can provide students with a deeper understanding of key topics while covering a wide range of content.

In conclusion, maintaining a balance between the breadth and depth of a curriculum requires thoughtful planning and implementation. By prioritizing learning outcomes, developing interdisciplinary connections, adopting a spiral approach, applying differentiated teaching and using technology, teachers can ensure that their curriculum covers a wide range of content while still providing students with an in-depth understanding of key concepts and skills.

6. Piloting the competence-based curriculum

The implementation of the competence-based curriculum has undergone an evolving, coherent, comprehensive and collaborative pilot process. This process served to increase awareness in public opinion, for the professional development and training of teachers, the complete preparation of programmes and texts for implementation across the system as a whole, as well as for possible reflections on programmes and texts after the pilot. The pilot was conducted in 26 schools in 13 districts of the country, including urban and rural areas. During the 2014-2015 school year, the pilot of the curricular package of documents drafted by QAAPUE began according to the scheme below:

- In the 2014-2015 school year, preparatory grade, grade I and grade VI were involved in the pilot.
- In the 2015-2016 school year, grades II, VII were involved in the pilot. The curriculum was implemented in all grades I and VI.
- In the school year 2016-2017, grades III, VIII were involved in the pilot. The curriculum was implemented in all grades II and VII and X.
- In the 2017-2018 school year, grades IV, IX were involved in the pilot. The curriculum was implemented in all grades III and VIII and XI.
- In the 2018-2019 school year, grade V was involved in the pilot. The curriculum was implemented in all grades IV, IX and XII.
- In the 2019-2020 school year, the curriculum was implemented in all grades I-XII.

This process was accompanied by continuous training and support for teachers and school leaders. QAAPUE conducted training courses year after year to prepare teachers for the implementation of the curriculum with competences, in accordance with the framework.

During these years, the Committee for Accreditation accredited a total of 556 training modules, delivered by 80 training agencies in teaching and learning, managing the educational institution, the professional development of

school teachers and principals, planning the competence-based curriculum, the use of ICT in the teaching process, including blended learning, inclusive education, as well as other cross-curricular issues. Training has also been conducted in relation to the basic skills assessed in international tests for the school subjects: native language, mathematics and natural sciences.

An important focal point for all teachers has been teacher training in implementing student-centred methods to develop higher-level thinking, critical and creative thinking, and recognizing the learning styles to optimally support the student learning progress. Some of these methods can be summarized as follows: group work, role play, expert groups, applying skills in practice, research work, class discussions, problem-solving activities, audio-visual presentations, tasks designed according to learning styles, modelling and demonstration, inviting friends to chat, working in an out-of-school setting and project-based learning, etc.

During the training sessions, teachers are encouraged to motivate students to develop higher-level thinking and critical thinking wherever application, analysis, evaluation and creation is involved. Teachers have also been instructed to focus on the development of students' affective and psychomotor skills. The teaching methods presented in the training courses are not exhaustive. Teachers can research and create other methods that motivate and promote student learning, and suit their needs and interest.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the Quality Assurance Agency of Pre-University Education (QAAPUE) plays a crucial role in establishing and coordinating the national curriculum in Albania. The curriculum is developed through the cooperation and coordination of various stakeholders, including lecturers, representatives of faculties of education, educational specialists/experts, school principals, and teachers. The Ministry of Education and Sport (MoES) approves the core curriculum at the central level, while local educational units facilitate the schools' efforts to meet student demands for the elective curriculum. At the school level, schools develop curriculum modules for the school-based curriculum to respond to student interests.

The implementation of the curriculum with competences is a priority in Albania's current educational strategy. Plans to ensure the quality of the implementation and address the challenges for its improvement include the provision of both short and long-term support for teachers and school leaders, the provision of packages and learning tools for students, the preparation of supporting materials and the promotion of successful experiences of schools in relation to teaching methodologies. Overall, the successful implementation of the curriculum is crucial for the quality of preschool, primary and secondary education in Albania and the development of lifelong learning competences among students.

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Bosnia and Herzegovina: fact box

This article focuses on:
☒ Primary education
☒ Secondary education

In Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H) the **teaching time** in primary education is 20-35 hours per week. In secondary education this is 35 hours per week. Both levels have 35 weeks of school per year. The ratio between the core and the full curriculum is approximately 70%.

B&H does not have **central examination.**

	Core curriculum	Full curriculum
Subjects/topics/key competences	The following ten key competences are part of the core curriculum in B&H: 1. Communication in the mother tongue 2. Communication in a foreign language 3. Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology 4. IT competence (informational, media, technological) 5. Learning to learn 6. Social and civic competence 7. Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship 8. Cultural awareness and expression 9. Creative-productive competence 10. Physical – health competence. All school subjects are grouped under one of the following eight educational areas: 1. Language and communication area 2. Mathematics area 3. Science area 4. Social and humanistic area 5. Area of technology and information technology 6. Art area 7. Physical training and health area 8. Cross-curricular and cross-subject area	B&H has 12 competent ministries who each have autonomy regarding education for a certain canton/ entity. Each ministry agreed with the general framework (ten key competences and eight educational areas) and to develop a more detailed subject based curriculum within that framework.
Amount of detail	A single methodology was applied to all education areas and subjects within the areas by defining fields, components, student learning outcomes, and the relevant indicators: A field is an organized, coherent set of knowledge, skills and attitudes within a certain field or school subject. Components are smaller units within strands that represent and additionally define certain knowledge and contents. Learning outcomes are statements about what a student should know, understand, and be capable of doing and demonstrating after completing a certain learning process, and are used to define components. Indicators define the degree of achieving the defined outcomes in accordance with the students age.	Elements of the subject-based curriculum are pretty detailed. Besides the information of the core-curriculum, it consists of: Description of the subject; Objectives of learning and teaching the subject; Key contents; recommendations and guidelines for teaching, learning and evaluation.
Who is involved in its development	All competent ministries of education in B&H and all pedagogical institutes. Also, teachers and advisers named by the ministries and institutes and university professors (as experts) are involved.	All pedagogical institutes and all teacher trainers within a competent ministry of education are involved in the development of the subject-based curriculum.

Bosnia and Herzegovina: biographies

Maja Stojkić

Maja Stojkić is a Master specialist of Diplomacy and diplomatic communication and has a teaching diploma for the Croatian language and literature and English language and literature.

She has more than twenty years of work experience in the field of education. She is experienced in organizing, HRM, project development, financial planning and reporting. She successfully completed a number of specialized courses on education and governance. She is the author and co-author of several professional works and co-author of two manuals for school directors.

Maja currently works as a Director of the Agency for Pre-primary, Primary and Secondary Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Marija Naletilić

Marija Naletilić has a PhD in Social Sciences and Humanities, scientific field of history, scientific branch of Bosnian, Croatian and world modern and contemporary history. She is head of the Common Core Curricula (CCC) Department of the Agency for Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina. She led the development of the CCC based on learning outcomes for preschool, primary and secondary education, the development of Guidelines for the implementation of the CCC in schools, as well as the development of Guidelines for inclusive education and Guidelines for implementing learning outcomes in inclusive education.

She has authored a number of scientific and professional papers on the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 19th and 20th centuries. As an active member of EUROCLIO HIP BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, she delivered several workshops on innovative approaches to history teaching.

She has collaborated with the Georg Eckert Institute in Germany and participated in international scientific seminars held in numerous countries. She has chaired the Committee for the Reform of History Teaching in Bosnia and Herzegovina and reviewed history textbooks for primary education and gymnasia. She has participated in drafting the Action Plan for the Development and Implementation of the Qualification Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in developing the Manual for Development of Methodologies for Quality Assurance of General Education Qualifications within the Qualifications Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina. She also participated in creating the Manual - Education that Makes Changes - Fundamentals for creating subject curricula.

A shift towards learning outcomes as the basis for the common core curriculum in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Abstract

After defining the key competences (completed in 2011), and in accordance with its mandate, in 2012, the Agency for pre-primary, primary and secondary education started developing the Common Core Curriculum (CCC) based on the learning outcomes for eight educational fields and for the school subjects within those fields.

Since in 2012, the Common Core Curricula in Bosnia and Herzegovina was only a set of agreed content for the individual subjects, the above-mentioned initiative by the Agency represented a huge step forward towards educational reform. The purpose of this initiative was to contribute, as effectively as possible, to systematic changes in education, and to develop more accessible, more adaptable, more efficient preschool, primary and secondary education in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The process of developing the Common Core Curricula based on learning outcomes lasted from 2012 to 2018. This newly developed CCC is a fundamental document that determines the direction of the development of education systems in Bosnia and Herzegovina, from preschool education till the end of high school education.

In order to improve the implementation and supervision of outcome feasibility, the Agency has also compiled several supporting documents.

All the documents are intended to support the competent ministries of education and pedagogical institutes to implement the reform in their jurisdiction.

1. Introduction

The international PISA 2018 and TIMSS 2019 studies indicated a low level of student achievement and functional literacy of students in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The recommendations of those studies influenced the specific measures taken to implement curricular reform and improve the quality of education. The test results confirmed a need for the urgent revision of the current curricula by shifting to the learning outcomes that the Agency had emphasized were a necessity during previous years, and equally, as a need for adopting new approaches of teaching and evaluation.

In order to acquire a better understanding of the existing educational systems in Bosnia and Herzegovina and a shift towards learning outcomes, it is first necessary to become familiar with the educational context of the country.

In 2003, a Common Core Curriculum (CCC) eight-year education system existed, but only as a set of the key content ministries of education had to incorporate in their programmes. The old-fashioned 'ex-cathedra' style of teaching, based on presenting different theoretical paradigms without concrete examples or links to real experience and practice, was very dominant.

Conducting the action plans, strategies, framework laws and all other documents at the state level was difficult because education in Bosnia and Herzegovina was, and still is, under the complete and undivided jurisdiction of the entity of the Republic of Srpska, ten cantons in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Brčko District. Each of the 12 listed 'entities' has its own ministry of education, educational laws and budget for education. They also determine educational and textbook policy, as well as all other rights and obligations that emerge from the mandate of the educational authority responsible for organizing and the functioning of education at their level of responsibility.

The framework laws in education and the establishment of the state agencies in Bosnia and Herzegovina marked the beginning of an education reform processes.

The task of the reform was to contribute to the acquisition of key competences, necessary for Bosnia and Herzegovina students' participation in the knowledge-based economy and future economic development of the country, through the improvement of educational quality and through its alignment with European educational standards.

The state Agency for pre-primary, primary and secondary education was established by the Law on the Agency for pre-primary, primary and secondary education in 2007. It is responsible for establishing knowledge standards, evaluating the results achieved and developing the common core of teaching curricula and programmes in pre-primary, primary and secondary education. Its responsibility also extends to other technical affairs in the field of knowledge standards and education quality assessment regulated by special laws and other regulations.

In 2011, the Agency conducted research and mapping based on the EU Reference framework of key competences for lifelong learning, which resulted in the determination of the

Bosnia and Herzegovina

key competences and life skills in primary and secondary education in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The identification of 10 key competences for Bosnia and Herzegovina, contrary to eight key competences that the European framework recognizes, was the result of a need to shift towards a modern and innovative approach to education. This shift demanded a changed approach to learning and teaching students in primary and general secondary education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as overcoming limitations of education based on lecturing, memorizing and reproducing content.

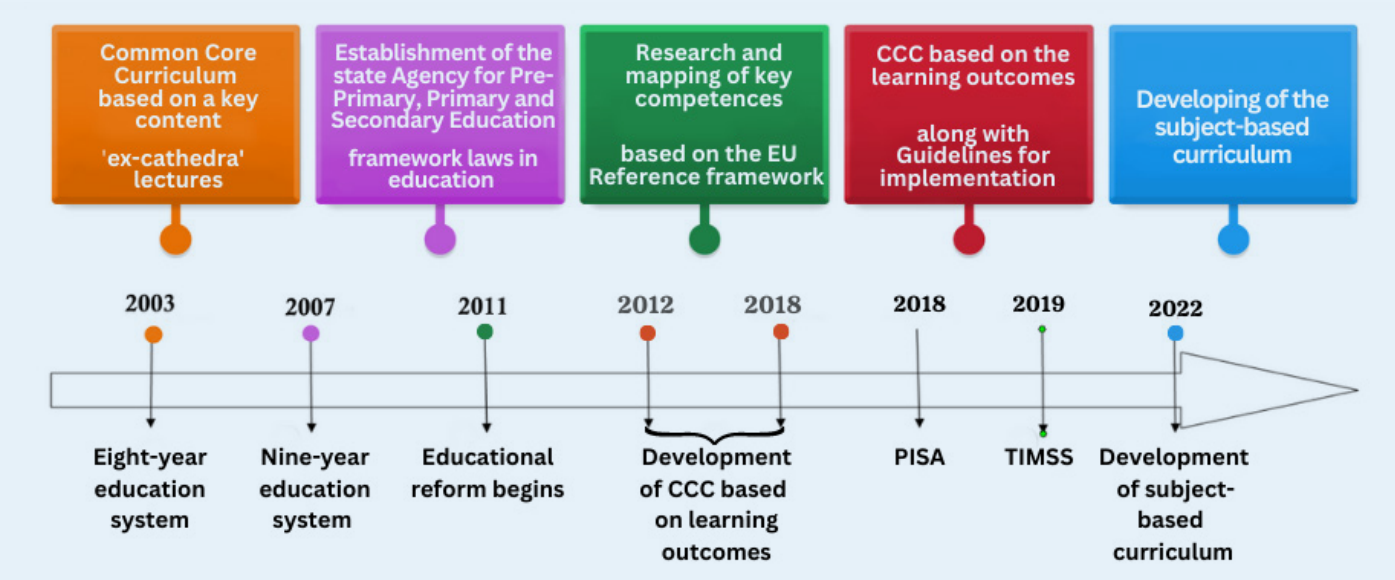

Figure 1: development process of the common core based on learning outcomes

Until 2004, the eight-year education system applied in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 2003, the Common Core Curriculum (CCC) for this eight-year education system was determined by the agreement of the ministries of education. The CCC agreed in 2003 included a section of the key content that the ministries of education had to incorporate in their programmes.

After shifting to the nine-year primary education system, in the whole Bosnia and Herzegovina, a curriculum analysis was performed, and a need for improvement was identified. This improvement had two goals: to create a CCC based on learning outcomes, as well as harmonizing it with European standards.

At the very beginning of the reform, eight educational fields, which contain all school subjects, were determined. The European key competence framework, key competences and life skills in Bosnia and Herzegovina, an analysis of the current curricula in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as an analysis of curricula in the region[1] and some world countries[2], formed the starting point for defining the educational fields. One of the fields is an additional cross-curricular and inter-subject field that connects key competences of all educational fields:

1. Language and communication field
2. Mathematics field
3. Science field
4. Social and humanistic field
5. Field of technology and information technologies
6. Art field
7. Physical training and health field
8. Cross-curricular and cross-subject field.[3]

1 Croatia, Slovenia, Kosovo* and Montenegro (*Under UN Resolution 1244 on Kosovo)
2 Great Britain, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, USA, Ireland and Japan
3 Common core defined on the basis of learning outcomes, Mostar, 2018, Pg. 7-8

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In the process of defining the new CCC, the Agency opted for a competence-based approach. This process implies the development of learning outcomes based on the key competences defined for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The appropriate key competences filter through to the defined learning outcomes. The research and mapping that the Agency for pre-primary, primary and secondary education conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina indicated that all the participants of the educational processes recognize and share these key competences:

1. Language and communication literacy in mother language
2. Language and communication literacy in foreign languages
3. Mathematical literacy and competence in science and technology
4. Informatics/informational literacy
5. Social and citizen literacy
6. Self-initiative and entrepreneurship
7. Cultural awareness and cultural expression
8. Physical and health competence
9. Learning to learn
10. Creative and productive competence.

The listed competences are **cross-curricular key competences**. It means they are not only related to the content of one school subject, or to a curriculum of one field – they are developed under multiple school subjects, between the subjects and through the curricula. Therefore, achieving key competence development as strategic educational outcomes cannot be realized through a traditional educational approach; it demands an integrative approach between school subjects and between the curricula.

In order to operationally achieve an integrative approach and to enable key competence development through school subjects and curricula, in the period of 2012-2018, the Agency worked intensively on defining the learning outcomes and indicators for educational fields, as well as for the school subjects within the defined fields.

The key competences, marked with different colours in all the documents compiled by the Agency, filter through to the learning outcomes.[4]

The learning outcomes are specific and measurable. They describe what students should know and should be able to do and are focused on applying and integrating knowledge and skills. They describe important and useful outcomes, which are relevant for a 21st century student's life and career. They do not describe how to teach and learn. Therefore, the learning outcomes do not describe teaching content. Neither do they determine what educators, pedagogues, teachers and professors should do in the classroom.

In addition to the learning outcomes, we also defined indicators. Indicators show the expected level in the learning outcomes, in accordance with the student's age. They are defined for the end of pre-primary education (5/6 years), the end of III grade (8/9 years), the end of VI grade (11/12), the end of nine-year primary education (14/15) and the end of secondary education (18/19) years.[5] The indicators for the end of pre-primary education were defined for the first time in order to facilitate the transition from pre-primary education to primary education.

> *To support the development of subject-based curricula by the competent ministries, the Agency developed the Guidelines for implementing the Common Core Curriculum. The implementing guidelines are primarily a set of suggestions that steer the teacher to the achievement of a defined outcome, but do not oblige him/her to implement it. The teacher has the autonomy to independently choose the way to achieve the outcome. The purpose of this open approach is to strengthen a teacher's role in planning and performing the teaching process.*

In order to better understand the changes, below is a brief description of the Common Core Curricula per educational field:

1. The language and communication field contains the Common Core Curricula for mother tongue and foreign languages. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages is used to determine the levels of foreign language competences (A1 – end of the 6th grade, age 11/12; A2 – end of nine years' primary education, age 14/15; B1+ - end of the 3rd grade in three-year secondary vocational education, age -17/18, B2 – end of four-year secondary vocational education, age 18/19 and B2+ - end of gymnasium, age 18/19).
2. In the mathematics field one of the primary goals is the application of mathematics in everyday life.
3. The science field contains a CCC for Natural Sciences and Social Studies, a CCC for Physics, a CCC for Chemistry, a CCC for Geography, a CCC for Biology and a CCC for My environment (lower grades of primary education). While learning the Sciences, students develop logical, creative and critical thinking and are prepared for active participation in society and to cultivate a responsible relationship with the environment and natural resources.
4. The social and humanistic field contains the framework CCC document for social and humanistic subjects within the field. This framework CCC is a base on which curricula for Psychology, Pedagogy, Logical Sciences, Sociology and Philosophy can be developed. This field also contains the CCC developed for History and Civic Education (civil education, democracy and human culture). While learning Social and Humanistic Sciences, the students explore and understand humanistic relationships and processes in history and present and think about their relevance for the future, acquire a positive attitude and adequacy for lifelong learning and permanently develop themselves and their identity at a time of major changes and pluralism.
5. The goal of the technology and informatics technologies field is to train students to apply technical, technological and informatics skills in everyday life.
6. The CCC for Arts and Music was compiled for the field of art. Through the field of art students are introduced

4 The common core based on learning outcomes, APOSO, 2018, Pg. 323.
5 Guidelines for implementing the Common Core Curricula based on learning outcomes, Mostar, 2015

to different shapes and kinds of artistic expression, applying practical and research work.

7. The physical training and health field aims to train students for maintaining and improving their own health and to acquire theoretical and motor skills and accomplishments necessary for spending free time wisely through active rest.
8. The cross-curricular and cross-subject field defines three fields: entrepreneurship, career orientation and anti-corruption. The goal of this field is accomplished by linking different teaching subjects and activities of regular classes within the framework of (cross-)thematic integration.
   Students are trained to efficiently cope in complex life and work conditions by recognising their potential and - one of the most important characteristics – persistence in accomplishing the established goals.

The document 'The Guidelines for implementing the Common core curriculum for cross-curricular and cross-subject areas based on learning outcomes' emphasizes the importance of binding curricula to cross-subject coherence.

> *The emphasis is on encouraging different subject teachers to work together with the aim of accomplishing their joint approach to the defined cross-subject content, as well as their joint approach to the development of key competences that cannot be coherent with just one school subject.*

Apart from the Guidelines for educational areas, the Agency also developed Guidelines for inclusive education with the attached form samples for the individualization of teaching work. This document also contains concrete examples for the continuous monitoring and evaluation of students in a certain subject. The Guidelines for inclusive education and the Guidelines for implementing learning outcomes in inclusive education during 2021 and 2022 were completed in order to help the competent ministries of education create the educational politics for children with special educational needs. The purpose of this document is to answer the question of how to include inclusive education in the curriculum reform.

Based on the new CCC, with defined learning outcomes and indicators, the competent ministries of education are expected to further develop the full developmental programmes for pre-primary education (ages 1-3, 3-5 and 5-6 years) and subject-based curriculum for all school subjects and all grades in primary and general secondary education in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

2. Development process for the subject-based curriculum

The development process for the common curricula in Bosnia and Herzegovina began in 2003 after the Agreement on the CCC[6] was signed by all the competent ministers of education in Bosnia and Herzegovina ensuring that, within the curriculum, the programme content agreed for all school subjects and grades in primary schools and gymnasiums will be applied under their jurisdiction.

Here are some examples of the curriculum for the physical and health field at the end of primary school:

- The example of the curriculum from 2003 that refers only to the group of content
- The example of one field from the CCC based on the learning outcomes from 2018
- The example of the subject curriculum for PE in Sarajevo Canton (2021), based on CCC from 2018

- Measuring anthropometric measurements and testing psychomotor skills
- Athletics: walking, running, jumping, throwing
- Gymnastics: exercises on the equipment and ground, rhythmic and aesthetic gymnastics
- Dance
- Sport of choice
- Additional sports games
- Martial art sports: judo, karate, wrestling

Figure 2: The example of the programme content for the curriculum for Physical education VII/IX grade from CCC (2003)

After the Agency completed the process of developing the common core based on learning outcomes and in the European context, recognized as the framework curriculum, the competent ministries of education acquired a framework for compiling the subject curricula. The process of developing the curricula in Bosnia and Herzegovina began in 2021 and is ongoing.

Establishing the learning outcomes represents a substantial part of the improvement process of the whole pedagogical and educational system in Bosnia and Herzegovina and, as the end goal, improving teaching and learning, which should result in better student achievements. The document is designed to describe the defined learning outcomes within the specific field, marked by number, which are followed by the set indicators under the same number of outcomes for different educational levels from the end of pre-primary education until the end of secondary education, increasing the requirements defined by the revised Bloom's taxonomy in accordance with the educational level.

6 Common core curriculum of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2003).

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FIELD:		2. HEALTHY LIFESTYLE		
Component:		2. Nutrition and hygiene habits		
Learning outcomes: **1. Knowledge of the importance of regular and proper personal hygiene and environmental protection is applied** **2. The principles of regular and proper nutrition are followed** **3. The influence of harmful substances on the development of disease and addiction is recognized**				
Indicators, according to student age, for:				
The end of pre-primary education	**The end of III grade (8/9 years)**	**The end of VI grade (11/12 years)**	**The end of the nine-year education period (14/15 years)**	**The end of secondary education (18/19 years)**
1. a) Knows and follows the rules of personal hygiene and neatness with support and encouragement **a) Keeps workspace clean in order to improve health with the educator's support and encouragement**	**1. a) Uses acquired knowledge of regular and proper personal hygiene and wenvironmental protection** **1. b) Uses acquired knowledge of regular and proper environmental hygiene (workspace)**	1. a) Argues about the importance of regular and proper personal hygiene 1. b) Argues about the importance of regular and proper preservation and protection of the environment 1. c) Conducts activities important for hygiene maintenance in everyday life	1. a) Analyses the impact of a workspace on health and possible development of disease 1. b) Participates in activities important for preservation of the environment	1. a) Plans and conducts activities important for personal hygiene maintenance in everyday life 1. b) Plans and organizes activities important for protection and preservation of the environment 1. c) Conducts activities important for protection and preservation of the environment
2. Cites the basic rules of proper nutrition and eating habits	**2. Recognizes basic rules of proper nutrition and its impact on health**	**2. a) Explains the purpose of groceries and their importance in nutrition**	2. a) Uses knowledge of healthy nutrition in order to preserve and improve health and development	2. a) Plans and conducts a healthy nutrition regime according to individual needs
3. a) Cites substances that have a harmful effect on the body with encouragement and support	**3. Cites and distinguishes harmful substances and their impact on disease development**	**3. a) Argues about the impact of harmful substances on human health**	3. a) Argues about the impact of harmful substances on human health	3. a) Explores and presents activities' results in order to prevent addiction by using information and communication technology (ICT)

Competence	Colour
Language and communication	
Informatics literacy	
Learning to learn	
Social and citizen competence	
Self-initiative and entrepreneurship competence	
Cultural awareness	
Creative and productive competence	
Physical and health competence	
a: Mathematical literacy	
b: Competence in science and technology	
F I E L D	
Component	
Learning outcomes	

Figure 3: Example from one field of the common core for Physical Education based on the learning outcomes (2018)

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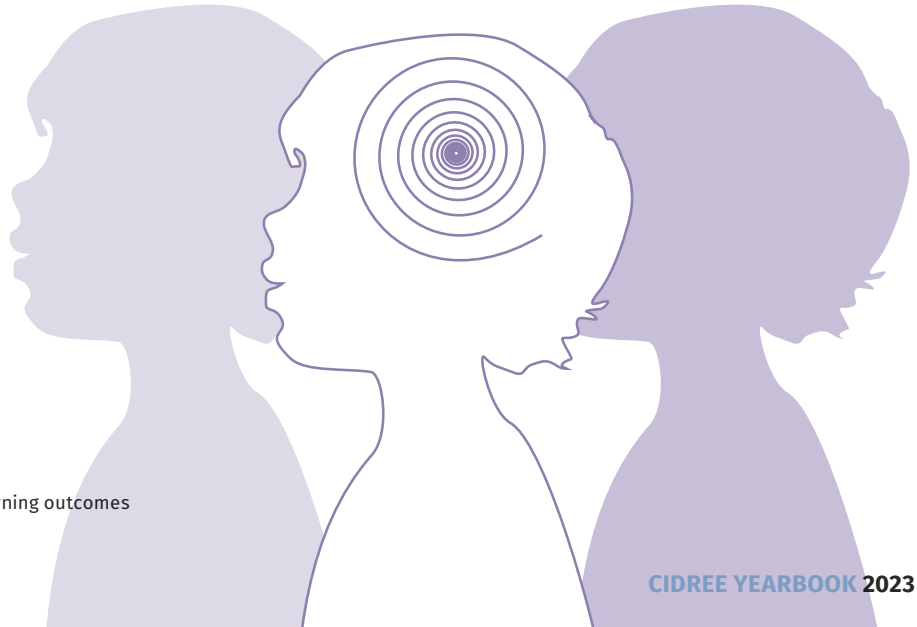
Encouraging the development of key competences through the defined learning outcomes and indicators corresponding to the relevant age, illustrated by different colours, are visible in the CCC for PE based on the learning outcomes[7]. A physical-health competence, competence in science and technology, self-initiative and entrepreneurship competence, creativity and productive competence and informatics literacy are developed in this component.

In order to improve the implementation and supervision of outcome feasibility, the Agency has also compiled several supporting documents - the Guidelines for implementing learning outcomes, the Guidelines for inclusive education and schooling and the Guidelines for implementing learning outcomes within inclusive education and schooling. Standards of student achievement for all eight educational fields 'covered' by the new CCC were also established in order to improve the adaptation and evaluation in the subject-based curricula.

All the documents mentioned are intended to support the competent ministries of education and pedagogical institutes (Brčko District, the entity of the Republic of Srpska and 10 cantons in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina). They are responsible for further developing all developmental programmes in preschool education, for compiling subject-based curricula in primary education, gymnasiums, in general educational subjects in secondary vocational education and, optionally, for developing individualized programmes, based on the new CCC.

The ministries of education develop the subject curricula based on the Common Core Curricula based on the learning outcomes from 2018. A subject curriculum for Physical Education, that is currently being piloted, was compiled in 2021, in Sarajevo Canton (Figure 4 and 5).



7 The common core curriculum for PE based on the learning outcomes (APOSO, 2018) Pg. 9-10

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Learning outcomes						
A 9.1 **Evaluates results of monitoring body growth and development**	**A 9.2** **Draws up a plan for physical exercise in order to improve physical skills and characteristics**	**A 9.3** **Estimates the effects of exercise on correct body posture**	**A 9.4** **Estimates theoretical-motoric knowledge and creates their own form of movement in independent and organized physical activities**	**A 9.5** **Determines basic legalities of physical effort and rest in conditions of physical exercise**	**A 9.6** **Uses teaching materials, equipment and space for physical exercise in the appropriate manner**	**A 9.7** **Draws up a physical training plan for each day in order to maintain and improve health**
OUTCOME ELABORATION						
Compares estimated results of physical skills and characteristics at the beginning and at the end of IX grade with a table of criteria	Applies sets of exercises with equipment and props for body skills and characteristics development	Compares the effects of exercise on correct body posture observed at the beginning and at the end.	Estimates a sports game and judgement rules. Analyses sport's event flow. Demonstrates technical elements and basic movement strategies in different physical activities.	Identifies the load in physical activities according to own progress.	Uses teaching materials, equipment and space for play, respecting rules of their use and disposal.	Estimates the effects of sport and recreational activities on body skills and characteristics development. Evaluates the effects of activity in specific conditions on the body and mental health.
KEY CONTENT						
Criteria tables and estimation of results – presentation; Sets of exercises with props for body skills and characteristics development; Impact of exercise on correct body posture – self-evaluation.			Game rules: judgement and judgement signs, game strategies, sports events – sports marketing, team sports, individual sports, rhythmic movements: dance, rhythmic gymnastics, etc., weights and rest according to age and individual advancement, teaching materials and equipment: functionality, use, disposal.		Different programmes and activities for a healthy and active life, skipping rope as a device for cardiorespiratory endurance development, orienteering: introduction, maps, compass.	

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACHIEVING OUTCOMES

1. Possibilities of efficient learning and teaching a thematic whole – methodical guidelines
   Field A is achieved through three components: Development of my body, Spot knowledge and moving skills and Active life.
   By using online calculators and mobile phone applications, students are able to compare the achieved assessment results of chosen tests of physical skills and characteristics with criteria values according to age and gender. Through mutual cooperation at the problem level, students create an exercise plan according to their own goals and aspirations.
   The student jointly identifies problems in the game and looks for elements of justification for showing a certain judging sign and based on the official judging rules for a specific sport, e.g. one group of students participates in a basketball game, while the other actively watches the game, and, after a certain irregularity, points to the reasons and a correct judging sign. According to their own aspirations, the students choose the movement strategies of a team, individual sports or rhythmic forms of movement e.g. the teacher forms groups of 'offensive' and 'defensive' players in handball and the groups of students later demonstrate proper movement strategies according to situations in the game. The students use their own record sheets, electronic notebooks, etc. e.g. physical activity journal and nutrition plan, and independently identify the load regime in a physical activity e.g. choose interval running and, based on the pulse, identify the zones of light, moderate and hard work. According to the acquired experiences in the classroom, they appropriately use teaching materials, equipment and space for physical exercise. The recommendation is that the teacher encourages the students to independently choose props in line with their own levels, needs and interests, e.g. the teacher sets out a modified polygon and in pairs, the students set out the obstacles using the available props and aids.
   Through mutual cooperation and cooperation with the teachers, the students actively participate in different sorts of sport and recreational exercises. The recommendation is that, through the content with a skipping rope and orienteering, the students follow the effects of exercise on cardiorespiratory endurance in relation to good health (e.g. by using the application, the student estimates a level of cardiac frequency before and after the exercise) starts to manage reading maps, using a compass, etc. It is all recorded in an e-journal of physical activity and a nutrition plan.
2. Possibilities of achieving inter-subject connectivity – inter-subject correlation
   Information technology is mainly connected to achieving the planned content through the use of photography cameras, cameras, mobile phone applications and computer programs for recording, editing and analysis of the materials (e.g. comparison of the effects of preventive and corrective content at the beginning and end of one cycle). There is also a possible connection to Geography through the use of maps and compasses and managing and orientation in nature).
3. Possibilities of educational action and key competence development – competence approach
   The Physical and health competence is mainly developed through all the content of field A and implies accepting and promoting healthy lifestyles and physical activities, which enable an individual to live a good quality and healthy life.
   Computer literacy develops the critical use of information and communication technology for gaining, evaluation, representing and exchanging information (the results of measuring and testing, use of technology to analyse the recorded material, etc.)
   Learning how to learn is developed through all three components and implies accepting own abilities and continuous work on self-regulation.

Figure 4: Example of the subject curriculum for PE in Sarajevo Canton (2021); Field A. Physical exercise

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Learning outcomes					
B **Healthy life**	**B.9.1** **Estimates the effects of proper nutrition on human health and plans meals in accordance with physical training.**	**B.9.2** **Plans and conducts the activities important for maintenance of personal hygiene, protection and preservation of the environment.**	**B.9.3** **Analyses the influence of harmful substances on development of disease and addiction.**	**B.9.4** **Estimates safety measures and protection during physical exercising.**	**B.9.5** **Analyses first aid procedure performance.**
OUTCOME ELABORATION					
	Distinguishes eating disorders. Makes a list of the food for physical activities in nature.	Estimates knowledge of personal hygiene and environment protection through participation in various out school activities. Explores the consequences of the environment pollution and makes recommendations.	Puts in context physical exercising and smoking prevention, alcoholism and other kinds of addictions.	Analyses the rules of conduct and movements during physical activities in specific conditions. Recognizes evacuation exits in school.	Provides a safe place and a stable position of an injured person. Demonstrates first aid with support of a teacher.
KEY CONTENT					
	Nutrition disorders; My menu for physical activities in nature.	Marking important dates: Earth Day 22. 04; World Environment Day 05. 06. – project teaching; Ecological catastrophes, causes; Consequences of environment pollution – my recommendations; physical exercising within smoking, alcoholism and other addictions prevention.		Providing an area for exercising, what do I have to have in mind; Moving within the group during physical activities in specific conditions – safety rules...; Acting during the evacuation; First aid to the injured person – cooperation with the school First aid section and Red Cross activists – project learning.	

RECOMMENDATION FOR ACHIEVING RESULTS

1. Possibilities of efficient learning and teaching thematic units – methodical guidelines
   Field B is being realized through three components: Proper nutrition, Health, hygienic and ecological habits and Protection and safety. During regular monitoring, the students are noticing the differences between optimal conditions of nourishment and disorders of malnutrition and increased body weight or obesity, as well as possible nutrition disorders (anorexia, bulimia). The recommendation is that a teacher through a conversation helps students while choosing healthy food (e.g. the students in their own diaries create a selection of healthy food during the trip in nature and create a menu in accordance with daily needs and their own goals).
   The students during a play, various workshops and other educational content, learn about acquiring hygienic habits and hygiene maintenance. The recommendation is that the teacher, by encouraging the students to personal hygiene and hygiene of the area surrounding them, points to the reduction of the contagious diseases and their spread (e.g. the students go out in the nature park with the teacher on the Earth Day and in smaller groups make plans for cleaning a part of the park under the motto „hygiene task is to fight against diseases"). Through workshops, the students put in context active use of free time in order to resist negative trends of consuming addictive substances among young adolescents (e.g. by watching videos and displays of the consequences to organ system, the students develop consciousness about the negative effects of smoking, alcohol consumption, psychoactive substances and creating addiction).
   Through mutual cooperation, the students predict a possibility of injuries during exercises and make a plan to secure the space for exercising and the rules of moving during exercise in order to prevent injuries.
   The recommendation is that the teacher, in cooperation with the Red Cross and the First Aid activists, organizes a lecture on potential dangers during exercising and a possibility of providing first aid in the case of injuries (e.g. work in couples, one student simulates a hand injury, while the other student puts a limb in a physiologically correct position and calls the emergency assistance).
2. Possibilities of achieving intersubject connection – intersubject correlation
   Intersubject connection is significant with Biology and Healthy lifestyles through the content related to the principles of proper nutrition and application of health and hygiene and ecological habits, as well as prevention of addiction.
3. Possibilities of educational activity and key competences development – competencies approach
   Physical and health competencies are developed through the acceptance and promotion of healthy lifestyles and understanding the unbreakable connection between body and food and environment.
   Self-initiative and entrepreneurial competence are developed through the use of group work skills and development of consciousness about responsibility.

Figure 5: Example of the subject curriculum for PE in Sarajevo Canton (2021); Field B. Healthy life

3. Conclusion

For the past 20 years Bosnia and Herzegovina has been in the process of educational reform. Unfortunately, according to the results of international studies, general efforts to improve the quality of education have not yielded satisfying results.

Till 2003, we witnessed politicization of the educational system, which impacted both what children learn and how they learn it. Curricular content varied, depending on the entity or canton in question, and the impact of these differences extended across all subjects.

The term Common Core Curricula was in truth misleading, as this CCC, from 2003, was developed not by establishing shared learning outcomes, but as a result of international pressure under which education officials identified similar content, which has already been taught in schools. The establishment of the state Agency for Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary Education came with the commitment to provide a quality education based on modern curricula that focuses on relevant and contemporary skills that students need to face the challenges of the 21st century.

From 2011, the Agency for Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary Education worked tirelessly to create systematic changes in education that would bring education in Bosnia and Herzegovina closer to the European educational area and ensure its recognition and measurability at the international level.

Research and mapping of the key competences, based on the EU Reference framework, has been conducted. The CCC based on learning outcomes has been developed for each educational field and for subjects inside those fields. Guidelines were compiled for implementing the CCC. Now, it is up to the ministries of education to work on further implementation.

After developing the subject curricula based on learning outcomes, the competent ministries of education in Bosnia and Herzegovina need to introduce efficient systems to monitor and evaluate the educational process, as well as to evaluate and grade student achievements. It is necessary to produce new materials for teaching and learning, including textbooks and digital teaching devices, as well as to improve initial education for teachers.

To acquire key competences, necessary for Bosnia and Herzegovina students' participation in the knowledge-based economy and future economic development of the country, the whole educational paradigm needs to change!

In the decades to come, Bosnia and Herzegovina will not be able to sufficiently utilize the potential of young generations and it will continue to lag behind in fulfilling its economic and social needs if the practice of outdated and fragmented approaches to teaching continues.

The Agency envisions the logical integration of knowledge that students acquire through various educational fields and subjects, as well as the development of teaching practices that contribute to the acquisition of cognitive skills, critical-thinking capacities, and understanding of the basic concepts to improve the applicability of knowledge.

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Ireland: fact box

This article focuses on:
☒ Early childhood education
☒ Primary education
☒ Secondary education

In Ireland the **teaching time** in primary education is defined at 20 hours a week. For the first two years of primary education shorter days apply (15 hours a week). School weeks in post-primary education contain 22 hours. Primary education has 36 weeks (182 days) of school a year and post-primary education 33 weeks (167 days).

Ireland has mandatory **national tests** both at primary and post-primary level. Primary education has Standardised Testing in Literacy and Numeracy in the 2nd, 4th and 6th class. In lower secondary education State examinations at Higher and Ordinary Level are available in English, Irish and Mathematics. In upper secondary state examinations are available at Higher and Ordinary Level for all subjects and at foundation level for Mathematics and Irish.

	Core curriculum	Full curriculum
Subjects/topics/key competences	Key competencies (aka skills or themes) vary across phases of education. At lower secondary (Junior Cycle), 4 subjects are compulsory: English, Irish, Mathematics and History. In addition, all students must engage with the area of Wellbeing, which includes Physical Education (PE), Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Civic, Social and Personal Education (CSPE). All other subjects/areas are optional, though almost all students also study Science. At upper secondary, three subjects are compulsory, English, Irish and Mathematics, and all students also engage with Physical Education.	The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework contains four core thematic areas: Wellbeing; Identity and belonging; Communicating; and Exploring and thinking. The full redeveloped Primary School Curriculum will include 7 key competencies and 5 curriculum areas and subjects (language, STEM Education, Wellbeing, Arts Education, and Social and Environmental Education). Eight key skills are included in the full curriculum of lower secondary (Junior Cycle): Managing myself, Staying well, Communicating, Working with others, Managing information and thinking, Being literate, Being numerate. Subjects in lower secondary: Applied Technology, Business Studies, Classics, Engineering, English, Irish, Geography, Graphics, History, Home Economics, Jewish Studies, Mathematics, Modern Foreign Languages, Music, Religious Education, Science, Visual Art, Wood Technology. The full curriculum of upper secondary (Senior Cycle) will include key competencies: Information processing, Communicating, Being personally effective, Working with others and Critical and creative thinking. Various programmes are organized in Upper Secondary (Senior Cycle): Transition Year; the Established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA); and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). Within each programme a myriad of subjects is offered.

Ireland: fact box

	Core curriculum	Full curriculum
Amount of detail	Knowledge, skills and attitudes are detailed in curriculum frameworks for the phase of education in question and/or in key skills/ competencies frameworks. There is no distinction between a core and full curriculum in early childhood and primary curricula in Ireland. Learning outcomes are framed for every two or four years in primary education depending on the area and stage of learning; in post-primary education, learning outcomes are framed for three years in lower secondary (junior cycle) and for two years in upper secondary (senior cycle). In post-primary, examples of student work in classroom-based assessments at junior cycle are published to support teachers in arriving at judgements about the level of achievement to award. Suggestions for pedagogies and detailed planning guidance are provided by the Junior Cycle for Teachers support service. In Senior Cycle, guidelines to support engagement with coursework are published and suggestions for pedagogies and planning are provided.	**Early Childhood Curriculum Framework** Children's learning is presented using four themes. These are Wellbeing; Identity and belonging; Communicating; and Exploring and thinking. The Themes are presented using four aims. Each aim is divided into learning goals. **Primary Curriculum** The full redeveloped Primary School Curriculum will include Learning outcomes across all curriculum areas / subjects, describing the expected learning and development for children at the end of a period of time. **Post-Primary Curriculum** Parallel to core curriculum.
Who is involved in its development	Education partners and stakeholders, children and students, parents, school managers, teachers, early childhood educators, third level educators, researchers, Government departments, and consultation with experts and the general public.	Education partners and stakeholders, children and students, parents, school managers, teachers, early childhood educators, third level educators, researchers, Government departments, and consultation with experts and the general public.

Ireland: biographies

Derek Grant

Derek Grant joined the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in 2016 and is an Early Childhood and Primary Director. He is a member of the team redeveloping the Primary School Curriculum and updating the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework. Prior to this he was a primary school deputy-principal and principal. He has 15 years teaching experience. He holds a Masters Degree in Education Management and a Doctorate in Education Leadership and Management.

Derek is particularly interested in Social, Environmental and Scientific Education and worked for a number of years as a part-time tutor in Initial Teacher Education.

Dr Sharon Skehill

Dr Sharon Skehill works as an Education Officer with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) with responsibility for updating *Aistear* the early childhood curriculum framework. Sharon has worked for several years as a Lecturer in Early Childhood Studies and has also worked directly with babies, toddlers and young children in practice.

Sharon has extensive experience developing curriculum content for ECEC programmes at university level and has published work relating to early childhood education; leadership; inclusion; outdoor learning and nature-pedagogy.

Evelyn O'Connor

Evelyn O'Connor is a former English, French, History and Media Studies teacher with 12 years classroom experience. She joined the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in 2015 and since 2019 has been one of several Directors of the secondary school curriculum in Ireland. She worked extensively on NCCA's Senior Cycle (Upper Secondary) Review from 2017 – 2021, co-authoring an Advisory Report for the Minister for Education on how senior cycle could be redeveloped to better meet the needs of all students. She is currently working with colleagues on a research-informed approach to the Technical Form of Curriculum Specifications for Upper Secondary education. She holds a Master of Arts in film studies, and previously won a Secondary Teacher of the Year award and an award for Best Education Blog. She is interested in the potential of education to contribute to human flourishing and how this can be reflected in the curriculum.

Curriculum review and redevelopment processes in Ireland

Abstract

The curriculum in Ireland reflects the educational, cultural, social and economic aspirations and concerns of Irish society. This article investigates the importance of curriculum review and redevelopment within Ireland's education system. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), as the statutory curriculum agency of the Department of Education (DoE), develops curriculum and assessment policy advice through its consultative, enabling structures. Curriculum developed by the NCCA and adopted by the DoE as national policy describes the essential entitlement of learners from birth to 18 years participating in state education. The article further describes the complex, challenging and ever-changing curriculum landscape in Ireland. It does so by providing a snapshot of NCCA's consultative and deliberative curriculum design processes, involving a range of education stakeholders. The article also highlights implications for curriculum development across early childhood, primary and post-primary education emerging through the interaction between the wider public and the education policy landscape.

1. Introduction

The education system in Ireland consists of early years, primary and post-primary education with curriculum having a foundational role in supporting continuity and progression within and across the education sectors. State-funded education is informed by explicit, national curriculum policy documents which use learning goals (early childhood) and learning outcomes (primary and post-primary). Education is compulsory from the ages of 6 to 16. Although pre-primary, early years education is not compulsory, the state-funded early childhood education and care (ECCE) provides this option for all children for the two years before starting primary school. Primary education, spanning approximately 5 to 12 years of age consists of an 8-year cycle. Post-primary education, spanning from about 12 to 18 years of age, consists of a five- or six-year cycle, with one optional year between lower and upper secondary (See Figure 1). The 3-year junior cycle phase of secondary education is informed by the Framework for Junior Cycle[1] (2015). This is followed by a two or three-year senior cycle, depending on whether the student undertakes an optional Transition Year (TY) immediately after junior cycle. Beyond Transition Year, students choose between the two-year Leaving Certificate Established (LCE) or Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programmes. Many students undertake a Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) in tandem with the Leaving Certificate Established.

Attendance beyond the age of 16 or having completed three years of lower secondary education is not compulsory. However, Ireland has one of the highest school completion rates in Europe, at 92%.

There is no distinction between a core and a full curriculum in early childhood or primary education, with all students following the same national curriculum. At post-primary, in junior cycle the 4 core subjects are English, Irish, Mathematics and History. All students also engage with the wellbeing area of learning, which encompasses Physical Education; Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE); and Civic, Social and Political Education. All other subjects and short courses are optional. In senior cycle, the core subjects are English, Irish and Mathematics and all students also engage with Physical Education. All other senior cycle subjects and modules are optional. Students follow the Leaving Certificate Applied programme; or the Leaving Certificate Established, with many students also studying Leaving Certificate Vocational link modules. All curriculum policy documentation is available at www.curriculumonline.ie. Curriculum research reports and details regarding curriculum developments are available at www.ncca.ie.

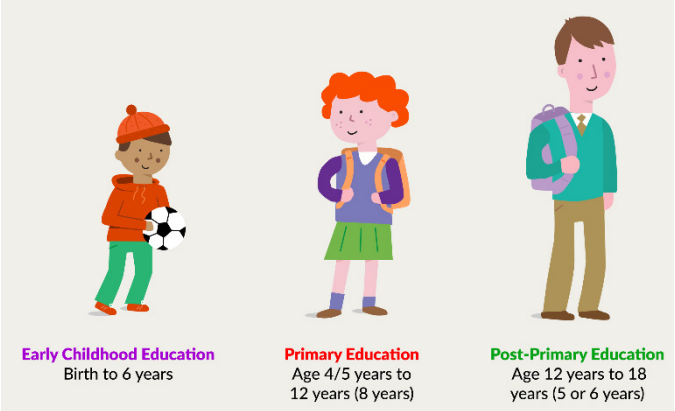

Figure 1: Stages of the Irish Education System

1 NCCA frameworks guide the curriculum for a specific phase of education.

Ireland

The DoE has ultimate responsibility for state-funded education in Ireland. As the state's statutory curriculum agency, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) works with education stakeholders to shape the curriculum for children and students from birth to 18 years. The Council's primary role is to provide advice to the Minister for Education on curriculum and assessment for early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools as well as assessment procedures used in schools and in state examinations. Through this wide remit, NCCA plays a central role in shaping policy decisions in education for children and students from birth to 18 years of age.

> *The curriculum is a crucial agent of education policy in Ireland and the complex process of developing curriculum and assessment advice involves collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders.*

This spirit of social partnership is overseen by a 25-person Council appointed for a four-year period by the Minister for Education, the majority of Council membership being nominees from school management, teacher unions, parent, university, and industry representative organisations[2].

NCCA's vision is to lead and sustain developments in curriculum and assessment that will ensure that all children and students experience and benefit from enjoyable, engaging, relevant and appropriately challenging experiences. In this, it aims to support learning in children and young people so that they can live in, contribute to, work in and care for a changing world. Key to achieving this vision is the way in which NCCA develops its advice (See Figure 2). This has four pillars:

- cutting-edge **research** from across the globe is critically reviewed and debated as we observe and keep a watchful eye on international developments.
- **deliberations**, with close attention paid to 'what works' as ideas about learning and teaching are developed, tried out, discussed and evaluated by and with children, young people, practitioners, teachers, parents, school leaders and education partners.
- **consultations** encourage wide engagement with key ideas about curriculum and assessment change.
- **networks** of schools provide feedback and practical examples.

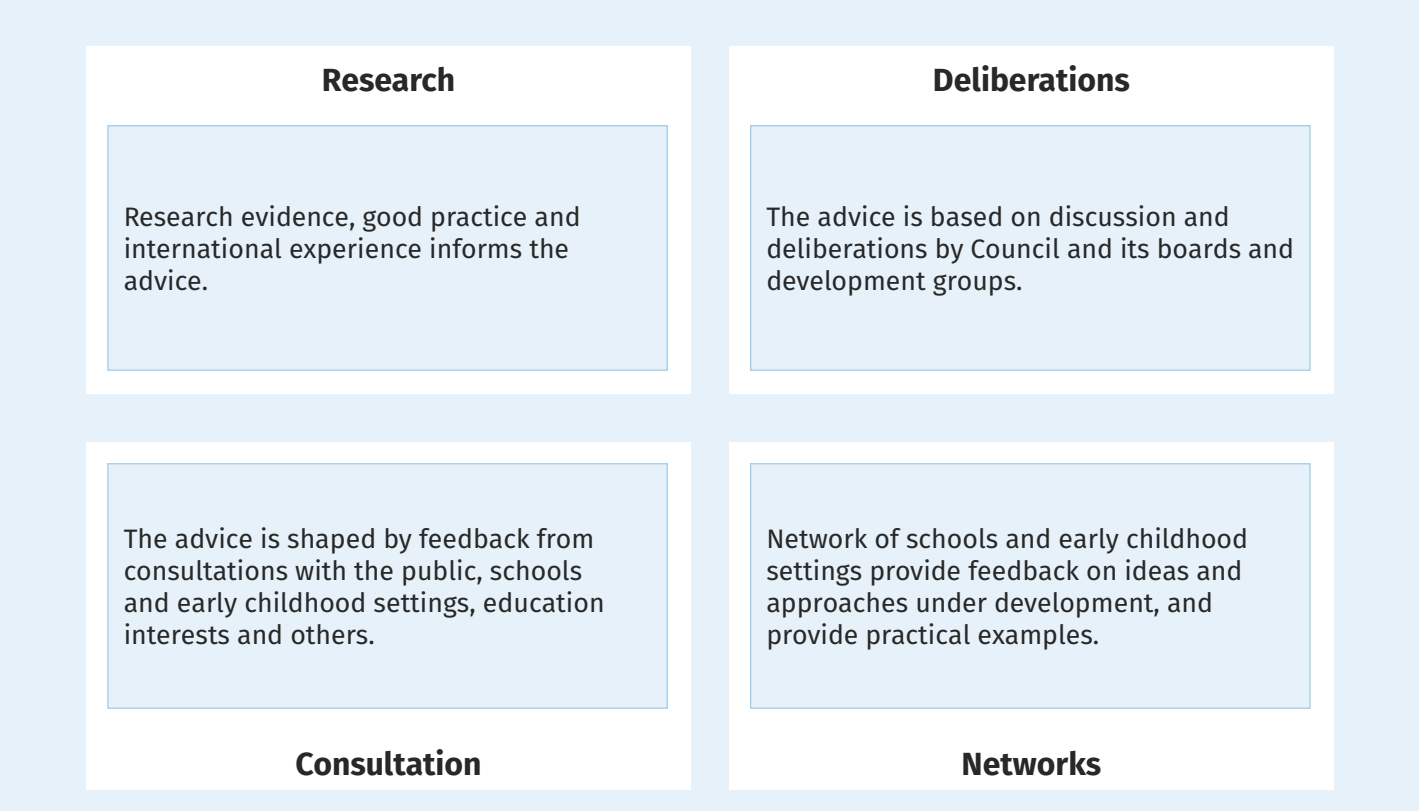

Figure 2: The 4 pillars of NCCA's work

2 A recent, welcome change to our Council membership is the addition of a student representative from the Irish Second Level Students Union (ISSU).

Ireland

In developing its advice to the Minister for Education, NCCA considers conducive conditions for curriculum enactment. Department of Education key strategies and initiatives also inform and shape curriculum and assessment developments.

Curriculum and assessment developments are underpinned by the 8 principles in Table 1: Threaded through these principles are the values of respect, equality, professionalism and integrity that are central to NCCA's work on curriculum and assessment.

Principle	How the principle is reflected in our work
Inclusion and diversity	Our work enables the development of curriculum and assessment that recognises the uniqueness and rights of each young person and the importance of supporting all children / students to reach their potential.
Partnership and collaboration	Using a variety of communication formats, we work in partnership with early childhood settings and schools, and with the wider education sector, national and international, to shape curriculum and assessment developments.
Consultation	We consult widely and use a variety of tools and processes to ensure that the rich diversity of voices, perspectives and views that make up Irish society, informs our work.
Child / student voice	Our work represents and actively promotes the right of children and students to have their voices heard and included in shaping the curriculum and assessment advice we develop. Our engagement with young people is age- and stage-appropriate and takes account of how they communicate.
Research-informed	We take account of a wide range of research, national and international, to inform our thinking on curriculum and assessment.
Innovation and responsiveness	We value inquiry and are open to new ideas and thinking as we build on the education system's strengths and develop curriculum and assessment advice that is responsive and relevant while being appropriately innovative and ambitious.
Coherence, continuity and progression	We pay attention to curriculum and assessment coherence within and across sectors to support appropriate continuity and progression in a young person's educational journey while respecting the discrete nature and identity of each stage and sector.
Learning organisation	We are committed to improving the educational experience of young people. In support of this, we promote and nurture a culture of learning amongst our staff and within the structures of NCCA.

Table 1: Principles underpinning the development of curriculum and assessment advice

2. Reviewing key competencies in the curriculum

A research-informed review of key skills (junior cycle) and key competencies[3] (primary and senior cycle) in Ireland's curriculum has taken place in recent years. Professor Emeritus Carol McGuinness, Queens University Belfast completed two research reports (2018 and 2023) drawing on work by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) as well as comparisons of international key competency / 21st century skills frameworks. It explores trends in the wider educational landscape, ways of classifying key competencies, and consideration of the connection between effective learning and key competencies. Those selected as 'key' are deemed essential for children and young people living, learning and working in society, now and into the future. The McGuinness research highlighted important aspects of key competencies, including:

- that key competencies can help students to respond to complex and varied tasks, commensurate with their individual needs, interests and abilities.
- the potential of key competencies to empower young people to participate fully in their schools, communities, family lives and society.
- the advantages to students of having well-developed competencies, making them better equipped to learn, to transition from school to a range of diverse futures, to meet the challenges of adulthood, and to understand and respond to a wide range of societal challenges.
- that Ireland is somewhat unusual in having different skills/competencies frameworks for different phases of education.
- the reality that key competencies as a policy priority will only impact the lived experiences of young adults if they are brought to life through the learning experiences and pedagogies students encounter throughout their senior cycle.
- the importance of providing opportunities for students to demonstrate their application of key competencies with increasing proficiency, as part of ongoing teaching, learning and assessment.
- that the transformative potential of key competencies is most likely to be realised where teachers explicitly draw students' attention to the competencies they are developing and where students have frequent opportunities to make connections across different curriculum subjects and modules.

Consequently, embedding key skills/competencies has been central to the development of curriculum frameworks in Early Childhood, Primary and Post-primary sectors.

3. Early Childhood Curriculum Framework – updating *Aistear*

Aistear, *The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2009)* was originally designed as a framework that would support early years educators to provide a consistent and play-based programme of care and education for children in the multi-faceted early years sector in Ireland. Developed at a time when there was limited guidance around curriculum for babies, toddlers and young children, the original *Aistear* served as an innovative step towards developing quality in early childhood education and care. Although early childhood education is not compulsory, the majority of services receive state funding to develop and implement a curriculum informed by this national curriculum framework. The framework is understood as a scaffold which can support implementation of a range of curriculum approaches in line with the broad principles and themes of *Aistear*. Indeed, *Aistear* is valued for its flexibility of interpretation depending on the lens of the user, whether as a graduate educator, parent, or as a childminder. The *Aistear* framework is currently being updated.

In accordance with the principles of the NCCA in the development of curriculum frameworks, the update of *Aistear* began with a comprehensive consultation process in 2021 to determine what has continued to work well with the early years curriculum framework and what needs to be changed or updated. The research design of this first phase of the consultation for updating *Aistear* was underpinned by a respectful regard for those who engage with the framework, ensuring all voices were facilitated and empowered to be heard (DCEDIY, 2021). Consideration of the context in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic guided an inclusive and participatory process involving written submissions, questionnaires and online focus groups for educators, parents and childminders (NCCA 2022). Aligning with the rights-based and child-led approach of *Aistear* (2009), a specific research project was commissioned to ensure the voices of babies, toddlers and young children informed this update (O'Toole, Walshe and Kerrins 2023). Using Lundy's Model of Participation (2007) as a guide, key messages from the perspectives of our youngest citizens were further interpreted by the NCCA Executive, as the 'Audience' in analysing the findings to ensure meaningful realisation of the views of babies, toddlers and young children into the updated *Aistear*. An important factor in interpreting these views is a reflexive stance in acknowledging the different contexts and lived experiences of children and of educators which may influence how *Aistear* is understood and enacted (Braun and Clarke, 2022; Brookfield, 2017). This collaborative consultation and interpretation give scope to developing content and exemplars to illustrate what *Aistear* might look like in practice. Through a further process of deliberation, the feedback from Phase 1 of the Consultation, supported by a comprehensive Literature Review (French and McKenna, 2022), have been developed into draft proposals for the updated *Aistear* which are currently being rolled out in Phase 2. This

3 NCCA uses competencies as an umbrella term for the integrated development of knowledge, skills, values and dispositions.

cyclical process ensures meaningful facilitation of voices and the consideration of ideas from those who wish to be heard in this process.

Aistear maintains a thematic approach to children's learning and development in early childhood, offering a flexible and accessible framework open to interpretation and creativity by the educator, whether in context of the home, the early years setting or with a childminder. Learning is presented across four core thematic areas: Well-Being; Identity and Belonging; Communicating; and Exploring and Thinking, which describe what children learn as "competent and confident learners". Each theme is associated with aims and learning goals which focus on a strengths-based approach emphasising the dispositions, attitudes and values, skills, knowledge, and understanding of each child. The aims and learning goals of each theme are sufficiently broad-based to be adapted as appropriate for the age and stage of development of babies, toddlers and young children. There is an emphasis on learning dispositions such as perseverance, independence, concentration, playfulness, creativity and problem solving which are embedded within and across the themes illustrating the holistic nature of learning and development in the early years. The themes also emphasize the importance of early literacy and numeracy skills for babies, toddlers and young children, illustrating how provocations for play and learning within the environment can create opportunities for learning, guided by the intentionality of the educator in planning around children's interests, strengths and needs. Owing to the flexible interpretation of the learning goals, there are not prescribed learning outcomes, but rather an individualistic approach in supporting all babies, toddlers and young children to reach their potential. Engaging with the *Aistear* framework gives scope to incorporate different curricular approaches across the themes, giving educators the pedagogical freedom to take influence from many theoretical concepts.

Consultation with the sector (NCCA, 2022) has guided further consideration of how key messages, such as diversity, equity, sustainability, and outdoor learning can be made more explicit across the Themes and the Principles underpinning the framework. Critically, in the updated *Aistear*, the Principles of the framework are brought to the fore and woven through the aims and learning goals, establishing an image of babies, toddlers and young children as agentic and capable with rights and responsibilities. There is a renewed emphasis on the strengths and abilities of each individual child, a respectful and celebratory regard for family and community, and recognition of the powerful role of the educator in advocating for babies, toddlers and young children.

Provision of education and care for babies, toddlers and young children in Ireland is monitored by both the DoE and the Department of Children, Equality, Diversity, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) through annual inspections to all settings registered with Tusla, the child and family agency under the remit of DCEDIY. While Tusla inspections focus on a broad range of regulations pertaining to governance and safety, they also inspect how the health, welfare and development of the child is evidenced in practice, with particular reference to facilities for play (Tusla, 2018). The Early Years Education-focused Inspections (DoE, 2022) have more recently expanded their inspection of early childhood education and care to include babies and toddlers as well as children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. This redeveloped model of inspection reflects government policy (Government of Ireland, 2018) to build on and improve quality in early childhood and draws influence from *Aistear*'s child-centred approach and the concept of the child as an active learner. Essentially, the monitoring processes illustrate the interconnectivity of care and education in the lives of babies, toddlers and young children and align with the Principles of *Aistear* in recognising the centrality of a slow relational pedagogy in creating the space, taking time and being present. Engagement with *Aistear* is a specific requirement under EYEI guidelines. including the pedagogical documentation to illustrate planning, implementation and reflection on the processes of the emergent curriculum in the setting.

4. Primary School Curriculum – review and redevelopment

INTRODUCTION

The Primary School Curriculum in Ireland is changing for the third time since the foundation of the state. Published back in 1999, it is a full, centralised curriculum that is over 20 years old. Prior to the current phase of review and redevelopment NCCA checked-in with the primary curriculum at various points since 1999 and engaged with schools and other stakeholders. NCCA initiated two reviews, the first review focused on the experiences of learning and teaching in English; Visual Arts; and Mathematics in 2005. The second review focused on the experiences of learning and teaching in Irish; Science; and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) in 2008. But much has changed in our world and our classrooms in the years since and we are now rethinking what, and importantly, how every child learns at primary level.

> Work to update the curriculum is underway, and from February 2020 to March 2022 an extensive consultation involving parents, children, teachers, school leaders, stakeholder organisations and the general public took place on proposals to update the curriculum. *Importantly, consultation with children was a key component to hear their views on the proposals.*

Children from preschool settings, primary schools and the first year of post-primary school were consulted on what they liked, disliked, and would change about learning in school. Reports on this consultation are available online at *www.ncca.ie*. This culminated in the launch of the *Primary Curriculum Framework* by the Minister for Education on 9th March 2023. The framework, as an overarching document, sets out the vision; principles; key competencies; structure; approaches to learning and teaching and assessment; and time allocations for a full redeveloped curriculum. With its emphasis on school and teacher agency, it provides the blueprint for guiding the enhancement of primary and special education for the coming years in Ireland.

PRIMARY CURRICULUM REVIEW PROCESS

The redevelopment of the primary curriculum necessitates a comprehensive understanding of national and international curriculum studies and literature. Account is also taken of curriculum research and trends internationally. NCCA collaborated with national and international researchers to develop a series of short papers on key aspects of curriculum. The research covers a range of topics including a critique of the 1999 curriculum, values and priorities for education, effective pedagogies, integration and assessment. The research also includes an audit of curriculum developments in other jurisdictions.

In an attempt to explore the complexity of the research, NCCA held five curriculum seminars between March 2018 and January 2019.

> *Curriculum sense-making is a 'social activity' in a multi-layered system and participants include the education partners, policy makers and wider stakeholders along with teachers, school leaders and early years educators.*

The seminars gave participants opportunities to consider the key points emerging from the research (described in the previous paragraph), and to discuss and tease out these points from different perspectives.

Teachers and school leaders are central and active agents in the curriculum redevelopment process in Ireland. NCCA established a Schools Forum in May 2018 consisting of a network of 60 primary schools, special schools, post-primary schools and preschools from across the country. The schools represent the rich diversity of school contexts in Ireland. In the Forum, teachers, school leaders and preschool educators come together to guide and shape the redevelopment of the primary curriculum. This is an important structure whereby teachers share their professional knowledge, dispositions and beliefs about curriculum.

NCCA has been working with an external Advisory Panel since March 2020. The four panellists Prof James Spillane, Northwestern University; Prof Louise Hayward, Glasgow University; Prof Dominic Wyse, University College London and Dr Thomas Walsh, Maynooth University, Ireland. were chosen for their expertise, current and previous research interests, their experience or participation in curriculum change processes, their knowledge and/or experience of education systems, and their familiarity with the Irish context.

5. Key competencies in the Primary Curriculum Framework

The *Primary Curriculum Framework* is the result of all the interconnected and highly dynamic activity described in the previous section. It includes for the first time, key competencies for children's learning and development in primary and special schools (See Figure 3).

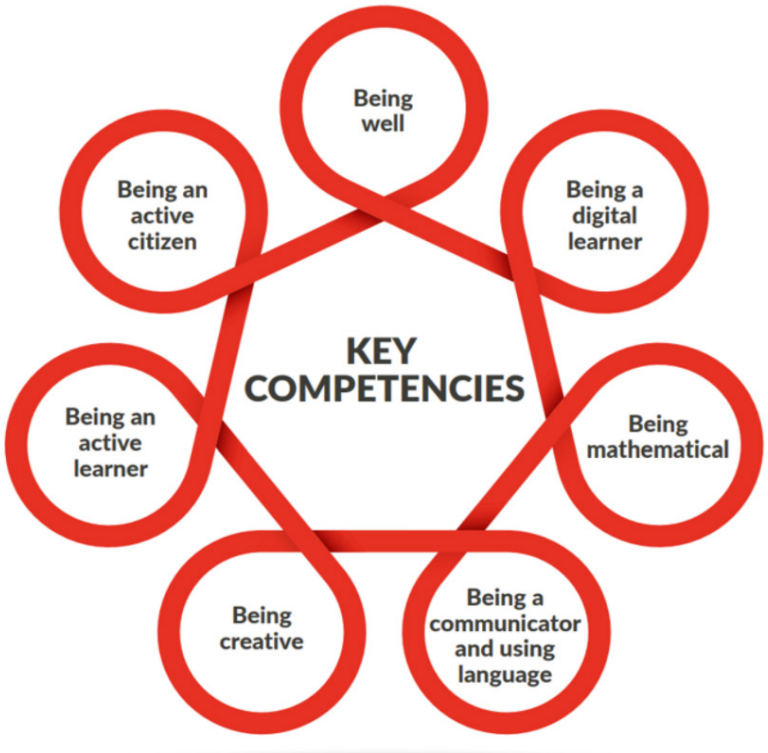

Figure 3: Key Competencies

As a new concept, the purpose and value of including key competencies in a primary curriculum required careful research and review. Essentially, we were asking how competencies can help children to meet the complex and challenging demands of living, learning and working.

The key competencies are broad in nature and help children to adapt and deal with a range of situations, challenges and contexts both in their childhood years and as they grow older into adolescents and adults. For example, these key competencies can help prepare children for future challenges such as changing work patterns, changing technology and changing family patterns. They can also help children to respond to important aspects of life such as sustainable development, social inequality and citizenship.

They are interconnected and remain the same from the beginning to the end of primary school. Each key competency has an accompanying set of attributes which describe the characteristic learning and development opportunities for children. The key competencies are embedded across the five curriculum areas through the learning outcomes. In this way the curriculum areas and subjects contribute to the development of the key competencies. They are aligned with the four themes of *Aistear* and the Key Skills in the *Framework for Junior Cycle*. In this way the competencies make connections with children's prior learning in pre-school and future learning in post-primary school. They have also been informed by Government Policies and Strategies.

6. Features of the Primary Curriculum Framework

The framework forms the basis for high-quality learning, teaching and assessment for all children attending primary and special schools. It intends to provide agency and flexibility in schools. It does so in three ways.

1. The framework structures the full curriculum in five broad curriculum areas (See Figure 4):
   - Language
   - Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Education
   - Wellbeing (Social, Personal and Health Education, and Physical Education)
   - Arts Education (Art, Music and Drama)
   - Social and Environmental Education (History and Geography)

As well as these five areas, schools can follow a Religious/ Ethical/Multi-belief, and Values Education. This is outside of the remit of NCCA.

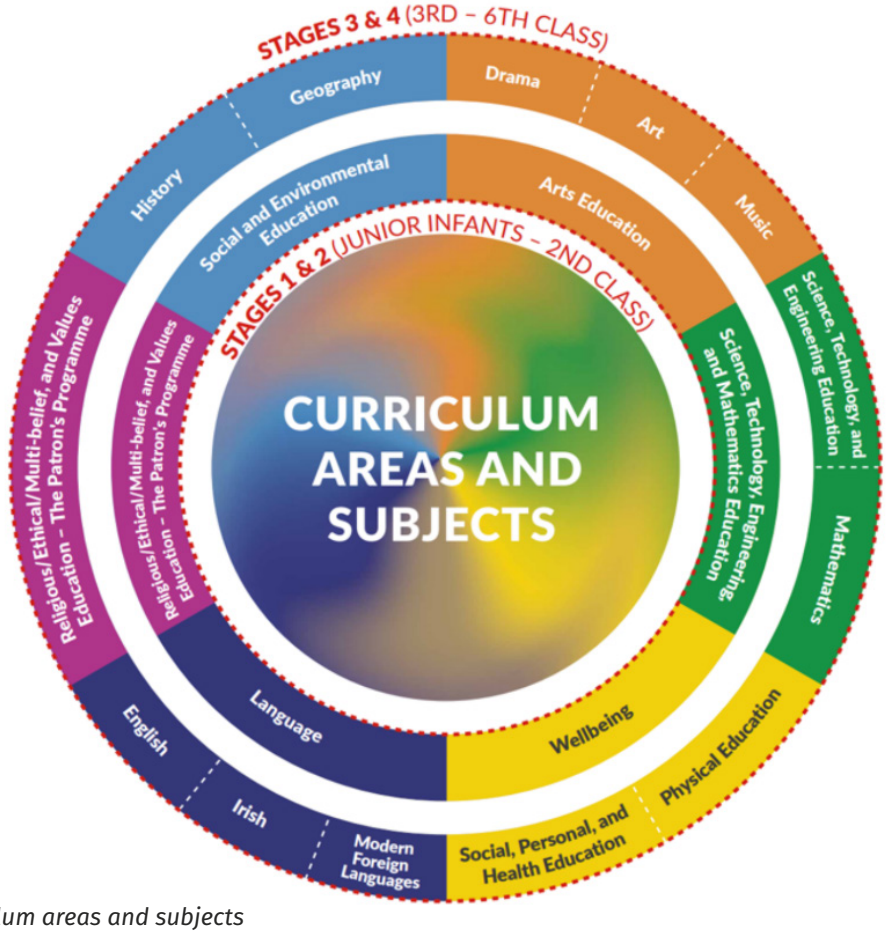

Figure 4: Curriculum areas and subjects

The curriculum areas are interrelated and become more differentiated into subjects in the middle and senior years of primary school to reflect children's growing awareness of subjects as a way of organising the world. All children attending primary schools and special schools will have meaningful and engaging learning experiences provided by the full curriculum.

> *Importantly, there is no 'core curriculum' and the expectation is that children will experience the full breadth and balance of all curriculum areas and subjects.*

When completed in early 2025 each curriculum area / subject will be presented within its own single document and Learning Outcomes will describe the expected learning and development for children at the end of a period of time in each curriculum area / subject.

2. The framework supports a variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies with assessment central to learning and teaching. The framework highlights the importance of teachers' professional judgement in supporting children's learning and encourages teachers to make meaningful connections with children's interests and experiences. Importantly, it recognises the significance of quality relationships and their impact on children's learning, and the role and influence of parents and families in children's education.
3. The framework provides support for changing how time is allocated across the curriculum. Suggested time allocations are provided to assist teachers and schools in their work with the curriculum. This includes strong support for schools at a local level having greater flexibility in allocating time for different curriculum areas. The framework presents time allocations in two categories: Minimum Curriculum Time (weekly and monthly) and Flexible Time (monthly). The suggested time allocations are intended to be used flexibly by schools, in order to embrace integrative learning, avail of unexpected learning opportunities, pace learning in response to children's needs, and support immersive and engaging learning experiences (Department of Education, 2023).

7. Post-Primary Curriculum – a multi-layered review process

The Post-Primary Curriculum in Ireland is also changing. A major evolution of the curriculum for lower secondary education has been taking place since 2012, guided by the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015). This included the introduction of key skills across the junior cycle curriculum; a dual approach to assessment combining classroom oral and project-based assessment with state examinations; a revised approach to reporting and the development of learning modules to meet the specific needs of the students with moderate, severe and profound learning needs. At upper secondary, a major review of all aspects of the Senior Cycle curriculum took place between 2017 and 2020. The review included research and extensive consultation with teachers, students, parents and education stakeholders. The review *culminated in the publication and launch of the Senior Cycle Review Advisory Report* in March 2022 by the Minister for Education. The report sets out a clear purpose and vision for a redeveloped senior cycle and provides a roadmap to the creation of a Framework for Senior Cycle. Redevelopment of senior cycle is underway and is expected to take a number of years to complete.

The strategies used to develop curriculum and assessment frameworks, syllabi and advice to the Minister for Education at Post-Primary have much in common with those used in Early Childhood and Primary. Extensive research informed the development of the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015), including a national longitudinal study of over 20,000 children and young people by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and Trinity College Dublin (TCD), funded by the Government of Ireland through the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY). One significant aspect of NCCA's approach to developing curriculum and assessment is the iterative process used by NCCA to formulate specifications (aka syllabi) for individual subjects and areas of learning. A Background Paper and Brief for the Review of each subject/area of learning is agreed. Draft specifications (aka syllabi) are then created by NCCA Development Groups, consisting of approximately 12 nominees from education stakeholder organisations and co-opted members with additional relevant expertise. Student voice is captured during the process to inform these drafts. Comparative analysis of international developments in the subject or area of learning in question is also consulted. Each draft is reviewed by the relevant Board structure. These drafts then proceed to public consultation and a consultation report capturing feedback on each draft specification is then published. Development groups make amendments, as appropriate, to the draft specification, then finalised specifications return to the relevant Board and Council for further discussion and deliberation. They are then sent to the Minister for Education for approval and publication.

Before the full curriculum for a phase of education changes, NCCA conducts widescale review. At upper secondary, senior cycle review took place in three phases, as outlined in the graphic below.

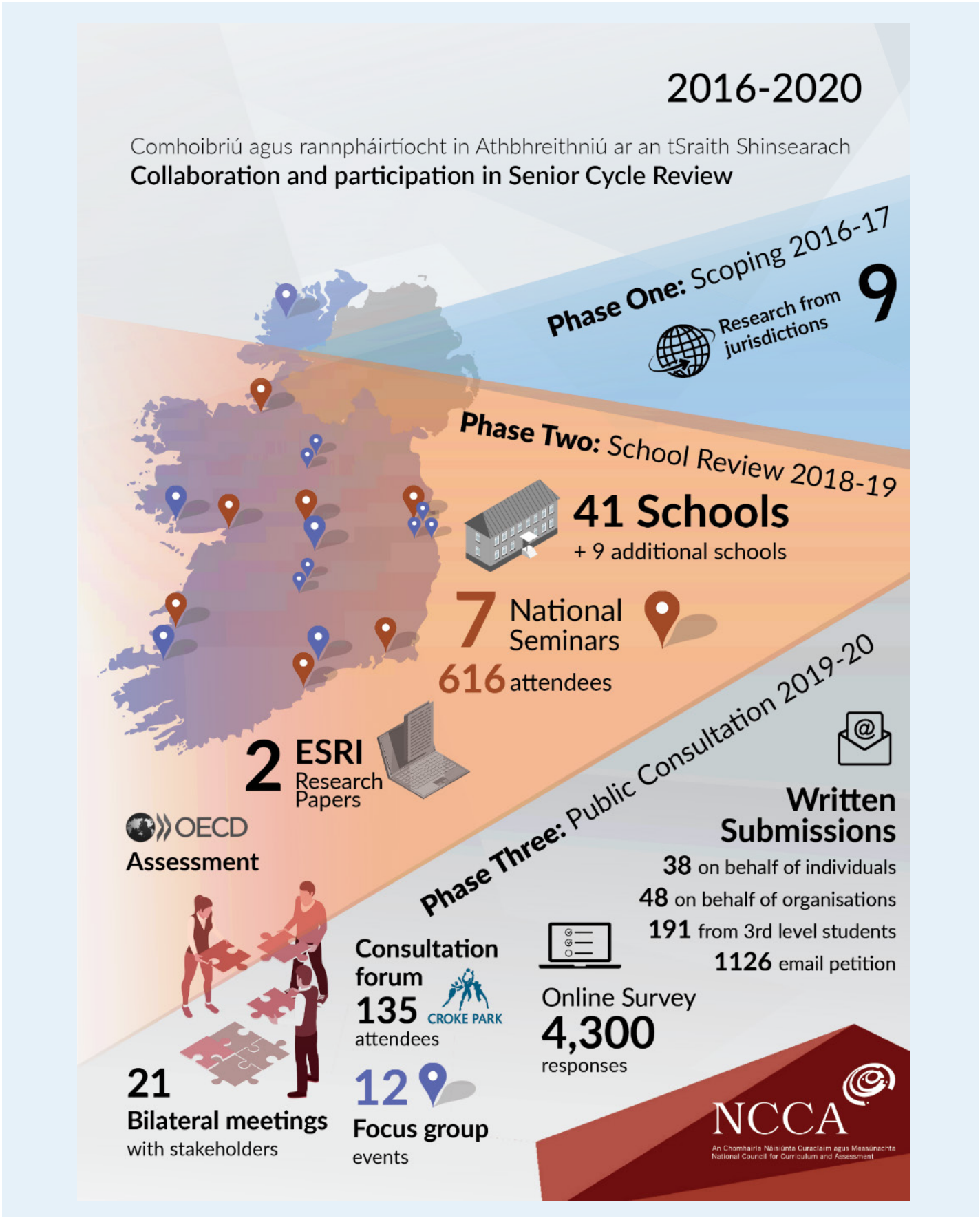

Figure 5: Phases of Consultation in Senior Cycle Review

To benefit from external oversight of the process, NCCA invited the OECD to visit Ireland on a number of occasions throughout the review, to observe the process in action, speak to key education stakeholders and to act as critical friends to NCCA so that we could learn more about what was working well and what we could improve as we moved through the phases of the review.

Redevelopment of senior cycle has been ongoing since mid-2022, with a number of key strands including an extensive review of the Technical Form of curriculum specifications; research and development of Senior Cycle Key Competencies; and independent assessment research commissioned by NCCA and the State Examinations Commission. A revised programme statement for Transition Year is being developed, as are specifications for Business; *Climate Action and Sustainable Development; Drama, Film and Theatre Studies; Social, Personal and Health Education*; and modules for students with significant additional learning needs. An Advisory Panel, similar to that used to inform work on the Primary Curriculum Framework, has also been established.

The Department of Education and/or NCCA monitor the enactment of curriculum reforms in a range of ways. In junior cycle, a longitudinal study *Exploring the implementation and impact of the Junior Cycle Framework (JCF) in post-primary schools* is currently being conducted by the School of Education at the University of Limerick. To date, two interim reports have been published, capturing the views of teachers, students, school leaders and education stakeholders and in-depth case studies in 12 schools are currently taking place. In addition to this over-arching, independent review, reviews of the early enactment of individual subjects—English, Science, Business Studies, Irish and CSPE—have been published. Early enactment reviews of Visual Art and Modern Foreign Languages are taking place currently. Minor amendments are made to specifications to respond to feedback and these reviews also provide insights into areas where teachers would like further training and support. The Department of Education inspectorate and the Junior Cycle for Teachers CPD support service[4] monitor enactment of the Framework through engagement with teachers and students, and the State Examinations Commission offers insights into student engagement with specific examinations via Chief Examiner Reports. At senior cycle, in addition to the extensive review of Senior Cycle outlined above, early enactment reviews of new subjects provide valuable insights and can also lead to minor amendments to specifications. Learning from these reviews informs ongoing work on curriculum and assessment across post-primary education.

8. Conclusion

NCCA's approach to the development of curriculum and assessment advice and policy is constantly evolving. Building on existing practices of extensive review and research, collaboration, consultation, school networks and representative development group, board and Council structures, NCCA recently added Advisory Panels and direct engagement with the OECD to our processes. We have expanded our expertise in relation to student voice in recent years, with a significant research-informed innovation in capturing the voices of babies, toddlers and young children.

A strong emphasis on helping young people to develop a wide range of competencies across the curriculum from early childhood, through primary and post-primary education is evident throughout our work and research continues to inform the development of these frameworks as well as the opportunities for and barriers to meaningful embedding of these competencies. Ongoing monitoring of the lived experiences of children and students are crucial if we are to continue to learn from our past and present, with a view to creating a better future for all of our citizens.

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Kosovo: fact box

This article focuses on:
☒ Primary education
☒ Secondary education

In the core curricula, **teaching time** is determined by a percentage (%) at the level of curricular fields. In the subject curricula, the same teaching time is specified for each subject, in the number of weekly and annual teaching hours. The optional curriculum is determined by the school. It is an integral part of the compulsory educational plan. In primary education, schools have more than 6% autonomy of teaching time for the optional curriculum, while in lower secondary education this is about 5%. The other percentage of teaching time is determined by the government.

In primary education, there is a total of 4,181 annual lessons for grades 1-5, this means 21-24 hours per week. In lower secondary education, there is a total of 4,343 hours of annual teaching for grades 6-9, this means 29-30 hours a week. There are 37 weeks of teaching for both levels of education per year.

As for **central examinations**, there is a state exam at the end of primary education, namely in the 5th grade. It is not carried out every year. The goals of the assessment are related to the research of various aspects of education and to identifying needs for support of students in lower secondary school and improving the primary level. There is also a state exam at the end of lower secondary education, namely at the end of the 9th grade. It is carried out every year. The goals of the assessment are related to measuring the level of achievement of competencies and the orientation for enrolment in upper secondary school.

	Core curriculum	Full curriculum
Subjects/topics/key competences	Focus on core competences, with a particular focus on: (i) breaking down the results of the key competences at the level of the curriculum stages: • Competence of communication and expression • Thinking competences • Learning competences, • Life, work and environment competences, • Personal competences, • Civic competences. (ii) breaking down learning outcomes for curricular areas, at the level of the curriculum stage. Curriculum areas determined in the Core Curriculum: • Languages and communication • Arts • Mathematics • Natural sciences • Society and environment • Physical education, sports and health	Focus on classroom subject curricula. Subject curricula are linked to curricular areas and learning outcomes of curricular areas. In the first grade of primary education, they start with nine teaching subjects and one subject from the optional curriculum. Meanwhile, in the ninth grade there is a total of 14 subjects and one subject from the optional curriculum.

Kosovo: fact box

Amount of detail	The Core Curriculum for the formal levels of education has the same structure and organization, including regulatory and descriptive specifications for all levels they cover. They provide detailed arrangements and descriptions for: • features of curricular levels for the formal level of education covered by the relevant CC; • key competences and results of competences for the curricular stage; • curricular fields, concepts and learning results for curricular fields; • optional curriculum; • teaching time for each curricular field; • instructions for the teaching methodology; • student assessment system.	The subject curricula for each class, used by teachers and schools, are detailed, including • The purpose of learning the subject in the respective class; • Field concepts; • Learning topics; • Learning outcomes for annual learning topics; • Methodological guidelines.
Who is involved in its development	• Political representatives • Education officials from the Ministry of Education and the local level • Representatives from schools • Representatives from teachers' unions • Representatives from Faculties of Education • Kosovo Pedagogical Institute • Local experts • Experts from international partners who support education in Kosovo	• Education officials from the Ministry of Education and the local level • School representatives • Representatives from the Faculties of Education • Local experts

Kosovo: biographies

Selim Mehmeti

Selim Mehmeti is a senior researcher in the Kosovo Pedagogical Institute. He completed his master's degree in 2010, in the University of Pristina on the degree: Management in Education. His carrier started as a high school teacher, researcher, leadership trainer, and educational official in the Ministry of Education. With the Ministry of Education, he has coordinated and contributed to the development of: curriculum for gymnasiums, guides, manuals and by-laws for the implementation of the Strategy for Quality Assurance in pre-university education, Strategy for Teacher Development in Kosovo etc. His area of expertise is training of school principals for management of education and quality assurance. His research covers the themes of: educational policy, advancement of leadership in education in Kosovo, teacher development, curriculum implementation, quality assurance, assessment in education etc. He published many professional articles for the research and analysis in fields and issues of interest to education in general.

Luljeta Shala

Luljeta Shala is PhD candidate in the Selinus University of Science and Literature-Ragusa Italy. She completed a Master degree in Management in Education in Faculty of Education at the University of Pristina. Her career started in 2001 as a school teacher, educator, teacher for children with special needs, English teacher in different levels in education. From 2007 up to now she is working as a Researcher for school management and student's rights in Kosovo Pedagogical Institute. She was author and coauthor of some publications in education, did researches, analyses, design a teacher training programme in pre-university education in Kosovo. Her area of expertise is the training of school principals for school management and quality assurance, training of teachers for methodological approach on teaching foreign languages through action research and treatment of approaches of children's social behavior phenomenon.

Kosovo: biographies

Ismet Potera

Ismet Potera graduated in pedagogical sciences, did an MA in education management. He is currently completing his PhD studies in the field of teaching and learning. His main interest is teaching and professional development of teachers. In this regard he has conducted a series of researches, analyzes and comparative studies. He started his teaching career as a class teacher, to continue it as a Pedagogical Adviser, professor engaged in the Faculty of Education. He currently works as a researcher at the Pedagogical Institute and head of the research sector. For a while he worked in the Ministry of Environment where he headed the environmental education sector.

Core curriculum - key competences and learning outcomes for primary and lower secondary education in Kosovo

Abstract

The aim of this article is to present an overview of the key competences integrated in the curricula developed in Kosovo, with a special emphasis on the Core Curriculum for primary and lower secondary education in Kosovo. The approach taken in this article is qualitative and comparative, through which we present an in-depth analysis of the curriculum documents, as well as a meta-analysis of reports on the development and implementation of these documents, related to the approaches applied in the establishment of the six key competences and learning outcomes. Part of the analysis also involved cross-curricular issues from the perspective of their role in achieving the key competences.

The drafting of the Core Curricula for the formal levels of education in Kosovo is an innovation in the curriculum reform in progress. The results of the analysis and meta-analysis prove that the choices applied for formulating and including the learning outcomes for the key competences in the curriculum documents, are an effort and commitment of the education system in Kosovo to promote the competence-based approach in all curriculum documents. There is a lack of cohesion and coherence in the curriculum, in relation to the key competences and learning outcomes for the competences, their interrelationship with the features of the key stage defined in the Core Curriculum, with the curriculum areas, the subject programmes for the class and with cross-curricular issues.

The development of the key competences is effectively guided by the implementation of the curriculum and activities with students in the classroom. We need more information about the practices of working with students in the classroom and more evidence about the aspects of the curriculum actually implemented or not, in order to review and complete them. Therefore, these findings represent an added value for further studies of curricula in the context of Kosovo, and beyond.

1. Introduction

In the last 20 years, Kosovo has gone through two curriculum reforms for pre-university education, (i) Curriculum reform in 2001 and (ii) Curriculum reform in 2011/2016. Both curriculum reforms started with drafting conceptual documents, known as the Curriculum Framework (CF).

The curriculum reform of 2001 defined changes in the structure of pre-university education in Kosovo, in 5 years (ISCED 1); 4 years (ISCED 2); and 3 years (ISCED 3). All subject curricula for grades 1-12 were drawn up by the CF (2001). All subject curricula were designed based on content and learning objectives, as well as on expected results (MEST, 2001).

In 2005, the Institute of Education in London conducted an evaluation of the Kosovo Curriculum - A review of the first steps of the curriculum of 2001. This report qualifies the CF as an excellent, modern and high-quality document that can serve as a model for education in Kosovo. The same report also describes the numerous challenges of Kosovo's education system, in implementing the curriculum, in providing modern teaching pedagogy, learning practices and evaluation (Peffers, et al., 2005).

The second curriculum reform, known as the reform of 2011/2016, was started based on the needs and requirements of the rapid social, economic, scientific, and technological developments of the first decade of the 21st century, as well as the new circumstances created by the declaration of Kosovo's independence in 2008. Curriculum documents from this reform were formalized in August 2016, after a pilot process.

According to Armend Tahirsylaj (2018), the development of the curriculum framework for both curriculum reforms was greatly influenced and shaped by financial support from donor actors and active international supporters from the donor community in Kosovo (such as UNICEF, EU, GIZ, etc.), especially through the expertise of UNESCO in the design of curricula (Tahirsylaj, 2018).

Tahirsylaj & Fitore Fazliu (2021) emphasize that elements for the key competences have been identified in the framework of the 2001 curriculum, in which competences are defined as an integration of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Therefore, the approach based on achieving competences introduced in the reform of 2011/2016 was not entirely new, at least not in the policy discourse of the curriculum.

The second curriculum reform is considered a continuation

of the 2001 reform, supplemented by basic conceptual and operational curriculum documents based on the key competences, such as the Core Curriculum (CC) for formal levels of education, which was developed during the reform of 2011-2016.

The Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI) is the government's main decision-making authority for setting policies for curricula at all levels of pre-university education. The department for Pre-University Education within MESTI - Division for Curriculum and Teacher Support, leads and coordinates the development of pre-university education curricula in Kosovo.

The school has autonomy in: (i) Planning for the implementation of the compulsory curriculum; Core Curriculum and subject curricula; (ii) Defining and developing the optional curriculum; and (iii) Other learning activities such as: complementary learning, supplementary learning and extracurricular activities.

The municipal authorities are responsible for coordination between MESTI and schools, but also for supporting schools in creating the conditions for effective implementation of the curriculum, as well as continuous support for teachers.

Meanwhile, the main authority for monitoring implementation of the curriculum reform is the Education Inspectorate within MESTI.

This article aims to provide a deeper insight into the set of curriculum framework documents developed in Kosovo, a meta-analysis of reports on the development and implementation of competence-based curricula. The definition of key competences, learning outcomes for competences and definition of cross-curricular topics are the main topics of this article.

The article is guided by the following questions:

- What is the strategy for developing competence-based curriculum documents and what are the main aspects they define?
- What are the key competences, the competence-oriented learning outcomes and how are they defined in the curriculum documents?
- How are the cross-curricular topics defined and in what way are they established in the curriculum documents?

2. The set of Curriculum documents

The set of all curriculum documents for pre-university education in Kosovo is developed by MESTI for the reform of the competence-based curriculum (2011/2016). It consists of three levels:

- The Curriculum Framework of Kosovo for Pre-University Education;
- Three Core Curricula for formal levels of education (ISCED1, ISCED 2, ISCED 3);
- The specific subject curricula for each subject and each grade (preparatory grade, grades 1 – 12).

THE KOSOVO CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK (KCF) FOR PRE-UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

The Kosovo Curriculum Framework (KCF) is the basic concept document of the curriculum reform. It is based on the achievement of key competences and learning outcomes per key competence, and is consistent with the recommendation of the European Commission (EC) on key competences for lifelong learning (European Commission, 2006).

> *With the decisions and arrangements in the KCF as the main concept document for the curriculum reform document, Kosovo intends to shift the focus from pressure to impart the teaching content defined by curricula and textbooks, to the development of key competences, presented in the form of learning outcomes, similar to competence standards.*

The KCF contains a list of regulatory and decisive aspects for the development and implementation of curriculum reform. It also determines the nature and development of all elements of pre-university education. A general overview of the aspects the KCF document defines is reflected in the following table.

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Goals in pre-university education:

- Cultivation of personal, national, state, and cultural identity
- Promoting general cultural and civic values
- The development of responsibility to oneself, to others, to society and to the environment
- Skills for life and work in different social and cultural contexts
- Entrepreneurship development and use of technology for sustainable development
- Lifelong learning capability

Key competences:

1. The competence of communication and expression
2. Thinking competence
3. Learning competence
4. Competence for life, work and environment
5. Personal competence
6. Civic competence

The principles of the Curriculum:

- Inclusiveness
- Competence development
- Integrated and coherent teaching and learning/
- interconnected
- Autonomy and flexibility at the school level
- Responsibility and accountability

Pre-University Education Structure – Curriculum Formal Levels and Key Stages

ISCED	Formal Levels of Pre-University Education	Curriculum Key Stages
ISCED 3	Upper Secondary Education: Grade XII	**Key stage 6:** Consolidation and specialization
	Upper Secondary Education: Grades X-XI	**Key stage 5:** Basic general and professional development
ISCED 2	Lower secondary education: Grades VIII-IX	**Key stage 4:** Reinforcement and orientation
	Lower secondary education: Grades VI-VII	**Key stage 3:** Further development and orientation
ISCED 1	Primary education: Grades III-V	**Key stage 2:** Reinforcement and development
	Primary education: Grades I-II	**Key stage 1:** Basic acquisition
ISCED 0	Preparatory class	
	Preschool education	**Preparatory stage:** Early childhood education

Curriculum areas:

1. Languages and communication
2. Arts
3. Mathematics
4. Natural sciences
5. Society and environment
6. Physical education, sports and health
7. Life and work

School-based curriculum:

- Elective curriculum
- Other learning activities: supplementary, additional learning, learning - extracurricular activities;

Student assessment:

- Continuous assessment - (formative assessment and summative assessment),
- Final assessment - at the end of the school year
- Assessment for key stage - at the end of each curricular level

- **The lesson plans:**
- In primary education, there are a total of 4,181 hours of annual lessons for grades 1-5.
- In lower secondary education, there are a total of 4,343 hours of annual teaching for grades 6-9.

State assessment:

- Grade 5
- Grade 9
- Grade 12 - State Matura Exam

- **Guidelines for drafting curricular documents:**
  - Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education (ISCED 0);
  - Core Curriculum for Primary Education (CC/1 - ISCED 1);
  - Core Curriculum for Lower Secondary Education (CC/2 - ISCED 2);
  - Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Education - gymnasium (ISCED 3);
  - Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Education - vocational schools (ISCED 3);
  - Subject Curriculum for each grade;
  - Guide for teachers and school principals;

Table 1: The conceptual structure of the KCF
Source (MEST, 2016a): Curriculum Framework of Pre-University Education of the Republic of Kosovo

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THE CORE CURRICULUM FOR FORMAL LEVELS OF PRE-UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

In the hierarchy of curricular documents for pre-university education in Kosovo, Core Curricula (CC) are the basic operating documents for three formal education levels (ISCED 1, 2 and 3). The three CCs are developed on the basis of the KCF document.

The CCs contain regulatory provisions for implementing the curriculum, established by MESTI, which are mandatory for all pre-university educational institutions. They define mandatory general orientations for the planning, organization and implementation of learning processes in schools, including the flexibility and autonomy of the school, in line with the provisions defined by the relevant CC.

The CCs implemented have the same structure and organization, with regulatory and descriptive specifications for the levels they cover. They regulate and describe:

- Features of the curricular stage for the formal level of education covered by the relevant CC
- Key competences and outcomes of competences for the curricular stage
- Curricular areas, concepts and learning outcomes
- The optional curriculum
- Teaching plans
- General methodology
- Student evaluation system

As stated by Lindita Boshtrakaj (2018), curricular stages, according to which the CC is structured and operationalized, represent the reference point for defining the key competences that must be mastered by all students. They represent the requirements of learning progress and the organization of learning experiences (Boshtrakaj, 2018). They contain the essential features for a formal level of education. Table 2 shows the description of two levels of the curriculum from CC /1 (Stage 1 and Stage 2), as an example of descriptions in the CC.

Stage 1 - Basic Acquisitions (Preparatory grades and grades I and II of primary education)	**Stage 2 - Strengthening and development** (Grades III, IV and V of primary education)
At this stage, students are exposed to systematic learning approaches. They will be familiar with the following learning experiences: • Acquisition of the basic level of communication and expression in the mother tongue; • Basic communication in English • Acquisition of the basic elements of reading, writing and numeracy; • Research and environmental recognition; • Knowledge and understanding of rights, obligations and responsibilities in the classroom, in school and in life; • Creative expression through play, symbols and basic forms of artistic expression; • Experience creating successful learning as an individual and as part of the group;	At this stage children are subject to the following challenges: • Correct use of their mother tongue and of basic English in oral and written communication; • Right use of symbols and operations; • Confronting new knowledge and detailed information; • Developing skills in structured and oriented thinking in problem solving; • Understanding own responsibility, responsibilities of others regarding the environment; • Expanding information sources; • Cultivating independence in planning;

Table 2. Description of curriculum levels for preparatory class and primary education
Source: The Core Curriculum for ISCED 1 (MEST, 2016b)

Issues related to key competences and competence outcomes for curriculum levels, curriculum areas and the respective concepts and learning outcomes are elaborated in the third part of this article.

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SUBJECT CURRICULA FOR CLASS - SUBJECT PROGRAMMES FOR CLASS

Subject curricula (SC) present the third level of operational curriculum documents for teachers and schools. Subject curricula have been drafted on the basis of definitions, regulations and general and mandatory orientations originating from the CC of the relevant ISCED. Subject curricula for each grade are mandatory for all schools (MEST, 2017 - 2021).

Subject curricula are the detailed syllabi for a class. They follow an organizational structure, such as:

- Introduction
- Goals
- Topical content and learning outcomes
- Guidelines for using the syllabus
- Methodological guidelines
- Cross-curricular issues
- Assessment and evaluation guidelines
- Guidelines for teaching materials, tools, and resources

Table 3 reflects the curriculum structure of a teaching subject for a certain grade, with an example from the subject of the English Language - grade 5. English is taught as a first foreign language from the first grade.

The content structure of the subject curriculum of the English Language/ Grade 5 (some illustrative examples)

Introduction: Learning is a complex process of discovery, collaboration, and inquiry facilitated by language.... **Goals:** The purpose of teaching English from an early stage is to enable learners to achieve a working language competence after completing upper secondary education for both further education and their career....

Concept	Topics	Subject learning outcomes for topics Student:
Literary and non-literary texts	**Topic 1** – Starter	• Listens to and reads short texts describing a city and paraphrases key information; ...;
	Topic 2 – My dream job	• Listens to short dialogues and/or songs reinforcing the vocabulary in focus (jobs, sports, injuries, and transport); ...

Guidelines for using the syllabus: All the learning outcomes in the syllabus are written based on four concepts: Literary and non-literary texts, Figurative and non-figurative language, Criticism, theory and history, and the Language system...

Methodological guidelines: In order to achieve the targeted aims and learning outcomes and equip children with the required competences, the Grade Five English Language Syllabus promotes the most contemporary approaches in language teaching and learning....

Cross-curricular issues: Since the English Language is not taught and learnt for its own sake but is seen as an aim and vehicle, the Grade Five English Language Syllabus integrates topics that directly relate to other subjects....

Assessment and evaluation guidelines: There are many reasons for assessing learners. Some of them are: to compare learners; ...

Guidelines for teaching materials, tools and resources: In order to achieve the targeted aims and learning outcomes and cover the topical content of the grade five syllabus ...,

Table 3. Illustrative example of content aspects of subject curricula by grade
Source: Subject curriculum for fifth grade (Class 5) (MEST, 2021)

Although the structured approach applied to the design of subject curricula is the same for all subject programmes, they differ in the description of methodological instructions. They not only vary in the depth and breadth of requirements within a learning outcome, but also in the number of learning outcomes, even in cases where the teaching time is the same for different subjects.

The teaching plan presented in the subject curricula, with the number of weekly lessons of each subject, is centralized by the MESTI, and is mandatory for all schools of the public education system in Kosovo. This approach is estimated to have influenced the reduction of the school's autonomy in implementing the competence-based curriculum and its commitment to meeting the expectations set for schools (Mehmeti et al., 2019).

3. Defining key competences and learning outcomes in curriculum documents

The competences are reflected through a system of learning outcomes, which must be achieved by all students in different periods of schooling (MEST, 2016a). The approach of defining and establishing key competences and learning outcomes in curriculum documents is addressed in the following section of this article.

KEY COMPETENCES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES IN THE KCF DOCUMENT

Kosovo has defined and established six key competences. The competences envisaged by the Kosovo Curriculum Framework (KCF) are derived from the general goals of pre-university education. They determine the main learning outcomes, which students must achieve in a progressive and sustainable manner in the pre-university education system (MEST, 2016a). The key competences and learning outcomes in the KCF document are linked to the eight European Key Competences for lifelong learning (European Commission, 2006).

Key learning competences	Student	Final results
Communication and expression competence	to become	Effective communicator
Thinking competence		Creative and critical thinker
Learning competence		Successful student
Competence for life, work and environment		Productive contributor
Personal competence		Healthy individual
Civic competence		Responsible citizen

Table 4. Key competences of the KCF

Source (MEST, 2016a): Curriculum Framework for Pre-University Education of the Republic of Kosovo

Key competences in the KCF document are broken down into sub-competences, which are interconnected to produce the final result at the end of pre-university education. In addition, the learning outcomes for the respective competence are determined based on the sub-competences of each key competence. They show what students will learn and are able to do at the end of pre-university education.

An example of the definition and placement of sub-competences and learning outcomes for competences in the KCF document, is reflected in the following table. This example refers to the Competence of communication and expression.

Communication and expression competence	Learning outcomes for the competence of Communication and Expression
Sub-competences • Fair communication in the mother tongue • Communication in foreign languages • Cultural expression through symbols, signs and other artistic expressions • Communication through information technology • Commitment and contribution to productive dialogue • Respecting the rules of communication • Giving and receiving feedback in a constructive way • Expression of tolerance and sympathy in communication • Initiation of constructive actions	Upon completion of upper secondary education, students should be able to: • Communicate and express themselves through languages, symbols, signs and codes • Speak, listen, read and write and express themselves in their mother tongue and in (at least) one other foreign language • Engage in and contribute to respectful and productive dialogue • Give and accept feedback in a constructive and creative way • Respect the general rules of communication/interaction and be creative at the same time • Use information and ICT programs during their learning process and when performing school tasks • Use ICT and the media effectively and responsibly as important tools of information, communication, and interaction in the digital age

Table 5. Example of the definition of sub-competences and learning outcomes for competences

Source (MEST, 2016a): Curriculum Framework for Pre-University Education of the Republic of Kosovo

This approach of breaking down the key competences into sub-competences and into learning outcomes for competences, is applied to the six key competences defined by the KCF document.

According to the principles of the curriculum, the competence development approach should ensure: (i) equal opportunities for all students for learning based on individual needs; (ii) fair assessment of the level of achievement of competences by the student, and (iii) accurate assessment of the quality of education offered at the country, municipality, or school level.

KEY COMPETENCES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES IN THE CORE CURRICULA

The development of competences is one of the five organizational principles of the Core Curricula (CC) for three formal levels of pre-university education in Kosovo. The organizational principle for a curriculum defines the main directions that must be taken into account both in the field of programme design and developing teaching activities in the classroom (Karameta, 2014).

In the development of the CC, the main directions to be considered are the principles of the curriculum, the

description of the curricular levels, and in particular the key competences and their results defined by the KCF. Similarly, the learning outcomes are broken down in the CC, and are specific to each grade and curriculum area. They show what students will learn and are able to do at the end of a curriculum level. In addition, they guide teachers and schools to develop independent planning of content and learning processes in order to achieve learning outcomes (Boshtrakaj, 2018).

In the CC, the breakdown of the competences defined in the KCF into learning outcomes of competences for the curricular level, is preceded by a summary description of each key competence. An example of the description of a key competence in the CC/1 is as follows:

Communication and expression skills (Effective Communicator): For children and young people to develop as personalities, learn and participate actively in society, it is important that they understand the messages addressed to them and express them adequately through languages, symbols, signs, codes and artistic forms. To communicate effectively, students are encouraged to independently, critically and creatively use the means and opportunities of communication and expression (MEST, 2016b).

The description of key competences is applied to all six core competences in each CC. Based on the KCF, the learning outcomes of the competences have been developed and established for each curriculum level (LOCS).

Table 6 illustrates a sample of learning outcomes for the Communication and Expression Competence ('Effective Communicator'), for the four curricular stages in primary and lower secondary education. These are only the first of eight learning outcomes for this competence, expected to be acquired by all students upon completion of the relevant curriculum stage.

Core Curriculum for primary education		**Core Curriculum for lower secondary education**	
Stage 1: *Basic acquisition* (Preparatory grade, grade I and II - age 5-8 years)	**Stage 2:** *Reinforcement and development* (Grade III, IV, V - age 8-11 years)	**Stage 3:** *Further development and orientation* (Grade 6,7 - age 11-13)	**Stage 4:** *Reinforcement and orientation* (Grade 8,9 - age 13-15)
Learning outcomes of the key competences for the curriculum stage - Communication and expression competence - Effective communicator			
1. Reads aloud a previously unread text of at least half a page on an age-appropriate topic. 2**..., 8.**	1. Reads aloud a previously unread literary or non-literary text. 2**..., 8.**	1. Reads fluently, with appropriate intonation, a specific narrative, descriptive, scientific, or journalistic text, etc., and comments on it orally or in writing as requested. 2**..., 8.**	1. Correctly transmits the data collected on a specific topic, in textual, numerical, verbal, electronic or any other form of expression. 2**..., 8.**

Table 6. Learning outcomes for competences according to the curriculum stage
Source: Core Curricula for ISCED 1 and 2 (MEST, 2016b & MEST, 2016c)

This approach of defining LOCS in the CC, as presented in Table 4, has been applied to all six key competences.

The LOCS established in the CC express the essential requirements of the mastery of key competences upon completion of a certain curriculum stage (e.g., Stage 1 – Grade 2) and they promote further integration of curriculum areas, in relation to developing the key competences as determined by the curriculum framework (MEST, 2016/b). In principle, they determine the focus and organization of teaching, learning and assessment aimed at developing key competences.

According to Boshtrakaj (2018), the way of defining and organizing LOCS in the CC has not been accompanied by the definition of the approach and evaluation criteria of certain competences for the curriculum stage.

> *Implementation of the competence-based approach can hardly be achieved if the relevant competences are not properly reflected in the assessment systems.*

This aspect has not been addressed at the necessary level in the curricula, especially in the CC and other documents that support implementation of the curriculum.

Kosovo

LEARNING OUTCOMES IN THE CURRICULAR AREAS

The seven curricular areas defined by the KCF (Table 1), are the common elements of the core curricula, and represent the essence of their development. The learning outcomes are determined for each curriculum area of the respective CC. They guide the teaching and learning process towards the development of key competences. Learning outcomes for curricular areas provide:

- Competence development through a common set of interrelated learning experiences.
- The connection/coherence between subjects and learning activities, which are carried out within a field of the curriculum, with the aim of integrating the knowledge, skills and attitudes these subjects enable.
- The implementation of new teaching practices at the class/school level (CC/ISCED 1).

The concepts of each curriculum area in the CC are defined and described, and are common for all subject curricula of the relevant field. Then, in the CC, the learning outcomes of the curriculum area (LOA) have been defined for each curriculum level. These learning outcomes must be achieved during two or three classes, and through the subject curricula of the relevant curriculum area.

Learning Outcomes of the curriculum Area (LOA) address the following elements:

- The knowledge, understanding and skills that must be developed;
- Attitudes and values that are expected to be developed;
- Skills that must be developed;
- Specific concepts.

Table 7 illustrates an example of the organization of the learning results of a curricular area, namely for the Language and communication area for stages 1 and 2, within which different elements of the results of the competences in the CC (ISCED 1) are reflected. Language and communication areas in primary and preparatory grades, based on the Curriculum Framework, contain the following subjects: mother tongue, first foreign language (English), and the Albanian language for students of non-Albanian communities.

Kosovo

Stage 1 Preparatory and grades, I, II (age 5-8)	**Stage 2** Grades III, IV, V (age 8-11)
I. Knowledge, understanding and skills to develop the student in: listening and speaking; reading; and writing	
Listening and speaking - Student: 1. Exchanges ideas during discussions, asks questions and gives answers using simple words and sentences; 2. **...**	**Listening and speaking -** Student: 1. Uses more complex forms of language to communicate with others on the content and purpose of texts; **2. ...**
Reading - Student: 1. Uses strategies to read simple texts with pleasure, learns new words; unknown words, sentences as well as simple elements of language; 2. **...**	**Reading** - Student: 1. Uses strategies to understand literary or non-literary materials: poetry, prose, letter, biography, request, report, commercial, etc. by identifying levels of reading comprehension and making the distinction between figurative and non-figurative language; 2. **...**
Writing - Student: 1. Describes texts based on models and writes in order to communicate his/her ideas with others through words, sentences and short text; 2. **...**	**Writing** - Student: 1. Practices a certain form of literary or non-literary text; 2. **...**
II. Attitudes and values developed by the student Student: Communicates well; Takes part in discussion; Cooperates; ...	
III. Skills developed by the student Student: Communicates; Listens; Speaks; Writes; Reads; Comprehends; ...	
IV. Specific concepts Verbal and non-verbal communication; Sounds, words, groups of words, sentences;	

Table 7. Example of Learning outcomes for the Language and communication area for stages 1 and 2
Source: Core Curricula for ISCED 1 (MEST, 2016b)

The same approach of breaking down the learning outcomes for the curriculum areas has been applied to all curriculum areas, for all three CCs of formal education levels. In addition to the LOA, for each curriculum area, instructions for teaching methodology, assessment instructions and instructions for using learning resource materials are provided.

The descriptions in the curriculum areas and in the methodological guidelines focus on the fact that each curriculum area can contribute to the development of each competence. It also contributes to the achievement of all learning outcomes of key competences, by achieving the learning outcomes of the curriculum areas. This has been reflected as a special challenge in implementing the curriculum and has been viewed as an additional workload for teachers during curriculum planning (Mehmeti et al., 2022).

The Core Curriculum determines that verification of the level of achievement of learning outcomes and the acquisition of key competences at the level of a stage and curricular area, should be performed by the council of teachers who implemented the teaching programme of a curricular stage. This should be conducted through the assessment at the end of a curricular stage; at the end of grades 2, 5, 7 and 9. However, there is still no national evidence for the practice of carrying out an assessment of the curricular stage, neither for measuring the level of achievement of learning outcomes by students or the use of assessment results to support student learning.

LEARNING OUTCOMES IN SUBJECT CURRICULA – SUBJECT PROGRAMMES

The subject curricula (SC) contain the learning outcomes that students must achieve within each subject and learning topics throughout a class/school year (MEST, 2016a). There is no direct correlation of SC with learning outcomes for the six key competences. A direct connection of SC is only made with field concepts and with Learning Outcomes for curriculum Areas (LOA). An example is provided in Table 8.

Concept	Topics	Subject learning outcomes for the topic
Literary and non-literary texts	Topic 1 – Starter Household chores Leisure activities In the city People I know and their jobs Numbers 1-20 (cardinal & ordinal)	Listens to and reads dialogues focusing on household chores and answers follow-up questions individually, in pairs or groups; Listens to and reads short texts describing a city and paraphrases key information; Scans for specific information while listening and reading guided by keywords or questions; Role-plays different scenes depicting the characteristics of different jobs; Identifies family members through a family tree, story or video and introduces their jobs using vocabulary taught in the previous grade; Writes a paragraph about leisure activities; Listens to short dialogues and/or songs reinforcing the vocabulary in focus; Identifies, pronounces and correctly spells numbers 1 – 20 (both cardinal and ordinal) presented through pictures, stories, short texts or videos.

Table 8. Example of setting learning outcomes for the subject of English language - grade 5

Source: Subject curriculum for the fifth grade (Grade 5) (MEST, 2021)

The same approach has been applied to all subjects included in the English language curriculum - grade 5. This means the same approach is applied to all subjects and topics taught throughout a class/school year.

In the subject curricula, there are significant differences in the depth and breadth of the requirements within the learning outcomes of the subject, as well as in the number of learning outcomes, even in cases where the teaching time is the same. This indicates a lack of standardization in this aspect, despite the fact that SC also have their own specifics that must be maintained and supported.

In relation to the development of key competences and learning outcomes for competences, the approach to subject curriculum design is debatable, since the connection and specific coverage of the results of the competences is not specified in any curriculum. Also, competences are only evaluated implicitly, and solely to the extent that they are expressed within certain subjects (Boshtrakaj, 2018).

However, findings by Mehmeti et al. (2022), show that there is a correlation between competences and the SC. This is reflected in the general methodological teaching instructions for their implementation, which are provided for all class subjects (Mehmeti et al., 2022).

In each document where the SC of a class is integrated, it is noted that: *Teachers, through the teaching of each subject, must make efforts to develop the competences for students that are determined for the curriculum stage* (MEST,2020, Grade 9). However, according to Tahirsylaj & Fazliu (2001) addressing key competences in subject curricula (SC), in the form of teaching methodology guidelines, does not provide strong arguments for implementing competence-based curricula in Kosovo. This is because we lack evidence from classroom settings and thus rely exclusively on the analysis of policy documents (Tahirsylaj & Fazliu, 2021).

4. Inclusion of cross-curricular topics/issues in curriculum documents

According to curriculum documents, the development of key competences should be achieved through cross-curricular topics. In the context of the Kosovo curriculum, the inclusion of cross-curricular topics in the curricula (in the CC and SC) is regulated by the CC for formal education levels.

INCLUSION OF CROSS-CURRICULAR TOPICS/ISSUES IN THE CORE CURRICULUM

In each CC document (ISCED 1, ISCED 2, ISCED 3), cross-curricular topics/issues are included in the chapter *General Methodology – Guidelines for Cross-curricular Issues*. According to the regulations and instructions in the CC, cross-curricular topics/issues do not belong to just one curriculum area or subject. They integrate curricular areas and teaching subjects in order to support students to understand and correctly interpret the social and natural processes that occur in society (MEST, 2016b).

The cross-curricular topics articulated in the CC, according to the rationale for their inclusion, are considered to be current topics of particular interest to the individual and society. Therefore, they contain the same titles in each CC, and include:

- Education for democratic citizenship
- Education for peace
- Globalization and interdependence
- Media education, and
- Education for sustainable development.

For cross-curricular topics included in the CC there are no defined learning outcomes; they are only described in each of the CCs. Based on descriptions in the CC, they determine the coverage of aspects that must be integrated when designing subject curricula and teaching planning.

An example of the description of cross-curricular topics in the CC, provided in the following section, show aspects of the coverage of a cross-curricular topic, such as the topic Media Education in CC/1:

Media education: This refers to the use of media for providing new and correct information, creating and using information, communicating through traditional media and digital, media criticism, media language and its impact on society, people's expectations about media and its fair and secure use, etc. The issue of media education includes content related to traditional and digital media, television, radio, film, newspapers, magazines, the Internet, pictures, commercials and video games, media ethics, etc. (MEST, 2016b).

This descriptive approach of the cross-curricular topic Media Education has also been applied to other cross-curricular topics, in all documents of the CC, with minor differences that characterize the corresponding level of education.

INCLUSION OF CROSS-CURRICULAR TOPICS/ISSUES IN SUBJECT CURRICULA

Based on CC decisions and guidelines, cross-curricular topics/issues are set in each subject curriculum. They are included in the chapter *Guidelines for the implementation of cross-curricular issues*. Cross-curricular topics set in SC are not defined in the learning results, and don't have a direct connection with the key competences.

The special feature of integrating cross-curricular topics in the framework of each subject curriculum is their description. Curriculum designers have made efforts to address the connection with the relevant subject curriculum through the descriptions of the instructions. In some cases, they are directly related to the topics of the relevant subject, in some cases a general language of the instructions is used, such as:

Media education – can be linked to the topic: Public sphere and equal participation, but also to the topic Use of eco-friendly technology for the environment. Using applications on smartphones, then navigating through websites to learn green technology is part of both media and environmental education (MEST, 2020 (Grade 9, SC: Civic education)).

Media education: From the perspective of the arts, this includes issues of the fair use of technology and media for the creation and distribution of artistic works, but also the education of aesthetic taste for art represented in the media..., (MEST, 2020 (Grade 9, SC: Musical Art).

The way in which cross-curricular topics are addressed in subject curricula does not sufficiently justify the purpose of their inclusion. They do not help or guide teachers and schools sufficiently in planning and implementing educational processes to enable the development of competences and the achievement of curriculum expectations (Mehmeti, et al., 2022).

5. Conclusions

The findings presented in this article show that Kosovo has made modest, necessary progress in developing curricula based on key competences and learning outcomes for competences. The drafting of the Core Curricula for the formal levels of education is an innovation in the curriculum reform in progress. This is seen as an attempt to change the curriculum paradigm to focus on what students will learn and be able to do at the end of a certain period of time, a curriculum stage, and not just the end of one grade.

Competences and learning outcomes play an essential role in developing curricula in Kosovo. Three approaches were applied with regards to the format, depth and breadth of key competences and learning outcomes in curriculum documents. They differ, depending on the regulatory and defining aspects of curriculum documents (MEST, 2016a/b/c):

- The KCF document including learning outcomes for each key competence upon completion of pre-university education;
- The CC documents including learning outcomes for each key competence and curriculum areas for each of the curriculum key stages;
- The subject curricula (subject programmes) including learning outcomes for each subject (for each grade, starting from the preparatory grade through grade 12).

Despite efforts to ensure the connection between the competences and the learning outcomes in the curricula, this has not been done in the right way. Thus, MESTI missed an opportunity to ensure the development of integrated and interdisciplinary curriculum content, and a learning process that reflects students' interests and experiences.

Cross-curricular themes were devised and integrated in the curricula of the education systems with the purpose of promoting holistic student development beyond traditional learning (OECD, 2020). In the context of Kosovo's subject curricula, the approach to cross-curricular topics for competence development, which has not been sufficiently developed, does not ensure this has been applied to traditional teaching.

Due to this approach of defining learning outcomes, impacted by traditional teaching methods, the process of teaching and evaluating students continues to be based on teaching content and textbooks, and not on competences and learning outcomes (Boshtrakaj, 2018; Mehmeti et al., 2019). This shows that students cannot develop the key competences without a special focus on the implementation of the curriculum, a process which should receive the appropriate institutional care and attention.

The main findings presented in this article suggest a review and a determination of aspects not sufficiently developed in curriculum documents. The findings also indicate the importance of and need for research into the practices of working with students in the classroom, to determine how teachers translate the competences and learning outcomes into learning activities for students.

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Luxembourg: fact box

This article focuses on:
☒ Primary education
☐ Secondary education

In Luxembourg **the teaching time** in primary education comprises 28 lessons of 50 minutes per week. There are 36 weeks of school per year. In total, in primary education there are 1,008 lessons per year.

In Luxembourg the Grand-Ducal legal decree forms the basis of the current Luxembourg Plan d'études (curriculum). It contains three annexes. In order to follow the proposed distinction between core and full curriculum, we consider the core curriculum as the formal, state approved curriculum. Annex 1 (competence levels), Annex 2 (Programmes: competences to be developed, performance examples and recommended contents) as well as Annex 3 (teaching time tables) are therefore part of the core curriculum. The full curriculum, which in fact "requires up to 100% of learning time", may include the operational curriculum (in the classrooms) as well as the experiential curriculum (experienced by the students).

Luxembourg has **central examinations** for French, German and Mathematics in the last year of primary school.

	Core curriculum	Full curriculum
Subjects/topics/key competences	The Luxembourgish language and language awareness, Literacy and the German language, the French language, Logical and numerical reasoning and mathematics, Discovery of the world with all the senses, Science education, Natural science and the humanities, Body expression psychomotricity, sports and health, Creative expression, aesthetic and cultural awareness in the field of plastic arts and music, Living together and values. In addition to these developmental and learning domains with their respective subject-specific competences, there are also so-called transversal competences and media literacy, as well as descriptors illustrating the expected performance & content needed to develop these competences.	The core curriculum corresponds with the full curriculum in the sense that it is the formal curriculum. The full curriculum differs locally, based on the learning materials used in the classroom (in Luxembourg, the freedom of teaching materials is mentioned in the law text).
Amount of detail	The core curriculum includes competences which are detailed on four different levels (Level 1 to 4): • Knowledge and skills are described to some extent • There is no detailed learning path, however intermediate learning levels are defined Didactic guidelines and suggestions are part of a different annex in the legal decree (Annex 2).	The full curriculum includes: • A detailed learning path is to be constructed by the teacher based intermediate learning goals/ competence levels and the chosen learning materials
Who is involved in its development	The Ministry of Education, in consultation and collaboration with: politics, administration, school representatives, representation of teachers, representation of academics.	Schools and teachers.

Luxembourg: biographies

Martin Kracheel

Martin Kracheel earned a bachelor's degree as a teacher for Political Sciences and French Philology from the Freie Universität Berlin and studied Political Sciences at the Institute of European Studies at the Université Libre Bruxelles. He completed his master's degree in Learning and Development in Multilingual and Multicultural Context at the University of Luxembourg. After having worked as a scientific collaborator, he completed his PhD in Psychology at the Interdisciplinary Centre for Security, Reliability and Trust (SNT). Martin has published in various scientific fields such as early childhood education, mobility, psychology, and gamification. He has worked as a consultant, as a psychologist for children with specific needs and as Citymanager (Differdange, Luxembourg). In June 2022 he joined the Division of Curriculum Development at SCRIPT (Service de Coordination de la Recherche et de l'Innovation pédagogiques et technologiques) at the ministriy of national educaton, childhood and youth.

Halldor Halldorsson

Halldor Halldorsson holds a master's degree in English Literature from the University of Aberdeen. In 2002 he started working as an English Language Teacher in Luxembourg and took on additional responsbilities by becoming a teacher trainer in 2007.

As a member of various working groups, Halldor has been involved in several curriculum related projects, such as the reform aligning the lower secondary curriculum for English with the CEFR. Other projects included the development of English language tests, including a new school leaving exam for the classical stream of secondary school.

In 2019, Halldor joined the Division of Curriculum Development at SCRIPT and became its head in September 2021.

Renewing primary education in Luxembourg: a stakeholder-driven curriculum review

Abstract

The Covid 19 pandemic further emphasised some limitations of the current curriculum ('Plan d'études') for Luxembourgish primary education. The 'Plan d'études 2025' (PE 2025) project was launched in June 2021 to address these shortcomings through a comprehensive review and reform process.
This paper focuses on the review process, which uses a participatory consultation approach to gather cross-sectional input from diverse stakeholders including pupils, parents, teachers, administrators, unions and policymakers. The transparent consultation process aims to define challenges and co-create potential solutions, whilst establishing or strengthening links between the various stakeholders. Its main findings provide the basis for a shared and dynamic curriculum, adapted to today's ever-changing world, while also aiming at communal ownership of said curriculum. The outcomes of the review inform the reform process, which will propose specific changes to the curriculum, both in relation to its form and content. Finally, the paper provides some preliminary conclusions about such a participatory curriculum consultation process in a multilingual European country.

1. Rationale for the review process and outline

In the context of this curriculum review and reform project, the Covid 19 pandemic has, both in real terms as well as on a purely emotional level, represented a potent catalyst for change. However, it was not the single most important driver for change.

Even prior to the pandemic shining a spotlight on some of its shortcomings, the current curriculum for primary education was straining under diverse stressors, emanating from both inside and outside (e.g. see below: European schools and teacher unions) the education system.

Before identifying and commenting on these stressors and prior to describing the review process, it is necessary to briefly describe Luxembourg's highly complex and ever-evolving language situation, as well the current curriculum context. Subsequently, we will provide a brief comparison of the current curriculum with its predecessor, to sketch out proposed foci of the new curriculum ('Plan d'études 2025' hereinafter: 'PE 2025'). We will then describe the participatory consultation process that drives the PE 2025, focusing on the involvement of different stakeholders, and our data collection using Collaborative Laboratories (CoLabs), before explaining our data analysis.

Finally, we will share some of the lessons we have learnt so far about our approach and the overall process and provide a brief look to the future.

LUXEMBOURG'S MULTILINGUAL CONTEXT

Luxembourg's multilingual context is by no means a recent historical invention or development.[1] However, recent societal and demographic developments have underscored the challenge that this context poses to the existent education system. Luxembourg has three official languages (Luxembourgish, German and French), each of which is represented and taught at different stages of primary school. Legally, Luxembourgish, French and German coexist at arguably the same level. However, the cultural capital associated with these languages in primary education differs starkly from their respective presence, reputation and importance in society at large. Cultural capital fluctuations in secondary school further complicate the situation, but that is beyond the scope of this article.

In pre-school (ages 3/4 – 6), Luxembourgish is used as a spoken language of integration and thus to prepare children for the multilingualism of Luxembourg schools and society.[2] Linguistic diversity is also recognised and appreciated in pre-school[3]. German is used for early literacy, i.e. learning to read and write, at the start of primary school at the age of 6. A recent change in educational policy, motivated in part by the continuously growing presence of French in society, resulted in it being introduced a year earlier, though with a primary focus on its spoken form. Thus, German and French are introduced (albeit with a different focus) in the same year. Prior to this change, pupils in Luxembourg may not have encountered the French language (in its written form) in a formal schooling context until the third year of primary education.

1 For further explanation, please refer to: Kirsch, C., & Seele, C. (2022). Early language education in Luxembourg. In *Handbook of Early Language Education*, pp. 789-792.

2 The Luxembourgish language is considered an important integration factor. Early introduction to this language from the age of three provides more space and time to learn the language especially for children who have little or no contact with Luxembourgish at home. This is supposed to create a foundation for the acquisition of German in elementary school, even though this has been discussed controversially (Cf. https://bildungsbericht.lu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/BB21_Ertel-et-al._D.pdf).

3 At the same time, the early daily and playful encounter with French in pre-and primary school allows natural access to the language, especially for children who do not speak French in the family. Cf. https://www.enfancejeunesse.lu/de/documents/kinder-entdecken-die-sprachen/.

Over the past decades, a constant influx of foreign nationals, whose children have access to (free) compulsory education, has further enriched the multilingual situation in Luxembourg, while simultaneously increasing the pressure on the traditional language curriculum. While the societal aim of near-simultaneous trilingualism may still make sense for some, especially those who speak at least one of the target languages at home, it is less relevant for students who speak none of these languages at home. [4] Consequently, their educational success in the traditional public schooling system may be jeopardised even before it begins.

This is relevant for the curriculum, as the acquisition and mastery of Luxembourgish, German and French accounts for around 40-50% of the total learning time in primary school and language is always closely linked to issues of equality, accessibility, and inclusion.

NEW POLICIES – NEW LEGISLATION

As hinted at earlier, internal policy initiatives and associated legislative changes have exerted their fair share of pressure on the existing curriculum. One important policy to counter the almost deterministic perspective for children coming to Luxembourg from abroad was the introduction of public, yet fully accredited, European schools.

THE CASE OF EUROPEAN SCHOOLS

In Luxembourgish public European schools, teaching and learning occurs in accordance and alignment with the curricula of the *European schools* introduced in the early days of the European Community in 1953. Since 2017, a total of six fully accredited European schools have opened their doors in Luxembourg. The European schools' different pedagogic approaches to both second and foreign language learning, as well as the associated curriculum progression stand in marked contrast to the traditional language learning model applied by regular public primary schools.[5]

SCRIPT AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Although the Service de Coordination de la Recherche et de *l'Innovation Pédagogiques et Technologiques* has played an important part in driving innovation and implementing educational policies in Luxembourg's educational landscape for 30 years, the division for curriculum development was not created until 2017. Since its inception, the division for the curriculum development's mission has been to coordinate, facilitate and steer initiatives and policies in the domain of curriculum development.

The subsequent 2018 law on curriculum development created the *Commissions Nationales de l'Enseignement Fondamental* (CNEF)[6] for each learning area defined by the law of 2009. The mission of these entirely new bodies is to advise the minister on all aspects related to teaching and learning in primary education, not least the 'plan d'études de l'enseignement fondamental', i.e., the core curriculum.

After extensive online consultation and discussions facilitated by SCRIPT's division for curriculum development, the curricular boards (CNEF) published and presented their findings, their position, and a wish list for necessary curriculum changes and improvements. As a result, the Minister of Education initiated a broader participatory consultation, review, and reform process involving all stakeholders. Ever since the Grand ducal decree of 2011, which established the current curriculum, there have been educational policies and initiatives requiring the modification, replacement, or addition of elements in the curriculum. However, aligning the legal framework with these developments remains a significant challenge.

2. A very brief history of Luxembourg's Plan d'études

The current framework for teaching and learning in primary school in Luxembourg is the Plan d'études. Its origins can be traced back to the law of 1912, which established a national framework for education and laid the foundation for the country's modern education system with an emphasis on compulsory education, setting out the first guidelines for the organization and content of the curriculum. In 1989, the curriculum was changed by extending compulsory education, emphasizing multilingualism, promoting student-centred teaching methods, updating the curriculum content and focusing on professional teacher development. The last major reform of the primary education curriculum took place between 2009 and 2011.

THE REFORM OF 2009 AND THE CURRENT CURRICULUM (2011)

A new Plan d'études was introduced in the wake of the new school law of 2009. This brought with it a completely new, more holistic approach to student learning and the assessment of their performance. In 2011, a decree implemented the curricular elements of the law from 2009. Such a new curriculum, marking among other things the active translation of key aspects of the law into the classroom, was published by grand-ducal decree and represented a significant shift in the nature of Luxembourgish curricula. While previous iterations had largely focused on both input and didactics, the new curriculum signalled a further instance of the 'competence turn' in Luxembourg's educational landscape[7].

Article 1 of the 2011 decree defines the Plan d'études as follows: "The curriculum for primary education consists of three distinct parts, which are annexed. The competence

4 55.8% of children in elementary education are Luxembourg nationals. However, only 32.3% speak Luxembourgish as a first language at home. Overall (cf. Muller et al. 2018: 35), about half the children do not speak any of the three official national languages as their first language at home. Cf. *https://edustat.script.lu/sites/default/files/inline-files/2023_SCRIPT_Enseignement_fondamental_Flyer_EN_WEB_0.pdf*.

5 Cf. *https://www.eursc.eu/en/European-Schools/principles*.

6 *https://www.script.lu/fr/activites/curriculum/commissions-nationales-de-lenseignement-fondamental-cn-ef*.

7 Cf. Vare, Paul. "The Competence Turn." *Competences in Education for Sustainable Development: Critical Perspectives*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022. 11-18.

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levels, the curricula and the weekly timetables are set out in the three annexes. The three annexes are an integral part of this regulation."[8]

The current curriculum from 2011 is divided into developmental and learning areas and looks at children's development and their abilities. These are[9]: the Luxembourgish language and language awareness, Literacy and the German language, the French language, Logical and numerical reasoning and mathematics, Discovery of the world with all the senses, Science education, Natural science and the humanities, Body expression psychomotricity, sports and health, Creative expression, Aesthetic and cultural awareness in the field of plastic arts and music, Living together and values, Moral and social education.

In addition to these domains of development and learning with their respective subject-specific competences, there are also so-called transversal competences and Media education. The transversal competences are divided into thinking skills - or Information processing competence, Learning to learn, Intrapersonal attitudes and Emotional attitudes, while Media education does not feature any sub-categories.

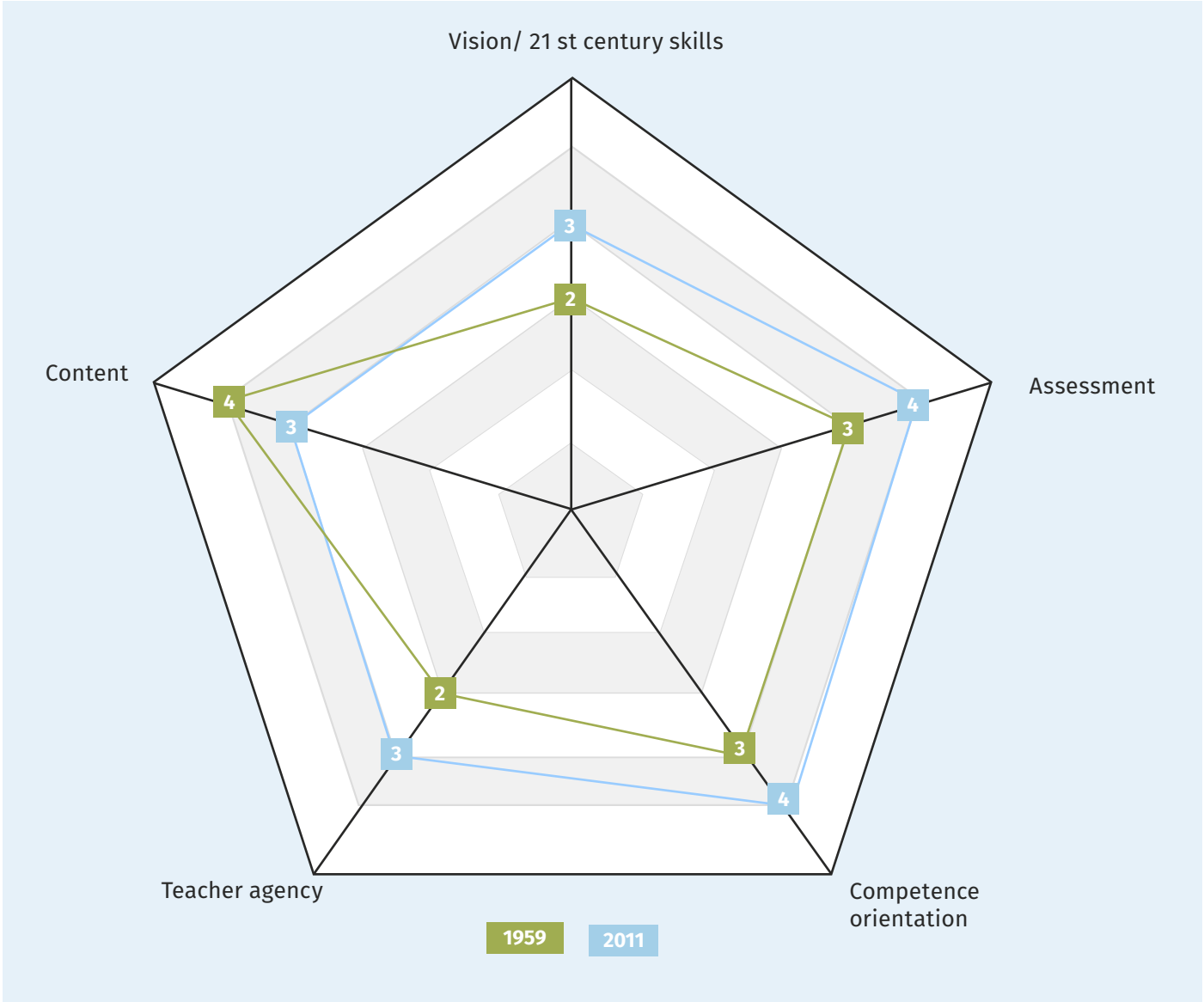

Figure 1: A metaphorical comparison of the former (1989) and the current (2011) curriculum.

8 Translations into English are provided by the authors.
9 Translations into English are provided by the authors.

The current curriculum's focus on competences has changed the way we look at learning and the co-construction of knowledge. Whereas the 1989 Plan d'études was rather content-oriented, the current Plan d'études defines learning outcomes and recommended content while leaving it to teachers to choose materials and design the exact learning paths.

The PE 2025 project faces the challenge of building on the individual and respective merits of both the 1989 and 2011 curricula. It aims to incorporate a contemporary outlook that addresses the needs of present-day students in the society of tomorrow, while also possessing the ability to adjust to societal changes compared to its predecessors.

CRITIQUE OF THE CURRENT CURRICULUM

Critical public discourse is an essential part of modern democracies. This also applies to (school) education. Three points of discussion are worth mentioning. The first is the (re) production of inequalities by way of the education system, of which the curriculum is an essential component. The second relates to the discussion of what needs to be included in the curriculum. A more recent, third point relates to the suggestion that children should be more physically active and the need to spend time outdoors has gained traction in the wake of new societal challenges such as climate change, but also because of our increasingly sedentary lifestyle and associated problems such as rising levels of child obesity.

Inequalities

From a perspective of equal opportunities and access to education, addressing the disparities highlighted in Luxembourg's education system in the curriculum is crucial. Currently, school outcomes and future educational trajectories are often determined at a very early stage. This calls not only for targeted interventions but also for structural changes. These include adjustments to the curriculum for the first years of both Cycles 1 and 2, ensuring fair and inclusive educational opportunities for all students, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds or language skills.[10]

Full curriculum and/or back to the essentials

The national union of teachers SNE/CGFP states that "Existing curricula should be reviewed to refocus on core competences and content, and the necessary adaptation of the syllabus should be made following this review."[11] With regards to the new subject of coding introduced at primary school level, in a press conference[12] the union asked whether it is "at all possible to add new content to current programmes that are already well-filled?".

The teachers union claims that even though "coding could be wonderfully useful in mathematics lessons, for example, and that synergies could be generated there, it can be observed in recent years that more and more tasks and more and more content are being handed over to the school. Perhaps now is the time to … get rid of all the ballast and to concentrate on the essentials." [13] They further point out that from their perspective "It becomes problematic when we keep piling up the (school) programmes without removing anything. At the moment, the teacher is almost facing a 'Mission Impossible to get through the programme in its entirety."

Here, we can grasp the perception of the curriculum as a compulsory programme/syllabus of which all aspects must be covered, and all boxes must be ticked.

Outdoor learning

The 'Kanner virun d'Dier' collective ('Let's get the Kids outside') argues that "the current Plan d'études for primary school … does not explicitly require taking children outdoors" and that " it is normal for many 1st cycle classes and most 2nd cycle classes to leave the school building, however that 3rd and 4th cycle classes leave the school building much less frequently."[14]

Overall, society's needs and expectations of a curriculum have changed since the last major reform process in 2009.

THE NEED FOR A NEW CURRICULUM

Thus it becomes clear that a variety of factors sparked the launch of the PE 2025 project. Key contributing elements include: the curriculum regulation of 2011, the establishment of the National Commissions for Educational Programming (CNEF), findings from the National Comparative Studies of Educational Attainment (EPSTAN),[15] the introduction of new French textbooks affording a novel method for teaching basic French, the advent of a new subject named Life and Society (Vie et Société-Vieso)[16] , as well as the incorporation of coding instruction in primary schools.[17].

While schools were closed due to the Covid 19 crisis, and pupils had to either study at home or attend school every other week, there was no consensus on what was considered essential in the current PE.

Hence, it became clear that the published curriculum lacks an overall vision relating to the overarching objectives of primary education. It also lacks an explicit statement relating to the pedagogic and didactic principles informing and guiding all learning activities, as well as a framework of learning environments (classroom, school garden etc).

10 The National Education Report of 2018 emphasized the significance of early competence development in Cycle 2.1 (1st grade) and Cycle 3.1 (3rd grade) in Luxembourg. The Épreuves Standardisées (ÉpStan) studies, designed to assess student achievements and competences, revealed initial competency differences among Luxembourgish students. These disparities were further exacerbated in Cycle 3.1, particularly for students from socially disadvantaged families with a migration background and a non-German/Luxembourgish first language, who performed lower in German reading comprehension and mathematics. Subsequent studies in 2021 confirmed these findings. Cf. Nationaler Bildungsbericht 2021 p. 44-54.

11 *https://www.sne.lu/cdch/cdch2020.pdf*. P.3.

12 *https://sne.lu/infomail/20200925_PK_Luxdidac_2020.pdf*.

13 Ibid p. 6-7.

14 http://www.sne.lu/bulletin/bul0421.pdf. p. 10-14. Also *https://www.forum.lu/article/bildung-an-der-frischen-luft-oder-kanner-virun-ddier/*; https://www.wort.lu/de/politik/neues-kollektiv-fordert-die-natur-verstaerkt-als-lernort-zu-nutzen-60883e1bde135b92364d5f98.

15 Fischbach, A., Colling, J., Levy, J., Cate, P. T., Rosa, C., Krämer, C., … & Wollschläger, R. (2021). Befunde aus dem nationalen Bildungsmonitoring ÉpStan vor dem Hintergrund der COVID-19-Pandemie. *Nationaler Bildungsbericht Luxemburg 2021*, 141-157.

16 *https://men.public.lu/fr/publications/education-citoyennete/information-generales/vie-societe-complement-plan-etudes.html.*

17 *https://men.public.lu/content/dam/men/catalogue-publications/dossiers-de-presse/2020-2021/201012-coding-ecole.pdf.*

In June 2021, the seven programme commissions (CNEF) & the College of Primary School Directors sent their opinions on the current Plan d'études to the Minister of Education. The ground was prepared for the review and reform project.

3. The launch of the participatory consultation process for the curriculum review

The consultation process, which began during the 2021-2022 school year, has now reached the stage of analysing and condensing the many opinions and points of view of the various actors involved, and has produced a broad consensus on the need to review and adapt the Plan d'études.

METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Involving different target groups and experts allows a multi-perspective description and analysis of current needs, experiences and perspectives on PE2025.

We follow an open approach based on scientific methodology, which aims at the inclusion of different knowledge content from practice and the non-scientific field. In general, the challenges and thus the main points that guide our actions are complexity management, contextualisation, transparency, integration and reflexivity.

A COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH FOR NATIONAL CURRICULUM REVIEW

The 'Plan d'études 2025' project was officially launched on 10 June 2021. Several National Curriculum Programme Commissions and the Board of Regional Directors of Primary Schools presented their opinions on the current curriculum to the Minister of Education, pointing out various aspects that needed to be adapted (see above in this paper). The pandemic had highlighted some of these aspects. The Minister of Education then announced that he would support a participatory consultation process on a new Plan d'études to be adapted in the future. PE 2025 is a bottom-up project committed to a systemic approach, based on the continuous involvement and active participation of actors at all levels. To achieve this, the Curriculum Division relies on interaction with the various educational institutions in Luxembourg and a common focus on results.

Thijs and van den Akker (2009, p. 16) and Visscher-Voerman & Gustafson (2004) propose four ideal, typical approaches to curriculum development: instrumental, communicative, artistic and pragmatic. We situate our participatory approach between the communicative and the pragmatic. In line with Thijs and van den Akker (2009, p. 17), we believe that "building relationships with stakeholders and soliciting the input of others involved is crucial..., the communicative approach starts with the more subjective perceptions and views of... the target group and other stakeholders. Design is seen as a social process in which the interested parties each have their own vision of the problem situation and the desired improvement. The best solution to the situation - i.e. the best design - is the one in which all parties involved reach a consensus. Therefore, deliberation and negotiation are at the heart of the design process." We are building on these values in our CoLabs, as the next section shows.

The reform approach initiated by the professional education actors will be translated into a curriculum-oriented approach in which pedagogy, content and, above all, the relevance of the educational programme to today's world of work and life will be central.

THE CONSULTATION PROCESSES

SCRIPT's Curriculum Department (Currix) has taken up this consultation process for a new Plan d'études and developed the approach. The first information meeting on the process and the planned CoLab workshops took place in January 2022.

> *The 'Plan d'études 2025' project is a transparent and participatory process in which the experiences of the professional world and of the various stakeholders (teachers, parents, students) in practice form the basis of the discussion.*

Therefore, the SCRIPT curriculum area offers workshops in the CoLab format (Collaborative Laboratories), an internationally tested form of collaboration. The 'collaborative labs' (CoLabs) are workshops organised by SCRIPT that bring together the people whom the project concerns. A CoLab serves to a) coordinate and collaborate between relevant stakeholders in an overarching and participatory approach to curricular processes, as well as to b) provide initial input for the elaboration of a set of specifications for the implementation of a specific project. [18]

The Currix acts as process stewards, preparing, moderating and coordinating the CoLab workshops, a crucial component of the curriculum review process. These workshops serve as a platform for gathering valuable input, which is subsequently synthesized into a comprehensive report published on www.curriculum.lu. By engaging in participatory curriculum development, these CoLabs play a vital role in advancing the professionalization of education in Luxembourg, aligned with SCRIPT's vision and values.

The primary goal of CoLabs is to enhance active exchange and cooperation among project participants, foster their participatory mindset and ultimately improve the coherence of curricular approaches. During our CoLabs, participants engaged in constructive and appreciative discussions. By facilitating this platform for exchange, we aim to reinforce the participants' sense of (professional) identity, whether as teachers or as active learning (organization) participants such as pupils or parents, within the broader curricular process. We refer to this empowerment of teachers as 'teacher agency' and to the engagement of students as 'active learning (organization) participants'.

18 Compare: Zbinden-Bühler (Hrsg.) 2010: Berufe reformieren und weiterentwickeln. Ein handlungskompetenzorientierter Ansatz. Bern: hep-Verlag.

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COLABS AS A KEY ELEMENT

The process of a CoLab usually consists of five phases. In the first phase, the existing context (the current curriculum etc.) and previous work is presented and classified. Each CoLab starts with an input presentation, referring to the actual situation in the educational landscape, as well as some scientific/research background. The input presentation proposes certain definitions and thus a frame for unfolding discussions. In the second phase, the objectives of the project/CoLab are explained. The third phase consists of semi-structured, joint brainstorming. In the fourth and penultimate phase, a consensus is sought. And finally, in the fifth phase, a review and quality control take place to document and seek a consensus on what has been jointly discussed.

Each of the CoLab focused on one of the six specific topics, which were previously identified as key aspects for the review of the curriculum: a) Vision, b) Multilingualism, c) Transitions, d) Assessment e) Transversality/Cross-curricular learning and f) Formal and non-formal education. Additionally, there were two meetings with the Conseil supérieur de l'Éducation nationale (CSEN), an advisory body with members of various sectors that provides opinions on issues related to national education and the broader education system. The participants engaged constructively and collaboratively in the process of curriculum development and began a transversal thinking process across the 'boundaries' of their disciplines through the five phases of CoLab.

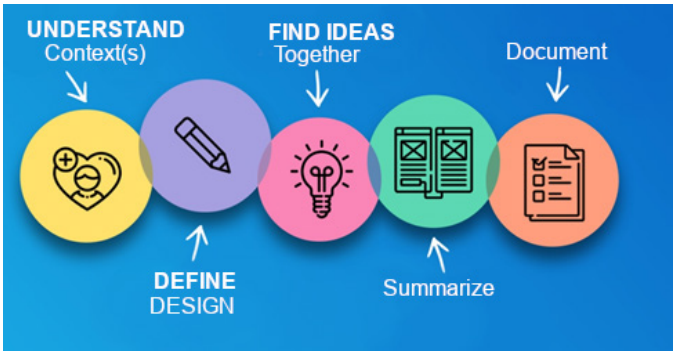


Figure 2: The five key phases of a CoLab.

The fifth phase of documentation (reports) takes place after the CoLab workshop itself, but is an integral part of the process to conclude the CoLab.

CROSS-SECTIONAL INPUT FROM DIVERSE STAKEHOLDERS

The three key consultation actors in the process of creating a new Plan d'études are the educational representatives or the pedagogical sector, the parents and, of course, the children themselves. Six different CoLab workshops targeted the educational sector in the school years 2021/2022 and 2022/2023. The educational field includes all teachers and educational/psychosocial staff in primary schools and competence centres, as well as secondary school teachers. The themes of these CoLab workshops are based on the feedback received from national representatives of the various stakeholders who have already commented on the Plan d'études before, during and after the Covid 19 crisis.

INVOLVEMENT OF PARENTS, CHILDREN AND PROFESSIONAL ACTORS

Parents

Parent representatives from primary and secondary education, as well as of children with special needs, attended a CoLab workshop in May 2022 in Luxembourg to discuss the 'Project Plan d'études 2025'. The CoLab workshop was jointly organised by the Parents' Council and the curriculum department of SCRIPT. The participants took part in workshops discussing which subjects and topics are useful or redundant, how to deal with language diversity in the curriculum, stages of transition for children and assessment in schools. A broad discussion was held bilingually or trilingually (Luxembourgish, French, English) in five workshops. Following the methodology of a CoLab described above, the results of these participatory and interactive workshops were collected in a report and published.[19]

Children

During the school years 2021-2022 and 2022- 2023, SCRIPT's Curriculum Development Department held workshops in 29 primary school classrooms across the country to capture children's ideas and aspirations for school and education. All regional directorates could register. The workshops were jointly prepared by facilitators of SCRIPT's Curriculum Development Department (Currix) together with the teachers.

The topics were prepared in an age-appropriate manner and discussed with the children during two school hours per workshop. Each workshop was organized and supervised by two staff members of Currix. The moderation team adapted discussions based on class, children's needs/wishes, and teacher input, such as discussing the transition to secondary school with upper level primary school classes.

The children were thus able to express their experiences with, in and around 'school' as actors, but also as experts on subjects and school content in participatory, interaction-oriented and semi-structured workshops.

Professional agents

The professional agents from a formal and non-formal setting contribute in a CoLab on different levels to the development of a national curriculum (macro, meso, micro level, cf. Thijs and van Akker 2009) and enrich these levels with their input. Following a system dynamic view, the participants engage in introspection, contemplating their role as both agents and catalysts in curriculum development. Simultaneously, they reflect on the primary objectives of their respective agency and the overall contribution of each actor to the curriculum.

THE ROLE OF SCRIPT'S CURRICULUM DIVISION (CURRIX)

Currix is a multidisciplinary team of social scientists, psychologists, teachers and other professionals with an

19 https://curriculum.lu/PE-colab-elteren.

interest and practical experience in (Luxembourg) school systems. The Currix plays an organising, moderating and critically reflective role. The Currix organised the CoLabs with educational staff and parent representatives. It also organised the workshops with the children. All participants, whether adults or children, participated voluntarily and the primary school (teachers) self-selected to participate throughout Luxembourg. In addition, Currix members attended all workshops as facilitators.

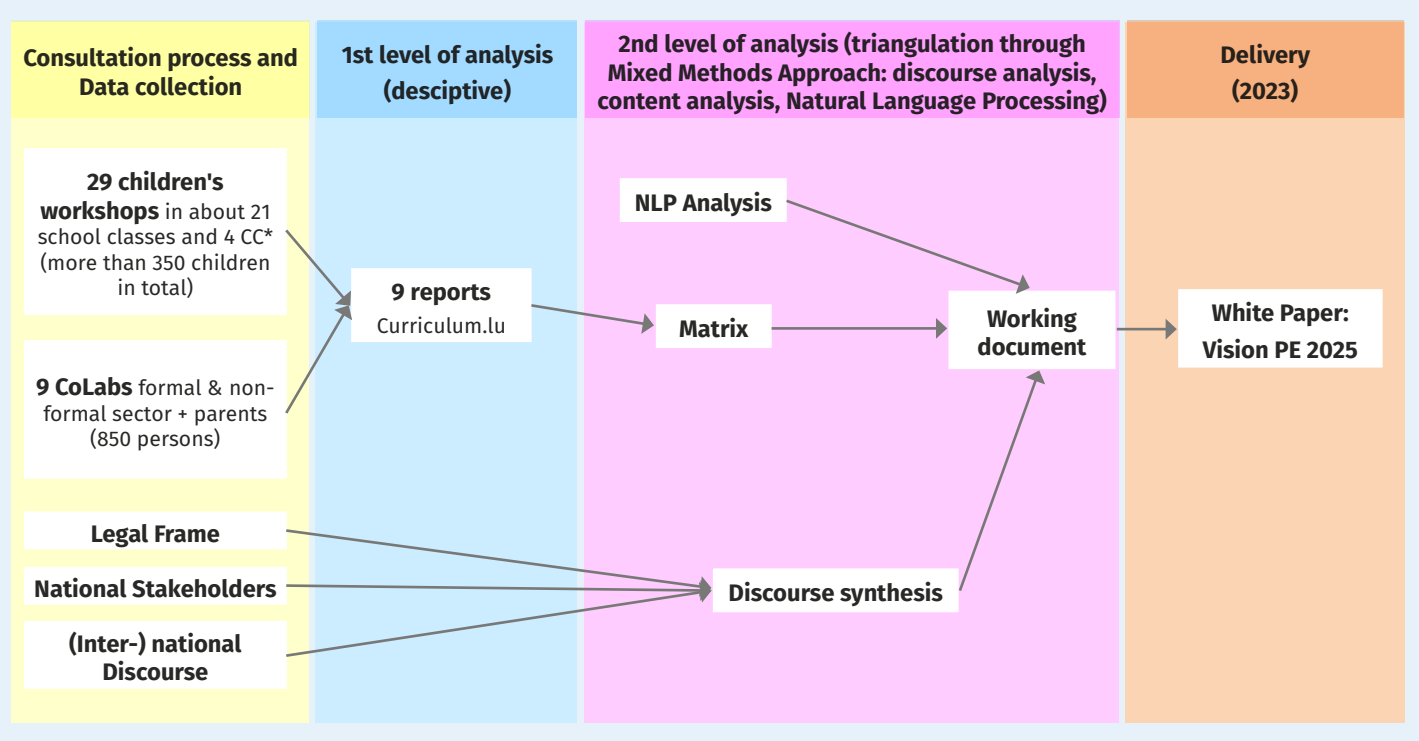
Finally, one of the main tasks of Currix is to critically reflect on the process. In doing so, it also draws on the (human) resources of other departments in SCRIPT (data, etc.). The opinions of various actors in and around the Luxembourg education system, are considered in our discourse synthesis. The upcoming White Paper will be revised in several iterations and thus subjected to a 'relevance test' in close cooperation with representatives from the field (such as CNEF etc.).

4. Analytical procedure

Employing qualitative methods (Przyborski/Wohlrab-Sahr 2014), our approach relies on individual actors participating in focus group-like discussions during CoLabs and semi-structured workshops to explore and delve into the aforementioned topics. In this constructive perspective, the focus is on understanding different perspectives and on the joint development of meaning (Creswell 2009, p.6).

Through group discussions (Co-labs, etc.), an equal discourse between process stewards (members of the curriculum division of SCRIPT) and those affected or directly involved (teachers, parents, children) was established and processed in the collection of protocols/reports. Qualitative content analysis and discourse analysis were used to identify key themes.

Drawing from Foucault[20], we utilize discourse analysis to extract practice-relevant modes of thinking, perceptions, representations, and ideas regarding the curriculum's past, present, and future, as well as its content and implementation, from written and oral statements." The analysis follows the principles of qualitative content analysis, as outlined by Mayring[21], with the objective of managing large volumes of data, such as CoLab reports. Through this approach, we closely examine and analyse the discourse, allowing us to draw conclusions on specific aspects and gain valuable insights. Three main methods are used to carry out the analysis and to write reports for a CoLab: summarising, structuring and explaining what has been said. The circa 6,000 'samples' are, of course, limited in their representativeness by the self-selection or opt-in of teachers, parent representatives and others, but are highly relevant in terms of content because of their voluntary and anonymous nature. Exploratory-descriptive, correlative and mixed approaches are used to further process the reports from the CoLabs. The final report is produced by synthesizing all findings and conclusions from different data sets and methods using triangulation based on content analysis, critical discourse analysis and machine-based natural language processing. External partners co-validate the 'category extraction' of SCRIPT, which is a very important moment for confirming the analyses of the CoLab results and possibly correcting certain emerging structures.



* CC-Competence Centres for children with special needs

Figure 3: Overview of the data collection and analysis process.

20 Cf. Sarasin, P. (2017). Diskursanalyse. *Handbuch Wissenschaftsgeschichte*, 45-54.
21 Mayring, P. (2014). Qualitative content analysis: theoretical foundation, basic procedures and software solution.

5. Lessons learned

A national participatory consultation process for a curriculum requires considerable resources, both in terms of human engagement and time. Aiming for a targeted exchange with a wide range of actors in different fields and at different levels is both an ambitious but also worthwhile approach. Some stakeholders appreciate being heard (e.g. parent representatives, but also children with special needs), others appreciate the (novel) opportunity to meet and exchange views with professional colleagues. One important example illustrating the latter was the exchange between actors from formal and non-formal education sectors, but also the exchange between teachers from different schools or different levels of education (primary and secondary).

> *Therefore, the participatory consultation process had intended side-benefits that went beyond our data collection. In this context, it is important to consider the process of curriculum review and reform not only at the level of content, organisation or technology, but also at the level of change management.*

The key is to create acceptance within the schooling context and its stakeholders. In order to attain effectiveness rather than just efficiency, it is crucial for us to collaborate with potential multipliers, even if it means achieving the desired results through a more complex approach. This takes time and effort. We organise a few extra workshops, meet with additional stakeholders or key players more often and communicate transparently. Communication is key. The process is an integral part of the product, a new curriculum, which can be seen as a process in itself. Our participatory approach means that we want to be open to feedback, dare to ask and answer questions, and address the possible concerns and anxieties of stakeholders.

Regarding the analysis of the qualitative data, we have learnt that this process is demanding, as we have collected, structured, summarised and synthesised about 6,000 sample statements recorded in the framework of the CoLabs.

6. Outlook

The aim of the PE2025 report is to translate the information gained from the participatory process into a White Paper, which would serve as a starting point for proposals and recommendations for the concrete curriculum reform. The White Paper can thus be used as a basis for education policy decisions. A distinction can be made between the short-term (1-2 years), medium-term (2-4 years) and long-term (3-5 years) implementation periods. The final and detailed design of a new Plan d'études is a subsequent process, which has not yet started at the time this paper is being written and will take place in working groups.

The revision will be based on the White Paper, its validation by representatives 'from the field' and the analysis of relevant educational data. However, its implementation will be a gradual process and the impact of a new PE 2025 should be measured in the medium to long term. External factors such as the school environment (infrastructure, material and human resources, etc.) have been mentioned in different contexts by different actors and will therefore feature in PE 2025. Bridges need to be built with the 'out-of-school plan', i.e. the non-formal education sector, which already proposed its comprehensive framework document for Luxembourg in 2021.[22]

The PE 2025 will provide a framework that will be 'filled in' in collaboration with existing actors, representatives and institutions in a participatory process. It will also provide the framework for a digital platform that will not only allow teachers to understand, research, plan, monitor, assess and evaluate school-related learning/teaching processes, but also children and parents to become active agents in the learning process. In that sense, while the current curriculum can be considered a core curriculum, the revised curriculum, with its new framework, may enable teachers and students to co-construct and enact a "full curriculum" in their respective schools.

In addition, the digital platform will enable and support a sustainable participation process of professional actors within the education sector, thus allowing the PE 2025 to remain flexible and proactive enough to incorporate societal and technological changes.

22 *https://guichet.public.lu/dam-assets/catalogue-formulaires/creche-foyer/cadre-reference-national/cadre-reference-national-de.pdf*.

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Norway: fact box

This article focuses on:
☒ Primary education
☒ Secondary education

In Norway the **teaching time** in primary education (1-7) is 20 hours per week, in lower secondary education (8-10) it is 23 hours per week, both on average per year. Both levels have 38 weeks of school per year. The ratio between the core and the full curriculum cannot be specified: the teaching time is related to each subject.

Norway has a **central examination** in both lower and upper secondary education.

	Core curriculum	Full curriculum
Subjects/topics/key competences	• Five basic skills, understood as literacies: oral, reading, writing, numeracy and digital skills • Three interdisciplinary topics: Public health and life skills, Democracy and citizenship and Sustainable development	In the current curriculum, both the interdisciplinary topics and the basic skills are included in the subject curricula (e.g. Social Studies, Mathematics,...)
Amount of detail	The core curriculum elaborates on the core values in the objectives clause in the Education Act and the overriding principles for primary and secondary education and training. It comprises three chapters: 1. Core values of the education and training 2. Principles for education and all-round development 3. Principles for the school's practice. In chapter 2 'Principles for education and all-round development' the interdisciplinary topics and the basic skills are described on a general level. The core curriculum does not include knowledge, skills and attitudes or a detailed learning path/intermediate learning goals. It doesn't include pedagogical guidelines and suggestions either. The subject curricula describe the content and goals of the subjects.	The full curriculum includes knowledge, skills and competences. It does not include a detailed learning path/ intermediate learning goals. Pedagogical guidelines and suggestions are not included.
Who is involved in its development	Politics, administration, school representatives, representation of teachers, representation of academics, student organizations.	Politics, administration, school representatives, representation of teachers, representation of academics, student organizations.

Norway: biographies

Knut G. Andersen

Knut G. Andersen is a Senior Advisor at the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. Knut has had a coordinating function in the latest national curriculum reform in Norway. He has been involved in a number of projects in the directorate, his contributions are specifically related to general curriculum issues and educational questions.

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Knut has a Master's in Educational Science from the University of Oslo.

Gaute Heyerdahl

Gaute Heyerdahl is a Senior Advisor at the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. Gaute is currently the coordinator of the evaluation research programme of the latest national curriculum reform in Norway. He has previously worked with teaching and research at the Norwegian School of Sport Sciences and the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. Gaute has a PhD from the Norwegian School of Sport Sciences.

Intentions and tensions in the national curriculum reform in Norway

Abstract

Norway has a long tradition of following a comprehensive national Core Curriculum. The article describes how the Core Curriculum both elaborates on the values on which the school system is based and the principles for each school's practice. The Core Curriculum also describes cross-curricular competencies on a general level. The government's 2020 Knowledge Promotion curriculum framework introduced Health and Life Skills, Democracy and Citizenship and Sustainable Development as three new interdisciplinary topics. In the current curriculum, the interdisciplinary topics are included in each subject's curricula. The article points to tensions that lie explicitly and implicitly in the curriculum and discusses key trade-offs in the development of the curriculum. The article also deals with tensions pointed out in findings of a continuing evaluation research project of the 2020 Knowledge Promotion curriculum.

1. Introduction

The intention of this article is to shed light on important tensions in the national curriculum from two different perspectives, namely that of public educational administration and educational research. The first perspective is presented in part one, while part two discusses the second perspective. In part three we present some concluding remarks.

The current Core Curriculum in Norway represents both tradition and renewal. On the one hand, it expresses a long tradition in Norway of a comprehensive Core Curriculum, with an emphasis on shared values. On the other hand, it expresses aspects of 21st Century Skills literature, such as learning to learn.

The first part of this article shows how the educational authorities wanted the new national Core Curriculum to contribute to a value boost in schools, while also functioning as a tool for the school to work with the pupils' development of relevant competences for the future. A national curriculum is a compromise document between professional, political, and administrative considerations. Consequently, any curriculum has many different aims, and thus tensions are inevitable. The first part of this article will highlight tensions that lie explicitly and implicitly in the national curriculum, with discussions of some key trade-offs in the development of the curriculum. The tensions emphasised are linked to some central ambitions behind the curriculum reform that were pushed forward by the Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training when the new curriculum was sent to the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research in 2019, before the Ministry adopted the curriculum as a regulation in 2020. These are:

- Curriculum Coherence and the promotion of values
- Avoiding curriculum overload and promoting in-depth learning
- Competences/content across subjects

The second part of this article is based on findings from the evaluation of the curriculum reform. The article presents an analysis and findings of the tensions, based on the research reports (Karseth et al. 2022; Furberg et al. 2023)[1]. While part one broadly focuses on tensions in the curriculum-making process, part two delves more in depth into one specific area, namely the concern for values. The second part discusses how and to what extent values have been included and become more visible in the subject curricula of the national curriculum, as intended.

2. Part 1

INTENSIONS OF THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM REFORM 2020

In the autumn of 2020, a new subject curricula was introduced for primary and secondary education in Norway. The overall objective has been to provide a curriculum that prepares pupils for their unpredictable futures. A central aspect of the curriculum development was to give the subjects more relevant content and clearer priorities. Improving the connection between the subjects was also a key consideration. Thus, three interdisciplinary topics were included in subjects where relevant: Democracy and Citizenship, Sustainable Development and Health and Life Skills. The National Curriculum Reform 2020 further emphasises 'learning to learn', exploratory competence and technological competence.

Clearer priorities in subjects should facilitate in-depth learning. In this context, in-depth learning is defined as gradually developing knowledge and a lasting understanding of concepts, methods, and relationships within subjects and between subject areas. In-depth learning involves being able to apply what has been learned in different ways in both familiar and unfamiliar situations, individually or together

1 For a presentation of the project in English, see: The Evaluation of the New National Curriculum: Intentions, Processes, and Practices (EVA2020) - Faculty of Educational Sciences (uio.no)

with others. Facilitating in-depth learning is thus considered important for children and young people so that they can develop the skills they need in a rapidly changing society.

Renewal of the Core Curriculum was the first step in the curriculum reform. The new Core Curriculum was then used as a basis for the development of the individual subject curricula (cf. Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, White Paper 28 (2015–2016)). In Norway, the national curriculum, consisting of the Core Curriculum and the specific curricula for each subject, are laid down as a regulation by the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training is responsible for developing and implementing the curricula.

THE CONTENT OF THE CORE CURRICULUM

In the 2006 Knowledge Promotion Curriculum, the Core Curriculum and the subject curricula were developed and implemented at different times. Evaluation research and analyses indicated that the connection between the various parts of the curriculum was deficient (Dale et al., 2011; Björnson & Hörnqvist, 2014a; Björnson & Hörnqvist, 2014b). Studies have also shown that in local work with curricula, the entirety of the curriculum was not emphasised enough, that many schools put the main emphasis on the competence aims for the subjects (Vibe & Hovdehaugen, 2012; Vibe & Lødding, 2014).

To improve coherence in the national curriculum, the ministry decided to renew the Core Curriculum and the curricula for all the subjects in the same process. The intention was that this should contribute to a more updated and topical curriculum for society both now and in the future.

The current Core Curriculum begins with a description of its content and function:

The general part of the Core Curriculum elaborates on the core values in the objectives clause of the Education Act and the overarching principles for primary and secondary education and training. It comprises an introduction, a summary of the objectives clause and three chapters, as follows: 1. Core values of education and training, 2. Principles for education and all-round development and, 3. Principles for the school's practice. The subject curricula describe the content and goals of each subject. The Core Curriculum gives direction for teaching and training across all the subjects, all of which contribute to realising the broad purpose of primary and secondary education and training. The curriculum in its entirety thus serves as the foundation for all teaching and training in the Norwegian school system, and for the entire school's activities, where the different sections are closely linked and are to be used together.

> *The Core Curriculum describes the fundamental approach that shall direct the pedagogical practice of all primary and secondary education and training, included vocational education and training.*

It shall also serve as the foundation for the collaboration between home and school. The Core Curriculum clarifies the responsibility of the school and training establishments when it comes to education and all-round development (Bildung) and the development of the competence of all participants in primary and secondary education and training. Everyone working in primary and secondary education and training must allow this fundamental approach to guide the planning, implementation and development of the teaching and training.

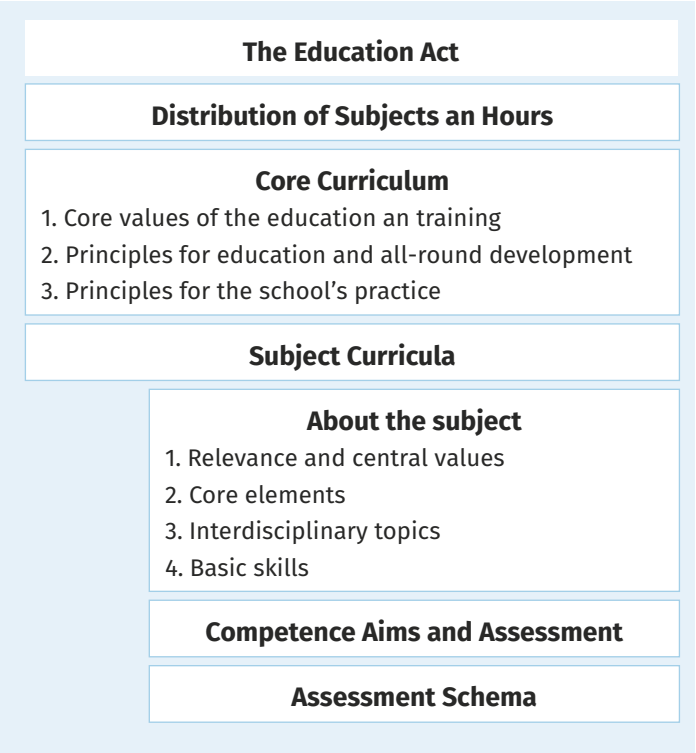

Figure 1: The figure presents the regulations for the Norwegian school. At the top: The Education Act. Further down: Distribution of teaching ours per subject, which also has the status of regulation. At the bottom: The subject curricula, also with status as regulations, divided into texts about the subject, competence aims and assessment and the assessment scheme, respectively. In the middle: The Core Curriculum.

TENSION IN THE CURRICULUM: CURRICULUM COHERENCE AND PROMOTION OF VALUES

Before the development of the Core Curriculum, the Norwegian Parliament – Stortinget – formally processed the content of the curriculum, on a general level. In this discussion, the National Assembly was concerned that the curriculum reform should contribute to a greater focus on values in schools:

> *The Storting asks the government in connection with the work to renew the Core Curriculum and the renewal of subjects to ensure value promotion in the school by better incorporating the common values of the purpose clause in all subjects and at all levels in the school. (Innst. 19 S (2016–2017), vedtak IV, s. 22).*

For the curriculum reform to contribute to value promotion, in the curriculum development emphasis was placed on the fact that the values described in the Core Curriculum must characterise both the school's practice and also what the pupils are to learn. Everyday school life must be built on and characterised by these values, while the pupils learn about, experience and develop such values by working with the subjects. Consequently, each subject curriculum highlights the values that are particularly relevant to the subject.

In light of the intention of prioritising content in subjects, the values most relevant to the content of each subject were integrated in the curriculum. A consequence of these priorities is that not all values were integrated in all subjects. A risk in emphasising values in the context of subjects is that other values are not perceived as equally important. In the curriculum development, it was carefully worked out that the values should be well dispersed across all subjects. The aim was for the subjects to contribute to a clearer connection between the value base and the individual subjects. The evaluation of the reform will be able to clarify how well this was achieved.

One purpose of the curriculum reform was to make children and young people better able to meet and find solutions to the challenges of today and the future. This requires pupils to develop relevant competence for the future, which means that the methods and tools used in the subjects were particularly important when it came to the renewal of the subjects. However, the curriculum reform is not one-sidedly method and tool-oriented. At the same time, the subjects must contribute to the development of good values and attitudes that are important for the individual and for society. The subjects must also contribute to a reinforced emphasis on reflection and critical thinking. A concern in the curriculum development was thus that one consideration should not come at the expense of the other. Moreover, we know there are different views on what the right balance is here, and there will probably also be different perceptions about how this balance is now safeguarded.

TENSION IN THE CURRICULUM: PROMOTING IN-DEPTH LEARNING AND AVOIDING CURRICULUM OVERLOAD

A central objective of the renewal of the curricula is to prioritise the content of the subjects, so the curricula better facilitate in-depth learning. Prioritising content is a demanding task as there are many opinions to take into consideration regarding what pupils should learn and what is relevant competence in the subjects. The subjects are also connected to academic traditions and subject disciplines that must be taken into account, but which cannot be incorporated in their full breadth.

The definition of in-depth learning is complex (cf. section 2 of this article), and that is precisely what has been afforded considerable importance in the curriculum development. Taking different aspects of in-depth learning into account means that developing curricula has not only been about slimming down the subjects by taking out content. The development of the curricula has been far more complex than that. Rather, it has been about reassembling what we want pupils to learn in the subjects, aimed at understanding, seeing connections in and between subjects and learning to learn in the subjects. Not least, one important consideration was that pupils should be able to find meaning in what they learn and be able to apply what they have learned in new and unfamiliar situations. Because the subjects are different, the various aspects of in-depth learning are not emphasised and solved exactly the same way in all subjects.

However, the extent to which we are now facilitating in-depth learning through our curricula and have solved the problem of curriculum overload in Norway, is linked to another factor, namely the consideration of space for local professional action, since the competence aims in the curricula are open and give a range of options for teachers. Whether the curriculum facilitates in-depth learning is also an empirical question, which will be scrutinized in the years to come.

TENSION IN THE CURRICULUM: COMPETENCES/ CONTENT ACROSS SUBJECTS

The way the interdisciplinary topics are to be integrated and defined in the subjects has been a central theme in the curriculum development. In this process, the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research specified that the content should be a central part of pupil competence in a subject and should be compared to the description of the interdisciplinary topics in the Core Curriculum.

It is worth emphasising that slightly different things can be taken from the phrasing *central part of pupil competence in the subject*. A central part of the competence can mean the main parts of the competence objectives. However, it can also be argued that an interdisciplinary topic can function as an important or natural part of the subject, even if it does not make up a large part of the competence objectives.

Another factor that, to a certain extent, probably characterises the implementation of the interdisciplinary topics is the education authorities' ambition for the broad and thorough involvement of all stakeholders in the school sector during curriculum development.

> *Drafts of the curricula were made public, on which the entire school sector, and all other interested parties, were invited to comment.*

When it comes to the interdisciplinary topics, this co-creation has probably both helped the implementation, but also contributed to the development of different understandings of them.

3. Part 2

EVALUATION RESEARCH

The second part of this article is based on findings from the evaluation of the curriculum reform. The Directorate of Education and Training is responsible for a research-based evaluation of the Knowledge Promotion 2020 curriculum, in the period 2020 to 2025. The evaluation programme is designed to provide a comprehensive picture of how the Knowledge Promotion is functioning and its effectiveness. Part two will analyse how and to what extent values have been included and become more prominent in the subject curricula within the national curriculum, as intended.

CONTEXT: THE CONCERN FOR VALUES

The researchers behind the analysis presented here have been concerned with the value promotion in the evaluation of the curriculum: the concern for values has become intensified in a global context of crises and challenges due to the widening of societal and economic inequalities, climate change, the loss of biodiversity and democratic backsliding (UNESCO, 2021). At the same time, the National Curriculum Reform 2020 as a political project must be understood in the Norwegian context in terms of reform activities, attitudes, approaches to governance and the relationship between the teaching profession and the state.[2]

THEORETICAL AND ANALYTICAL LENSES

The researchers behind the analysis also applied certain theoretical and analytical lenses. Curriculum research includes studies of decision-making processes on different levels of the school system by different actors in accordance with different national traditions and regulations. The curriculum research literature reminds us that there are different ways to understand and approach the relationship between the learner, the school, the school district/ municipality, the state, and society (Karseth & Wahlström 2023).

An important point of departure is the German Didaktik tradition (see Hopmann 2000) and the work of Wolfgang Klafki. Klafki is a salient contributor to the thinking of Northern European general didactics in the 20th century, and he addresses key social challenges and problems such as environmental crises, social inequity, identity issues and threats to peace on Earth (Klakfi, 2001; Kvamme, 2021).

Klafki's theory on Bildung gives us an entry point to explore the potential of curriculum renewal to support the schools' dual mission as stated in the Core Curriculum.

> *The school's mission is the education and all-round development (Bildung) of all pupils.*

Education and all-round development are interlinked and mutually dependent, and their underlying principles should help schools accomplish this dual mission (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, White Paper 21 (2016-2017)).

VALUES AND SOCIETAL CHALLENGES: POLITICALLY IMPORTANT BUT DESCRIPTIONS LACK CLARITY

In the introductory chapter of White Paper no. 28 of 2015–2016, 'societal challenges' is introduced as a term which, at an overall level, contributes to justifying and legitimising the curriculum renewal as an educational policy project (Karseth et al., 2022). The white paper's introduction states that the government has high ambitions for Norway as a knowledge society. Knowledge and competence are necessary prerequisites for finding solutions to the societal challenges of today and tomorrow (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, White Paper 28 (2015-2016), p. 5). In the white paper the researchers identified two quite different examples of discourse on what is at stake (Karseth et al., 2022). On the one hand, there are challenges related to social equality, cultural diversity, and coping with life in a democratic society. On the other hand, the paper describes challenges related to a changing world characterised by rapid technological development, where school and education are important in ensuring productivity and employment growth in an internationally competitive economy. In this latter discourse, the educational project is linked to economic considerations such as knowledge capital and competitiveness.

A common feature of both examples of discourse is that they are framed by national conditions and national needs. It is shown that countries have become more dependent on each other economically and politically and that Norway has increasingly been affected by growing international mobility, which has led to a more diverse Norwegian society (Karseth et al., 2022).

Nevertheless, the researchers point out that social challenges constituted important premises for renewing the curriculum. The white paper draws attention to the common values in the objectives clause and states that education and training shall be based on Christian and humanist heritage and traditions. The common values that are mentioned are *respect for human dignity and nature, freedom of speech, freedom of spirit, charity, forgiveness, equality, and solidarity (p. 20).* The white paper issued a call for strengthening the value base of education. This was followed up by the parliamentary standing committee on education and research, which issued recommendations to parliament, arguing that:

> *"The committee believes that one of the school's tasks is to manage a national cultural heritage that all children and young people should share in. It is about building and further developing a common cultural identity, while at the same time showing openness and tolerance towards different cultural and religious groups and individuals." (White Paper 2015-2016, translated by the authors)*

Based on the proposal from the committee, the Storting introduced the term value promotion [Verdiløftet] and made the following decision:

"The Storting asks the government in connection with the work to renew the Core Curriculum and the renewal of subjects to ensure value promotion in the school by better incorporating the common values of the objectives clause in all subjects and at all levels in the school". *(White Paper 2016-2017, translated by the authors).*

2 For an English summary of the report, see: *report-4---summary.pdf (uio.no)*

THE CURRICULAR TRAJECTORY OF VALUE PROMOTION

The Core Curriculum states that pupils must learn about the values and traditions which contribute to uniting people in our country. Furthermore, it maintains that Christian and humanist heritage and traditions are an important part of Norway's collective cultural heritage and have played a vital role in the development of our democracy. It also states that the Sami cultural heritage is part of Norway's cultural heritage. There is an emphasis on the importance of a common frame of reference for individuals' sense of belonging in society. The argument is that this will help create solidarity and connect each individual's identity to the greater community and a historical context. According to the Core Curriculum, a good society is founded on the ideals of inclusiveness and diversity (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, White Paper 21 (2016-2017)).

In their analysis, the researchers pointed out that there was a political consensus that the 2020 Core Curriculum should contribute to an increased emphasis on values in schooling and educational practices (Karseth et al., 2022). The researchers' analysis shows that the core curriculum re-contextualises the Education Act by issuing common values that are closer to an individual perspective, thus linking values to personal growth and processes of individual learning (Karseth et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the analysis of the final curriculum reveals that some important modification occurred as several common values become less prominent (Karseth et al., 2022). The researchers found that the reformulation of values in the overall section of the Core Curriculum was further modified by the value sections in the subject curricula. In these shifts, some values – such as creative joy, engagement, and the urge to explore – emerged as particularly important, while other values became almost invisible. Neither solidarity, charity, forgiveness, nor freedom of spirit – all values highlighted in the objectives clause – were articulated in the values sections of the subject curricula we examined (Karseth et al., 2022).

The elaboration and clarification of the school's value base in the Core Curriculum and the value sections of the subject curricula have led to values in general becoming more prominent in the curriculum, but the way they have actually been included reflects an orientation towards the individual learner (Karseth et al., 2022).

If many of the common values in the purpose clause are rarely mentioned, this may affect concrete teaching practices by narrowing the space for the professionals' own interpretation, reflection, and challenges. This is problematic in light of the central position values are afforded in the objectives clause (Karseth et al., 2022).

VALUES AND INTERDISCIPLINARY TOPICS

As pointed out by the researchers behind the evaluation, in a broader perspective, value promotion is part of an intention to strengthen the coherence of the curriculum as a whole. This includes the introduction of interdisciplinary topics in the 2020 Core Curriculum: Health and Life Skills, Democracy and Citizenship, and Sustainable Development. These topics, as interdisciplinary themes, promote the integration of knowledge across various school subjects. This is one of the three selection criteria emphasized in White Paper 28 by the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. They should also address vital, persistent societal challenges, and reflect the objectives clause in the Education Act. As further emphasized by the researchers, the foothold of the interdisciplinary topics in the objectives clause is particularly interesting with regard to value promotion, due to the fact that the objectives themselves are qualified by societal values, as discussed above. In other words, engaging in the interdisciplinary topics could potentially contribute to value promotion (Karseth et al., 2022; Furberg et al., 2023).

However, in the curriculum structure the links and relationships between the interdisciplinary topics and value promotion are not made explicit. The possible identification of such connections is a responsibility handed over to teachers. Here value promotion does not provide much help (Karseth et al., 2022; Furberg et al., 2023).

VALUES AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE SUBJECT CURRICULA

Like its predecessor of 2006, the new national curriculum follows a competence-based orientation. However, as we have seen, there is a new emphasis on promoting common values in addition to the introduction of core elements in the different school subjects. This appears to be a strengthening of the dual mission in Norwegian schools, where general education is linked to nurturing shared societal values.

A competence orientation was introduced in the 2006 Knowledge Promotion curriculum and linked to learning outcomes. The fulfilment of the competence aims forms the basis for assessment in the subjects. Researchers who evaluate the curriculum reform question whether a curriculum architecture based on the expected outcome for the individual student supports the intention of strengthening the value base. However, there is no simple answer to this question. Nevertheless, there is a risk that despite including values as commonplace in the subject curricula descriptions, the description of the competence aims may be at the forefront and mark the starting point for teachers' planning processes (Karseth et al., 2022).

4. Part 3

CONCLUDING REMARKS: VALUES IN THE CURRICULUM

As pointed out in part one, a consequence of priorities in the curriculum-making process, is that not all values were integrated in all subjects. As experienced in the process, one risk in emphasising values in the context of the individual subjects is that other values are not perceived as equally important. Part two analysed some of the implications of these compromises.

Every subject curriculum includes a paragraph addressing the values that are seen as particularly important. In this way the curricula fulfil the intention laid out by the Norwegian government to better incorporate the common values of the objectives clause in all subjects and at all levels in school. However, as the analysis in part two indicates, the values are modified throughout the curriculum-making process. Simultaneously, some of the overarching values seem to have had problems finding a foothold in the subject curricula. Instead, there seems to be an appreciation of (value-

adjacent) learning processes and student activity.

Values such as creative joy and engagement, emphasised in the value promotion strategy, require further qualification to suggest how they may be employed in a responsible manner (see Klafki, 2001, p. 93).

Regarding the question as to what extent the curriculum leads to value promotion in practise, we have to wait and see. Patience is crucial in a reform process, as change takes time to take effect and produce results. It is important to have a long-term vision and to persist in making changes, even if progress may be slow. This fact also applies to value promotion in Norwegian primary and secondary education. The evaluation allows the education sector to continuously assess and monitor the introduction and improvements in value promotion. Most importantly, it ensures that we are aware of the tensions and can reflect on the implications, both at the local and national levels.

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Interview with our friend Chat GPT: we asked chat GPT to enlighten us on “core curriculum”.

Artificial intelligence has already been present for a while in our everyday life. But the recent introduction of content generators using natural language processing and AI techniques, like Chat GPT, caused quite a fuzz in the education sector. In the introductory chapter, we claim that such technology might not only have consequences for didactics in schools, but also for the core curricula’s content. However, this technology cannot be stopped. So what better approach can we choose than to explore its potential to contribute to a better world, for example by supporting learning? Therefore we challenged Chat GPT to create a short article about the core curricula in Europe. We asked to uncover the subjects, topics, and key competences encompassed in primary and secondary education. Additionally, we proposed Chat GPT to seek expert opinions on what should be included in the core curriculum. We additionally questioned the level of detail present in European core curricula and asked to identify the essential partners involved in its development. Furthermore, we explored Chat GPT’s viewpoint on the concept of a central exam to test the core curriculum.

While we acknowledge the valuable insights in this text, we learned that there is still some work left to rewrite the text. We even noticed some inconsistencies between Chat GPT’s interpretation of the Norwegian core curriculum and the information in the Norwegian article. Hence, we want to warn that we are not responsible for any misinterpretation or outdated information in this article. All in all, it was an interesting experience. It is amazing that new texts can be generated within seconds and on demand. We leave the judgement about the result to you.

CORE CURRICULUM: WHAT’S IN A NAME?

The core curriculum for primary and secondary education refers to the set of academic subjects and knowledge areas that students are required to learn in order to meet specific educational standards and goals.

The purpose of the core curriculum is to ensure that students receive a well-rounded education that prepares them for future academic and professional pursuits. The specific content and requirements may vary depending on the country in which the education is taking place.

It may also vary slightly in primary and secondary education. However, there are some subjects and topics that are generally considered to be part of the core curriculum in most European countries:

1. Mathematics: arithmetic, algebra, geometry, statistics, and probability.
2. Science: biology, chemistry, physics, earth science, and environmental science.
3. Language(s): reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills, grammar, vocabulary, and literature.
4. History and social studies: world history, geography, economics, politics, and civics.
5. Physical education: sports, fitness, health, and wellness.
6. Arts: music, visual arts, drama, and dance.

In addition to subject-specific knowledge and skills, many European countries have also identified a set of key competences that are considered essential for students to develop throughout their primary and secondary education:

- Communication in the mother tongue: the ability to communicate effectively in the official language(s) of the country, both orally and in writing.
- Communication in foreign languages: the ability to communicate effectively in at least one foreign language.
- Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology: the ability to apply mathematical concepts and skills, and to understand and apply scientific and technological concepts.
- Digital competence: the ability to use digital technologies effectively and responsibly.
- Learning to learn: the ability to learn independently, to set and achieve goals, and to reflect on one’s own learning.
- Social and civic competences: the ability to work collaboratively, to respect diversity, to understand and respect human rights and democratic values, and to engage in active citizenship.
- Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship: the ability to take initiative, to be creative, and to develop an entrepreneurial mindset.

- Cultural awareness and expression: the ability to appreciate and understand different cultural perspectives, and to express oneself creatively through the arts.

These key competences are often integrated into the curriculum across all subjects, and are seen as important for students to develop in order to be successful in both their academic and personal lives.

Experts have identified several key areas that they believe should be part of the core curriculum in primary and secondary education:

- Critical thinking and problem-solving: students should be taught to think critically, analyze information, and solve problems across all subjects.
- Digital literacy: Experts stress the importance of digital literacy skills, including the ability to use technology effectively and responsibly.
- Social-emotional learning: social and emotional skills, such as empathy, self-awareness, and self-regulation, should be integrated into the curriculum to support students' well-being and success.
- Global awareness and citizenship: students should learn about different cultures, perspectives, and global issues in order to become responsible and engaged global citizens.
- Financial literacy: financial literacy skills, such as budgeting and managing money, should be part of the core curriculum to prepare students for the future.
- Environmental sustainability: students should be teached about environmental sustainability and the impact of human behavior on the planet.
- Creative thinking and innovation: students should be encouraged to think creatively and develop innovative solutions to real-world problems.
- Overall, experts emphasize the importance of a well-rounded education that focuses not only on academic subjects but also on the development of essential skills and competencies that will prepare students for success in the 21st century.

THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAIL

The level of detail in the core curriculum of primary and secondary education can vary by country and even by region within a country. Some countries have very detailed curricula that specify specific learning objectives and standards for each subject and grade level, while others have more general guidelines that provide a broad framework for what students should learn.

For example, in some European countries such as Finland and Norway, the national core curriculum provides detailed guidelines for what students should learn in each subject and grade level. These guidelines outline specific learning objectives, skills, and knowledge that students are expected to master, and they also provide guidance for assessment and evaluation of student learning.

Other countries, such as the United Kingdom, have a more flexible approach to the core curriculum, where each school has the freedom to develop their own curriculum based on a set of broad national standards. In these cases, schools have more autonomy in deciding how to structure and deliver the curriculum, while still ensuring that students are meeting the required standards.

Overall, the level of detail in the core curriculum can vary widely across European countries and even within a country. However, the goal is generally to provide a clear framework for what students should learn and to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in their academic and personal lives.

Experts have differing opinions on the level of detail in the core curriculum of primary and secondary education. Some experts believe that a detailed curriculum is necessary to ensure consistency in what students learn across different schools and regions. They argue that a clear and specific curriculum can help teachers to plan their lessons and assessments effectively, and can also help to ensure that all students have access to the same high-quality education.

Other experts, however, argue that a detailed curriculum can be too prescriptive and may limit teachers' flexibility and creativity in the classroom. They suggest that a more flexible approach, such as providing a broad framework for what students should learn and allowing teachers to adapt and personalize the curriculum to meet the needs of their students, can be more effective in promoting student engagement and motivation.

Overall, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to the core curriculum, and experts have different opinions on the level of detail that is necessary. However, most experts agree that a well-designed curriculum should be based on research and evidence of effective teaching and learning practices, and should focus on developing essential skills and competencies that will prepare students for success in the 21st century.

WEAVING A TAPESTRY OF VOICES

The development of a core curriculum in primary and secondary education should involve a wide range of stakeholders to ensure that it is comprehensive, relevant, and effective in meeting the needs of all students. Here are some examples of partners who should be involved in the development of a core curriculum:

- Educators: Teachers and school leaders should be involved in the development of the core curriculum as they have a deep understanding of the needs of their students and can provide insights into the most effective teaching and learning practices.
- Students: Students should also be involved in the development of the core curriculum, as they are the ones who will be learning from it. Their input can help to ensure that the curriculum is relevant and engaging, and that it meets their needs and interests.
- Parents and caregivers: Parents and caregivers should also be involved in the development of the core curriculum, as they have a vested interest in their children's education and can provide insights into their children's needs and interests.
- Community leaders: Community leaders, including business leaders, non-profit organizations, and religious groups, can provide insights into the skills and competencies that are needed in the local workforce and community, and can help to ensure that the core curriculum is aligned with these needs.
- Higher education institutions: Colleges and universities can provide insights into the knowledge and skills that are needed for success in higher education and can help to ensure that the core curriculum is aligned with these needs.
- Education researchers: Education researchers can provide evidence-based insights into effective teaching and learning practices, as well as the most effective ways to develop a core curriculum.

Involving these different partners in the development of a core curriculum can help to ensure that it is comprehensive, relevant, and effective in meeting the needs of all students.

TO TEST OR NOT TO TEST...

Whether or not a central exam is recommended for testing the core curriculum can depend on a variety of factors, including the education system and the goals of the curriculum. Here are some potential pros and cons of using a central exam to test the core curriculum:

Pros:

- Ensures that all students are tested on the same content and skills, which can promote fairness and equity in assessment.
- Provides a clear benchmark for students and schools to strive towards, which can help to improve student learning and motivation.
- Allows for easy comparison of student performance across schools and regions, which can help to identify areas for improvement and promote accountability.

Cons:

- Can lead to a "teaching to the test" mentality, where teachers focus solely on the content that will be tested on the exam rather than on broader learning goals.
- May not be able to accurately capture the full range of student learning and skills, as some skills may be difficult to test through a standardized exam format.
- Can create a stressful and high-stakes environment for students, which may not be conducive to effective learning.

It is important to carefully consider the potential benefits and drawbacks of using a central exam and to explore alternative assessment methods if needed.

MAKE USE OF TIME, LET NOT ADVANTAGE SLIP

There is no perfect teaching time ratio between the core curriculum and the full curriculum that can be universally applied to all educational systems, as this can vary depending on a variety of factors, including the specific goals of the curriculum, the education system, and the needs and interests of the students. However, in general, the core curriculum should form the foundation of the full curriculum, with additional topics and subjects added to provide students with a well-rounded education.

The core curriculum typically includes the essential knowledge and skills that students need to succeed in their future studies and careers, while the full curriculum provides additional opportunities for students to explore their interests and develop their talents in other areas. The specific time ratio between the core curriculum and the full should be carefully balanced to ensure that students have the opportunity to develop the essential knowledge and skills they need, while also having the flexibility to explore their interests and develop other important competencies.

Ultimately, the goal of any curriculum should be to provide students with a balanced and well-rounded education that prepares them for success in their future studies and careers, while also promoting their personal growth and development