

Submission to the Northern Ireland Curriculum Consultation

September 2026

Who we are

Founded in 2004, the [Irish Development Education Association \(IDEA\)](#) is the all-island network for organisations and individuals working on Global Citizenship Education (GCE) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in Ireland - an area in which Ireland is recognised as a European leader. We represent 120 [members](#), including several organisations and individuals working to provide and/or promote GCE in formal and non-formal education settings in Northern Ireland. In 2025, our members reached more than 400,000 learners supporting education and empowerment on topics such as human rights, climate action, democracy, conflict, migration, and equality.

IDEA is recognised internationally leader as a pioneer for having co-developed with its members the [Code of Good Practice on Development Education](#). It is a quality framework that articulates how to strengthen good practice within Development Education work. It won a [Global Education Network Europe \(GENE\) Quality in Global Education Award](#) in 2021.

IDEA's commitment to working across the island of Ireland is evident in its strategic roadmap for GCE to 2030, [Vision 2030: Towards a Society of Active Global Citizens](#) and participation in the Shared Island Initiative, together with CADA and Dóchas, which brought people working in Global Citizenship Education together from across the island to share learning, build relationships and explore opportunities for cooperation.

Endorsement of CADA submission

Several IDEA members are also members of the [Coalition of Aid and Development Agencies in Northern Ireland \(CADA\)](#) and we work closely with CADA on several issues related to GCE and ESD. As such, we participated in a focus group discussion that informed their submission

to this consultation, and we reviewed their draft response. We endorse the [CADA submission](#) and echo many of the points CADA made in its submission.

Key messages and recommendations

Strengths and gaps

The proposed new curriculum framework for Northern Ireland aims to be a knowledge-rich curriculum designed to improve clarity, coherence and progression for all learners, and to give learners “access to powerful knowledge and develop the skills needed to participate fully in society, the economy and civic life.” We commend these aims, and we welcome much of the content of the overarching framework as laid out in the curriculum overview document, the capabilities documents, the subject frameworks and the key stage documents.

However, the current draft would not provide access to all the *essential* knowledge and *essential* skills needed to participate fully in society, the economy and civic life in today's rapidly changing, interdependent and interconnected world. As well as an important focus on the local reality in Northern Ireland, we consider it vital that the curriculum also addresses more the global reality, on the basis that “economically, environmentally, socially and politically, we are linked to other people on the planet as never before.”¹

Global Citizenship Education and Education for Sustainable Development are bodies of knowledge, skills and values-based pedagogy that help learners to understand today's world and their place in it, and how they can work together to live sustainably, fairly and in peace.

Unfortunately, both these areas of education are largely missing from the current draft curriculum framework. Global Citizenship Education is not named at all. Education for Sustainable Development is mentioned once in the context of the 2007 curriculum, as an example of a component that “in practice...led to subject content being included based on

¹ <https://www.unesco.org/en/global-citizenship-peace-education/need-know?hub=87862>

weak or indirect links to (this theme) ..., rather than clear disciplinary coherence.”² While the above statement may be true, it does not diminish the importance of ESD as a clear body of essential knowledge and skills needed to participate fully in today’s world in a sustainable and fair manner.

UK international policy commitments in ESD and GCE

ESD and GCE both have clear disciplinary coherence, outlined in multiple UN guidance documents and academic curricula developed based on global policy documents the British Government has signed up to, and which have application in Northern Ireland. The two most relevant global policies the UK has committed to implementing in this case are the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) (specifically [SDG Target 4.7](#)) and the [2023 UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights, International Understanding, Cooperation, Fundamental Freedoms, Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development](#).

In relation to SDG Target 4.7, the UK has a commitment to ensure that by 2030 all learners under its jurisdiction “acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development”³. Progress against this target is measured by the extent to which GCE and ESD are integrated into national education policy, **curricula**, teacher education and student assessment. Given that education in Northern Ireland is a devolved issue, responsibility for integrating GCE and ESD in curricula in Northern Ireland’s schools lies with the Northern Ireland Department of Education and its statutory curriculum.

The disciplinary coherence for ESD and GCE could be easily integrated into the curriculum instead of deleting all access to these bodies of knowledge and skills, so critically needed in today’s rapidly changing interdependent and interconnected world. It merits mention that

² <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2026-06/TransformED%20-%20Curriculum%20Overview%20Document.pdf> (p.27)

³ https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4#targets_and_indicators

the British government recently recommitted to achieving SDG Target 4.7 by 2030 by signing the [UN Pact for the Future](#) in September 2024.

Evidence of the positive impact of GCE and Europe-wide support

An umbrella term for GCE and ESD and other values-based educations that promote peace education, human rights and intercultural understanding is Global Learning or Global Education. [The Case for Global Learning in the UK](#) (2025) lays out recent evidence for the positive impact of Global Learning on society, the economy, and the individual, and highlights that “most countries with advanced education systems are developing policies and direct funding to support Global Learning.” Several case studies and quotes from learners and educators in the document emphasise the benefits of a global learning approach: greater awareness of global issues, improved motivation and confidence of learners and teachers, enhanced performance in science, writing and art, increased intercultural dialogue and mutual learning across different countries and cultures, and more students taking the initiative in applying their learning to new activities and further learning.

Furthermore, while the UK is not currently a signatory of the [European Declaration on Global Education to 2050](#), launched in 2022, it merits mention that it is a joint initiative of the [Council of Europe](#), of which the UK is a founding and permanent member, via its [North South Centre](#) in partnership with the [Global Education Network Europe](#).

Linking Peace Education to GCE

Northern Ireland has a long history of peace education, including work by schools and community organisations to help young people understand conflict, build relationships across difference and take part in shared civic life. This experience is a strength to build on. We welcome the inclusion in the subject framework for Personal, Social, Civic and Careers (PSCC) learning outcomes related to understanding and resolving conflict peacefully. Global Citizenship Education and Education for Sustainable Development offer an opportunity to connect that learning with wider questions of peace, human rights, justice and sustainability.

Young people would benefit from understanding both the history of the place they live and how its lessons relate to challenges faced by people elsewhere.

The opportunity to address gaps in specific subjects and capabilities

The current draft curriculum framework for Northern Ireland could integrate some key dimensions of GCE and ESD without having to create a new strand or make widespread amendments. This could be achieved by changing some of the language and framing of the current capabilities document and subject frameworks to ensure that GCE and ESD principles are embedded in core capabilities and subjects such as Geography, History, English and Drama, and PSCC.

We therefore make the following **recommendations**, echoing the key asks of the CADA submission and adding further suggestions:

1. Include **GCE** and **ESD** as concepts in the capabilities document and cross-reference them in the subject frameworks for Geography, History, English and Drama and PSCC.
2. Include the concept of **global citizenship** in the capabilities document under the descriptors for social and civic participation and environmental and ecological responsibility and in the PSCC subject framework, as defined by UNESCO⁴, as a distinct but complementary concept to citizenship and civic understanding.
3. Include the concepts of **solidarity, justice and local-global interconnection and interdependence** (and thus **shared responsibility**) in the subjects English and Drama and PSCC. This would enable pupils to learn to act on shared challenges, locally and globally, and not only to help “others who are less fortunate”.
4. Increase the **progression of human rights knowledge** in PSCC across Stages towards its global application by Key Stage 3.

⁴ <https://www.unesco.org/en/global-citizenship-peace-education/need-know?hub=87862>

5. Add **shared responsibility** and **justice** as key dimensions of sustainable development and global inequality to the environmental and ecological responsibility capability, as well as to Geography.
6. Include addressing **misinformation, disinformation** and **factchecking** under the language and communication capability and in the subject framework for English, as well as in the media and information literacy component of PSCC.
7. Build on Northern Ireland's experience of **peace education** by including opportunities, particularly in History and PSCC, for pupils to explore connections between peace and reconciliation locally and globally as part of GCE and ESD.

Implementing the recommendations

Section 7 (Specific Curriculum Recommendations) of the [CADA submission](#) to this curriculum consultation provides detailed suggestions for minor rewording of specific sentences within the subject frameworks for PSCC, Geography and History, as well as within the capabilities document. A meticulous analysis was undertaken to identify where minor changes to specific sentences within these documents could be made to enable the implementation of their overarching recommendations. These suggested changes are categorised according to each of their overarching recommendations and a rationale for the changes is also given. As mentioned earlier in this submission, most of our recommendations echo those of CADA, and the minor changes proposed by CADA align with our vision of how our recommendations could be implemented with the minimum number of amendments to the curriculum framework in its current draft. Therefore, IDEA endorses the specific rewording suggested by CADA under this Section (pp. 6-12) and recommends that this specific rewording is incorporated into the final versions of these documents of the Northern Ireland 2028 Curriculum Framework.

Beyond the rewording suggested by CADA, we also recommend that within the subject framework of English and Drama, the concepts of **solidarity, justice and local-global interconnection and interdependence** (and thus **shared responsibility**) could be

integrated in the content for Key Stage 3, specifically under the sections on Story and Argument. Both literature and language offer ample opportunities to explore these concepts. This would align well with the statement in the introduction to Key Stage 3 English: “Building on what they have learned in the primary phase, pupils deepen their understanding of English as a living discipline. They explore meanings, trace patterns, viewpoints and consequences across whole texts. They understand how language maps ideas and shapes worldviews through the way meaning is conveyed by writers”.

Furthermore, under the sections on Argument and Context in Key Stages 2 and 3 English, addressing **misinformation, disinformation** and the importance of **factchecking** texts could be added to expand on learning outcomes that are already covered in the draft subject framework related to critically assessing text (e.g. learning outcomes 12-14 under Argument in Key Stage 2 and the last three learning outcomes under Argument in Key Stage 3).

Within History, connecting learning on the peace process in Northern Ireland (Key Stage 3) with global examples of where peace processes were attempted or are needed would strengthen the understanding of learners related to conflict and peace on a global scale. Within PSCC, a global perspective to peace education could be incorporated under the sections on Relationships and Society and Ethics and Moral Reasoning in both Key Stages 2 and 3, to strengthen existing learning outcomes related to understanding and resolving conflict peacefully.

Conclusion

The draft curriculum already contains the potential for young people to have access to the knowledge and skills they need to understand today's world, their place in it and how to act to contribute positively to a fairer, more sustainable society.

However, a key gap is that the global dimension has been dropped from the scope of citizenship education that is being proposed. This is a significant blind spot, as the curriculum does not seem to consider enough how interconnected and interdependent Northern Ireland is with the rest of the world, and how young people's learning needs in today's

increasingly interconnected world means the scope of their shared responsibility and civic and ethical duty goes beyond national borders. A focus on solidarity, justice and shared responsibility as it applies to addressing complex global issues is largely missing from the current draft framework.

Our recommendations focus on minor changes that can be made to address these gaps, so that the curriculum meets its own aims and honours global policy commitments made by the UK, which apply in Northern Ireland.

IDEA and its members operating in Northern Ireland would welcome the opportunity to discuss these proposals with the Department and to support work on amendment wording as the curriculum is finalised.