

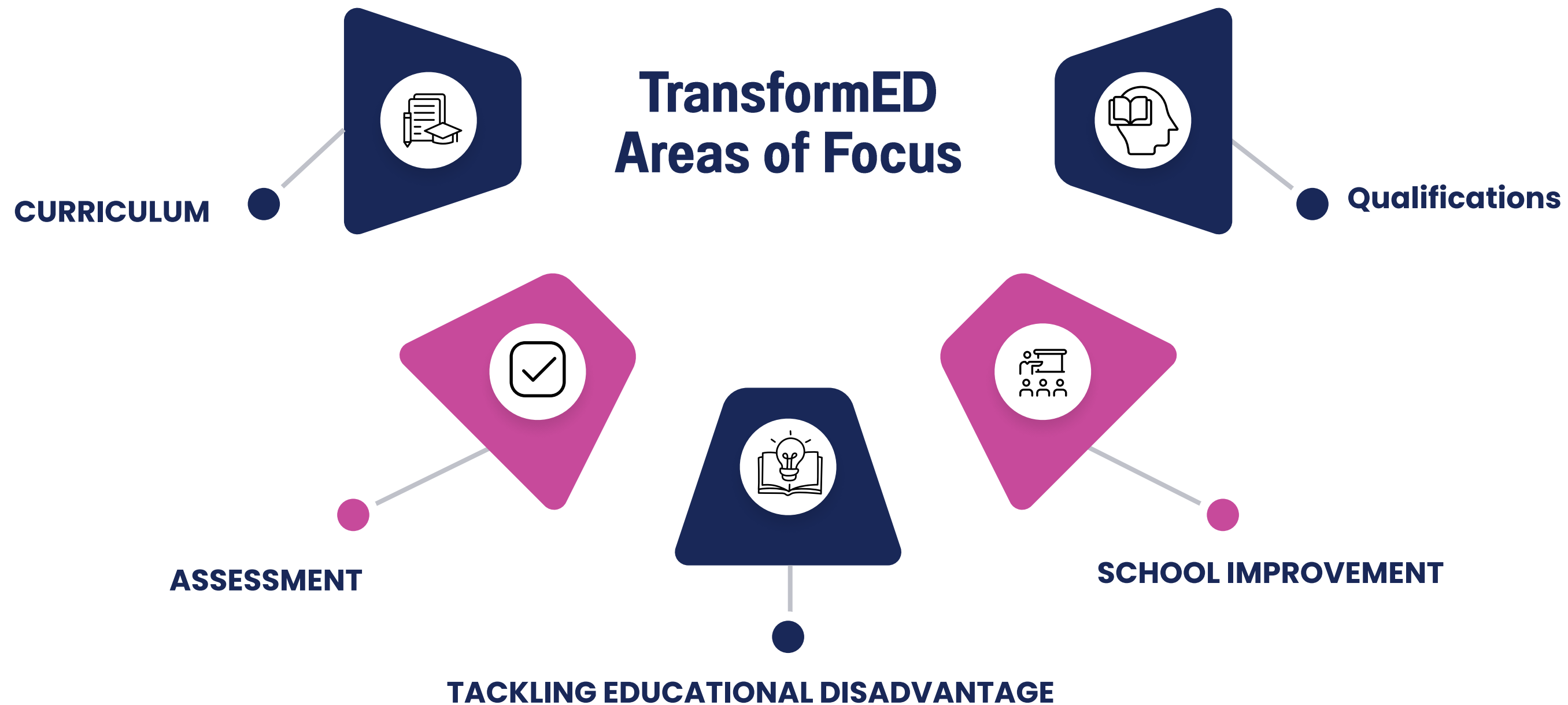


Peter Hutchinson

**Director of Curriculum Reform and
TransformED Implementation
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

EVERY LEARNER | EVERY SCHOOL | EVERY CHANCE

AREAS OF FOCUS



Supported by sustained investment in Teacher Professional Learning.

WHY IS A NEW STRATEGY NEEDED?

‘Based on clear evidence into what influences outcomes, successful school systems ground changes in the classroom, focusing first and foremost on teachers and the content they deliver’

**McKinsey and Company, Spark and Sustain Report
(February, 2024)**

HOW IS NORTHERN IRELAND PERFORMING?

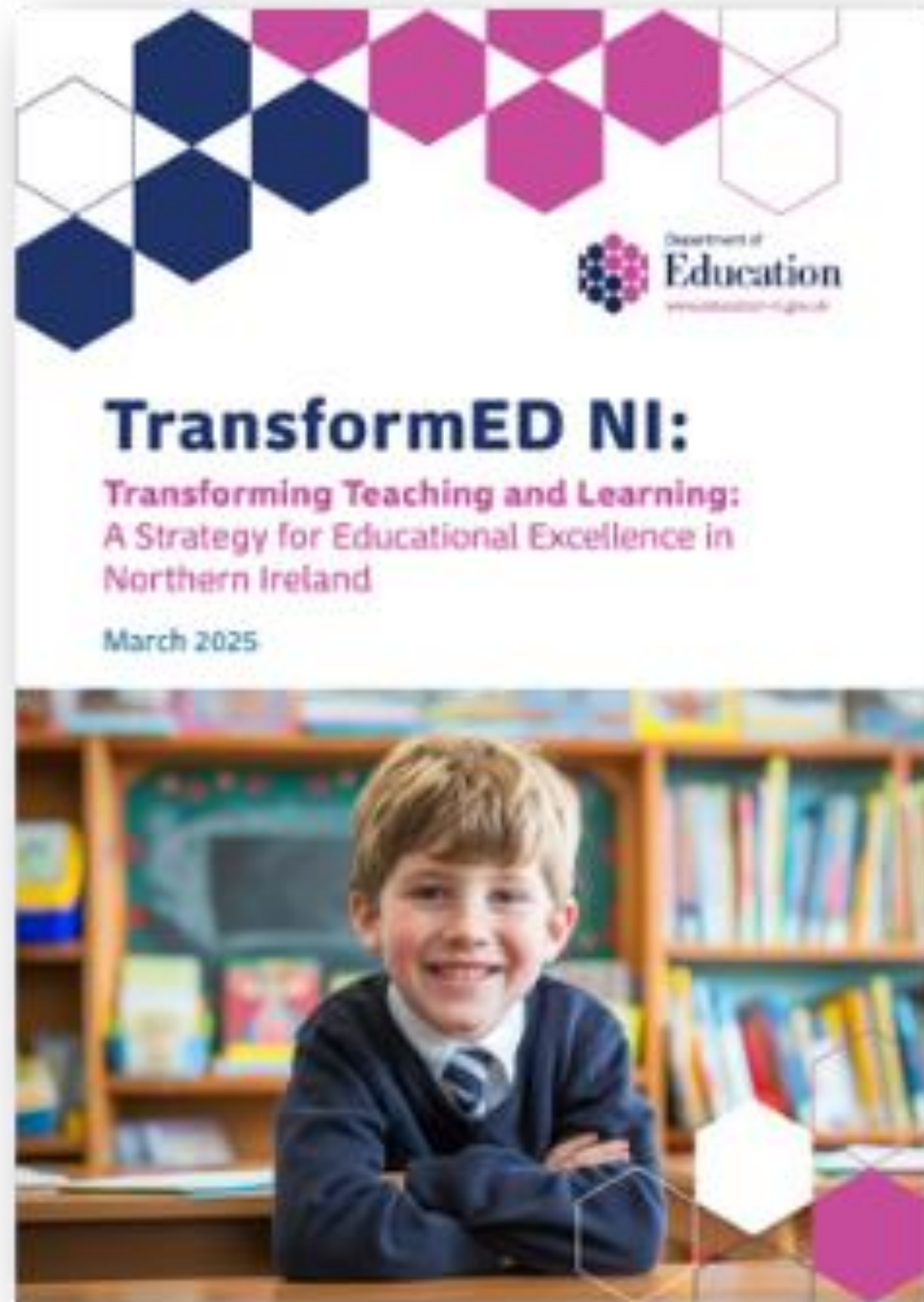
- **Improving qualification outcomes for school leavers.**
- **Primary school pupils performing well above international average in literacy and numeracy.**
- **Highly-qualified teaching workforce.**

BUT:

- **No national measures of school or system performance at primary or Key Stage 3.**
- **Significant variation in pupil outcomes between schools of similar characteristics at GCSE and A Level.**

HOW IS NORTHERN IRELAND PERFORMING?

- **Disadvantage gap only closing very slowly.**
- **Inspection fundamentally disrupted by ASOS.**
- **Increased uptake of equivalent qualifications – not all providing sound progression.**
- **PISA outcomes stagnating over last decade – average in science and mathematics and below England and Republic of Ireland.**



Ten point plan for Educational Excellence in Northern Ireland



Key Areas of Focus



Professional Learning: Progress so Far



Professional Learning: What's Next?

- Professional Qualification for Headship
- Support programme for experienced principals
- Core Content Framework for Initial Teacher Education
- Compulsory online induction programme
- Leaders of Education Programme
- Funding for professional learning clusters
- Curriculum and Assessment specific professional learning

Assessment: Progress So Far

01

Interim arrangements – system level sample assessments 2025–26 to 2028–9

02

Investment in CCEA Computer Adaptive Assessment

03

Independent Review of Statutory Assessment Report published

Independent Review of Assessment Statutory Assessment Pathway



Department of
Education
www.education-ni.gov.uk



Key

Optional assessment to complement the statutory pathway

Optional CCEA Adaptive Assessments

Optional Reading Fluency Checks at any time

Optional Baseline Checks in literacy, numeracy and science in Year 8

Optional submission to Writing Repository

* Year 2 Phonics Check taken by end of June and followed by Fluency Checks in Years 3, 4 and 5. If not meeting the Phonics Check required standard, then the Phonics Check needs to be retaken in the next window for the check. When the Phonics standard is met, it is followed by 3 years of Fluency Checks.

Assessment Reform: Next Steps

- System-level sample assessments in literacy and numeracy for Years 4, 7 and 10 continue until 2028–29 academic year.
- New Year 4 literacy and numeracy assessments for all pupils to begin in **March 2030**.
- New Year 7 and Year 10 assessments in literacy, numeracy and science to begin in **March 2031**.
- Consider appropriate timescales for introducing the Year 1 baseline check, Year 2 phonics check, Year 5 multiplication check and the Writing Repository.

TransformED

Policy Framework for General
Qualifications in Northern Ireland



QUALIFICATIONS

*Publication of new Policy
Framework for General
Qualifications*

Qualifications

New Framework for A Levels

- There will be a new two-year modular structure made up of three units.
- One designated unit may be taken in Year 13 (worth 30%), with the remaining 70% assessed in Year 14.
- Alternatively, all units may be taken in Year 14 if schools prefer a linear model.
- AS levels will no longer be offered as a separate qualification.
- Content will be reduced to support deeper learning and subject mastery.
- Grading will continue on the A*– E scale.
- Non-exam assessment is to be used sparingly and only when essential to assess practical skills.

Qualifications

New Framework for GCSEs

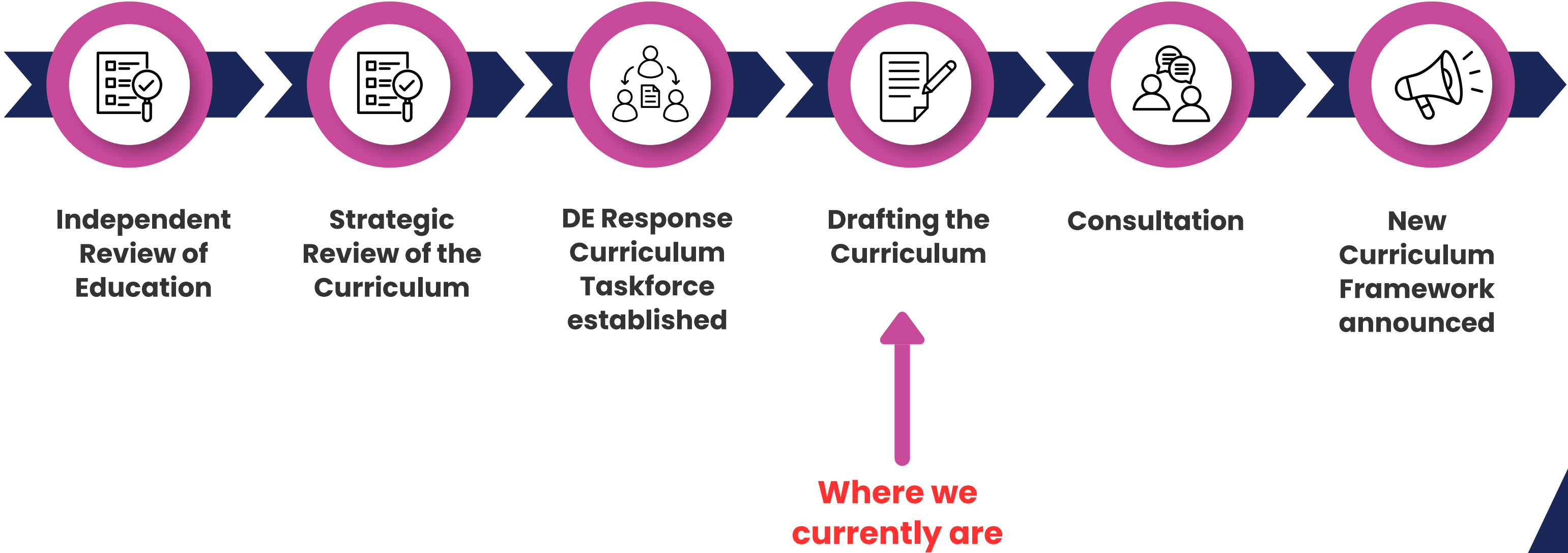
- Most GCSEs are limited to two written exam papers unless more are genuinely required.
- Content will be reduced to support deeper learning and secure understanding.
- English Language, Mathematics and Single/Double Award Science are remaining modular, with other GCSEs moving to a linear structure.
- Grading remains on the nine-point A*– G alphabetical scale.
- Non-exam assessment will be used only when it is essential to assess practical skills.



OUR PLEDGE

*A curriculum for every learner:
Clear, Coherent, Connected*

THE STORY SO FAR



ISSUES WITH THE CURRENT CURRICULUM

- There is a lack of specificity on what should be taught, leading to variation and inequity.
- There is a lack of vertical coherence which prevents learning being progressively built upon over time.
- It fails to meaningfully articulate the role and importance of knowledge, particularly subject-specific knowledge and skills, and their relationship with broader skills.
- There is curriculum overload.
- The content within the curriculum is outdated.
- It doesn't meet the needs of Irish-medium and SEN learners and some young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

PRINCIPLES OF THE NEW CURRICULUM

Purpose led

Clear vision so all children can develop their capabilities.



Knowledge-rich

Careful and intentional teaching of substantive and well-sequenced concepts



Continuous and Coherent

Seamless progression and logical connections across year groups.



Specific and Focused

Well-articulated objectives about what pupils should know and by what stage.



Inclusive and Flexible

Capable of responding to the diverse needs of learners, schools and communities.



WHY KNOWLEDGE-RICH?

Grounded in how we learn

There is a growing body of evidence, backed by cognitive science, that knowledge is not just nice to have, it is the bedrock of all learning.

Proven to work

The more students know, the easier it is for them to learn new things including skills because they have context to hook new ideas onto.



Structured and sequenced

Determining core concepts that are vital in supporting the progressive acquisition and application of deep learning.

Equitable

Access to high-quality, structured content can bridge the knowledge gaps that often arise from socio-economic disparities.

WEAKNESSES IN THE CURRICULUM

- **Vagueness of entitlement**

- Pupils should be enabled to “research, select, process and interpret information” and “create, develop, present and publish ideas and information using a range of digital media.”
- No specification on what knowledge should be understood or references to specific technical concepts and disciplinary ideas.
- Schools interpret entitlement very differently.

- **Repetition without deepening**

- Pupils should “access and manage data and information.” KS2
- Pupils should “collect, process, interpret and communicate information effectively using ICT.” KS3
- Progression is not about adding harder verbs, but about increasing complexity of the knowledge itself.

WEAKNESSES IN THE CURRICULUM

- **Absence of a cumulative knowledge spine**
 - Digital Technology concepts such as algorithms or computation are not named at all in the statutory minimum requirements.
 - If the curriculum does not specify content, it cannot guarantee entitlement.
- **Confusing knowledge and skills**
 - Digital Technology can become generic problem solving rather than disciplinary thinking.
 - ICT should be used to “solve problems, pose questions and take risks.”
 - ICT should support “thinking, problem-solving and decision-making.”
- **Absence of subject identity**
 - No clear domain knowledge. No sense of progression within a discipline. No curriculum logic explaining why digital systems work.

NEW APPROACH

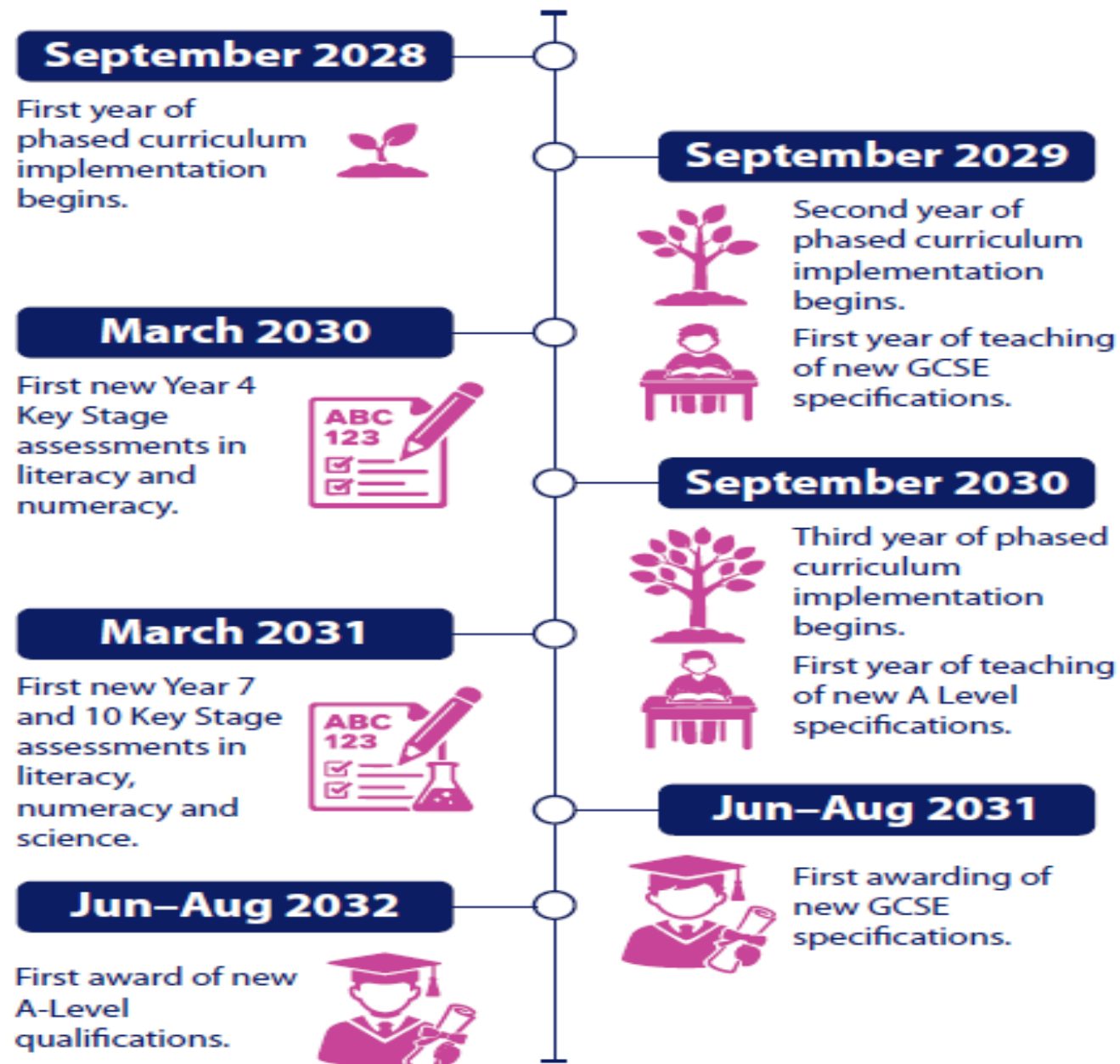
- **Vagueness to entitlement**
 - Precise, declarative knowledge statements at every stage
 - Concrete examples
- **A progression model**
 - A deliberate conceptual progression across key stages, where ideas are introduced concretely ,then refined conceptually ,then formalised technically.
- **Clear subject architecture**
 - Recur consistently from FS-KS3
 - Deepen in content
- **Embedding Skills Inside Knowledge**
 - Debugging is taught as a response to incorrect logic,
 - Creativity is framed as design within constraints (file formats, protocols, efficiency).

ADDRESSING MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT KNOWLEDGE-RICH APPROACHES...

- It is **not** “information rich”
- It is **not** a dilution of skills
- It is **not** workload heavy
- It is **not** designed for the high attainers

NEXT STEPS

TransformED Curriculum, Assessment and Qualifications Reform Milestones



CURRICULUM MILESTONES

- Spring 2026: Consultation on framework
- 2026–28: Resources and Training
- Phased implementation to be commenced from September 2027 at the earliest (early adopters)
- Statutory from 2028–30 (phased).



TransformED is the Department of Education's major education reform programme to transform teaching and learning in Northern Ireland. It focuses on the core areas of curriculum, assessment, qualifications, school improvement and tackling educational disadvantage. Reform in each of these areas will be underpinned by significant investment in high-quality teacher professional development.



ABOUT TransformED

About TransformED

Find out about how TransformED is focused on high-quality teaching, learning and whole-school improvement.



CURRICULUM

Curriculum

Discover the work that is taking place to review and strengthen the Northern Ireland Curriculum.



LITERACY

Literacy

Learn more about how every learner can develop confident reading, writing and communication skills.



TEACHER PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Teacher Professional Learning

Discover more about teacher professional learning opportunities designed to develop practice, build leadership skills and empower educators at every career stage.



QUALIFICATIONS

Qualifications

Up-to-date guidance on qualification pathways and information on proposed changes to qualifications.



ASSESSMENT

Assessment

Find out about current arrangements for Key Stage assessment as well as the Independent Review of Assessment.



RESOURCES

Resources



TACKLING EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE

Tackling Educational



SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

School Improvement

TransformED Hub

A central space for updates, resources, guidance and opportunities related to TransformED.

www.education-ni.gov.uk/topics/transformed



END

