

Curriculum Improvement Cycle for Languages: Update - December 2025



Introducing the ES Languages Team

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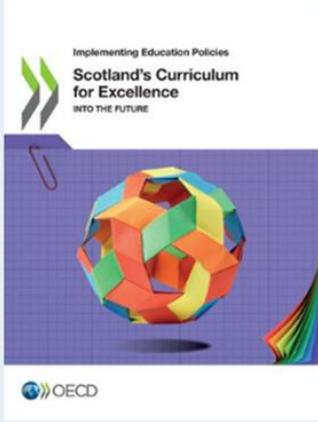
Denise Riley, Glasgow (S)



Overview: Curriculum Improvement Cycle



Why are we reviewing the curriculum?



Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence

Into the Future

Students in Scotland (United Kingdom) engage in learning through Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), which aims to provide them with a holistic, coherent, and future-oriented approach to learning between the ages of 3 and 18. CfE offers an inspiring and widely supported philosophy of education. Schools design their own curriculum based on a common framework which allows for effective curricular practices. In 2020, Scotland invited the OECD to assess the implementation of CfE in primary and secondary schools to understand how school curricula have been designed and implemented in recent years. [More](#)

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In series: [Implementing Education Policies](#) (view more titles)

'Structural' challenges identified

Attainment barriers

Moderation

Tracking and Monitoring

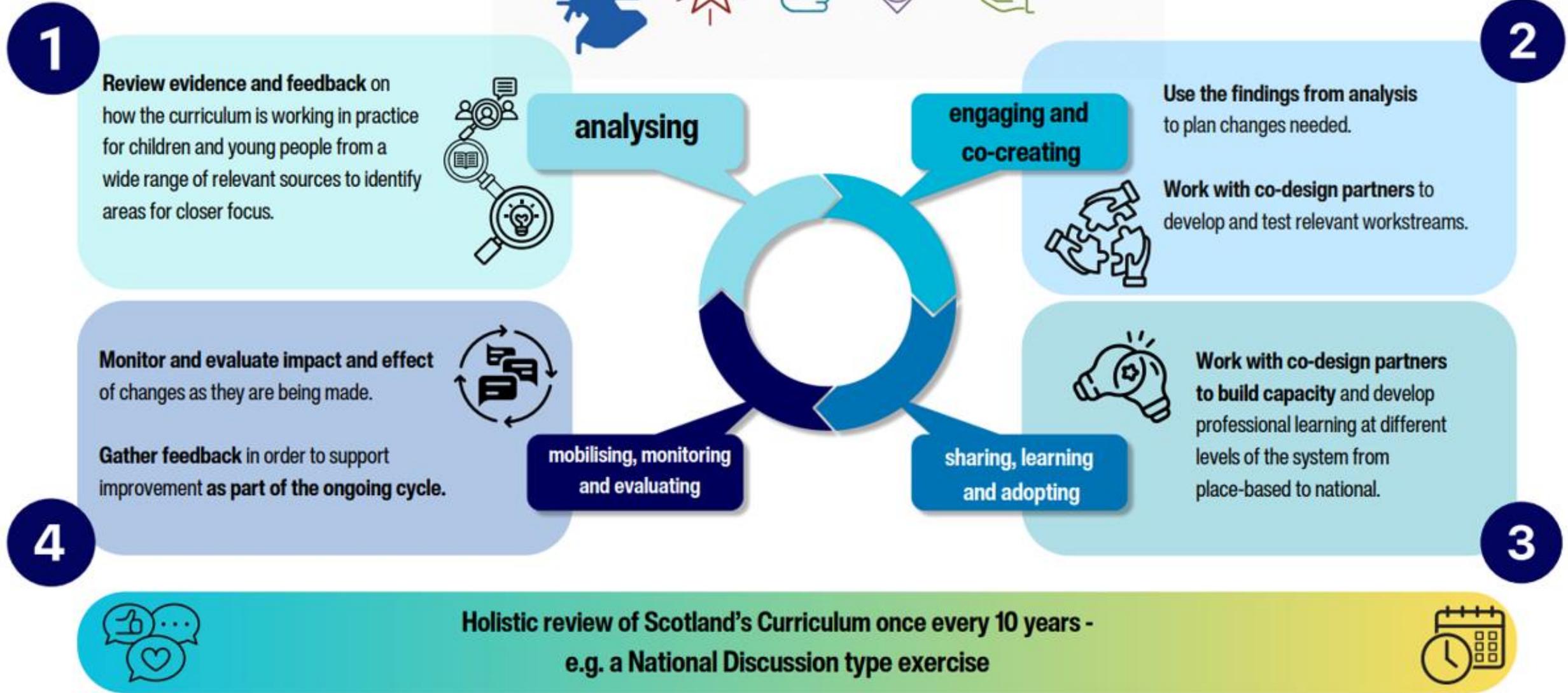
Barriers to transition from Primary to Secondary

Disconnect between BGE to Senior Phase

Lack of clarity on Progression

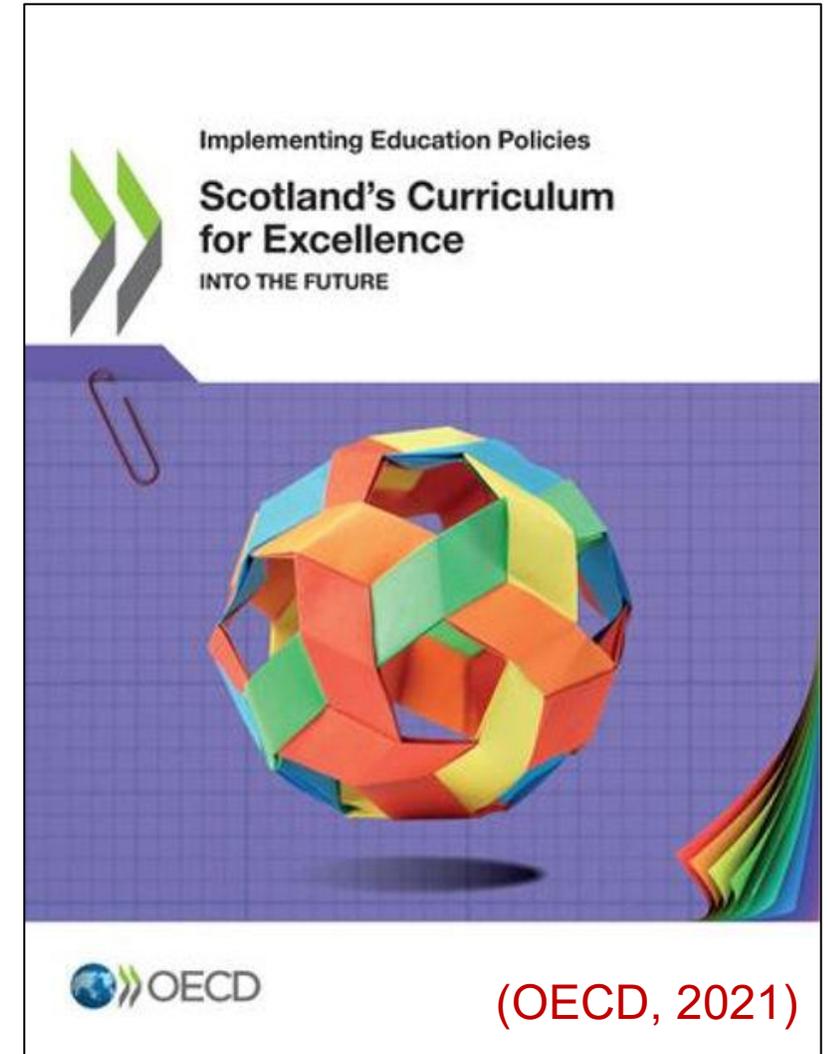


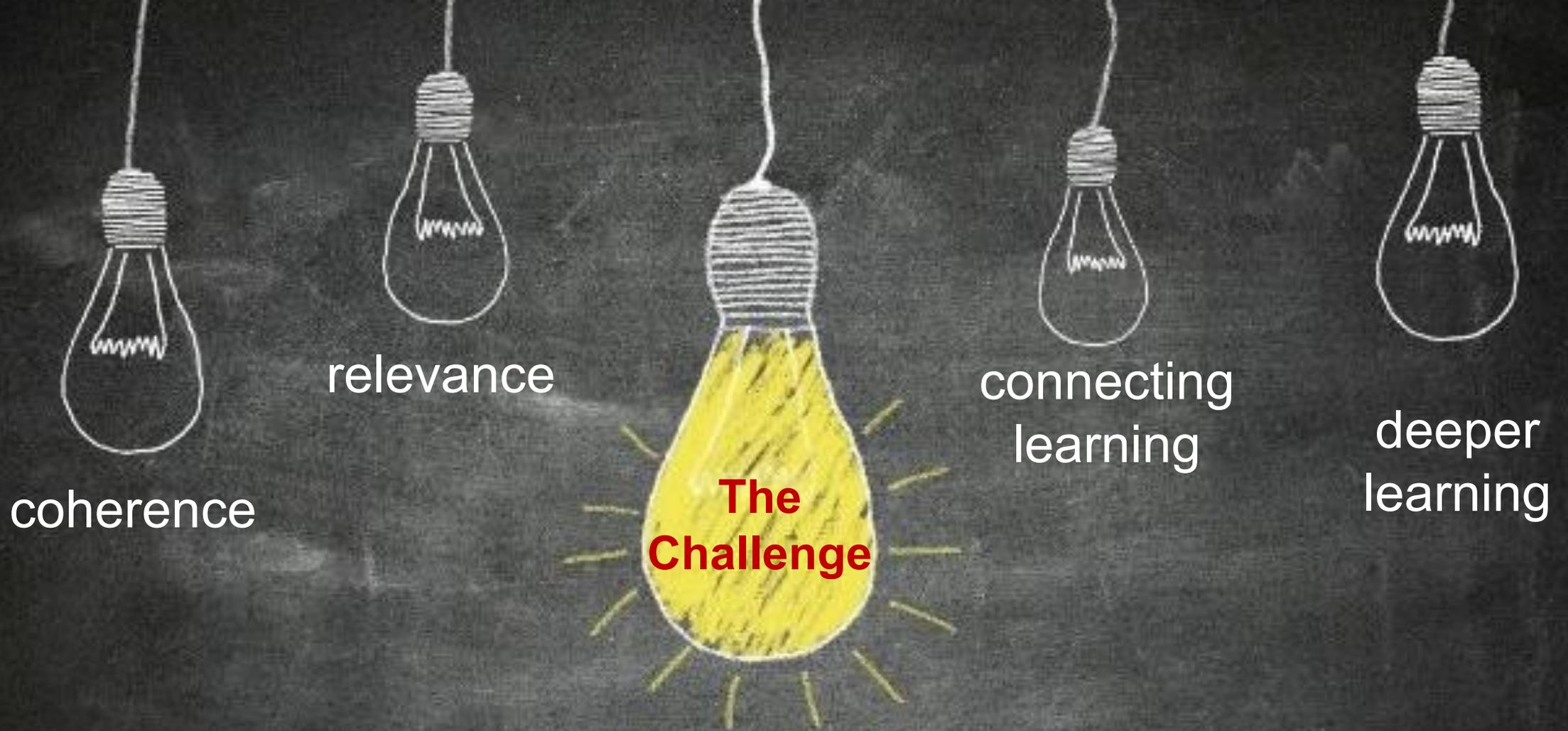
Scotland's Curriculum Framework
curriculum improvement cycle



There is, therefore, **a need for processes to select, update, prioritise** and combine learning aims and contents that give coherence and consistency to student learning trajectories.

To provide more detail without drifting towards strict specification in learning areas, **it may be a helpful first step to formulate big ideas**, as a growing number of education systems have been **developing**. Systems such as British Columbia (Canada), Korea, Norway and Singapore have been selecting **broad overarching themes** that relate to a number of subjects within curriculum areas of learning.





‘Big Ideas’ mean different things in different systems & contexts



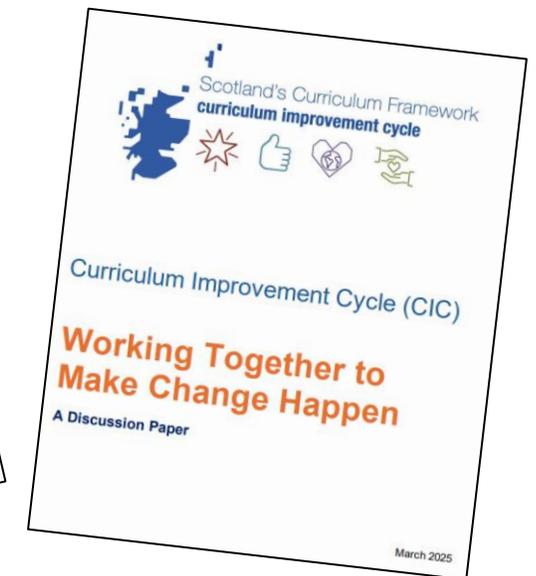
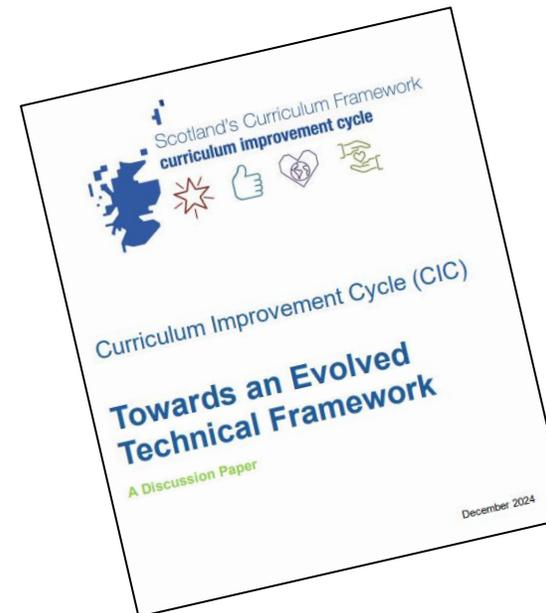
Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC)

Background and a Case for Change

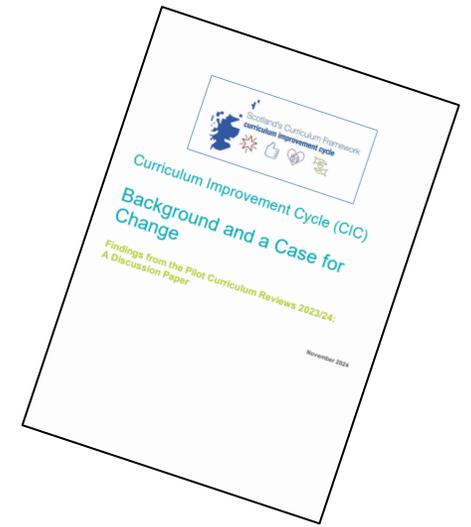
Findings from the Pilot Curriculum Reviews 2023/24:
A Discussion Paper

November 2024

- Shares key findings of the **pilot reviews**
- Makes a case for **evolution of the current technical framework**
- Explores the position of **knowledge** in the curriculum



Messages from the pilots

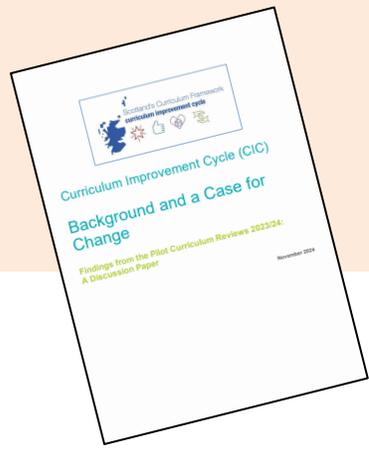


Autonomy

Prescription



Clarity with
autonomy



Insights from high-performing school systems:

(A comparative study - Korea, Hong Kong, Finland, Estonia, British Columbia: Master 2023)

The position of knowledge in high performing systems

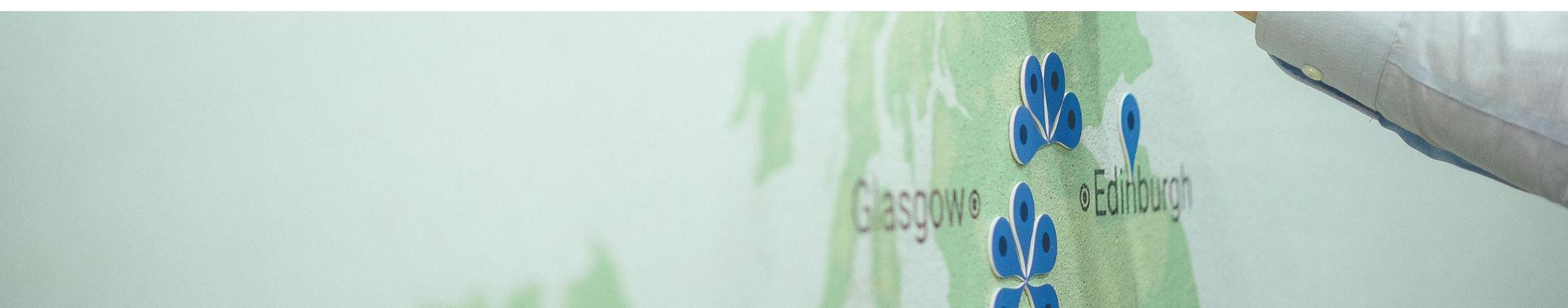
Curriculum
structured around
**traditional
disciplines**

High priority to developing
students' deep
understandings of essential
disciplinary concepts,
principles, and methods
which may be relatively few
in number.

Opportunities for students
to **deepen conceptual
understandings** by applying
their learning to a variety of
meaningful, often real-
world, contexts.



The Current Technical Framework



Our **current technical framework** is defined as all documents used by educators to plan what young people learn, including guidance such as the **Es and Os**, benchmarks, **progression frameworks**, responsibilities of all, as well as **approaches to moderation**.

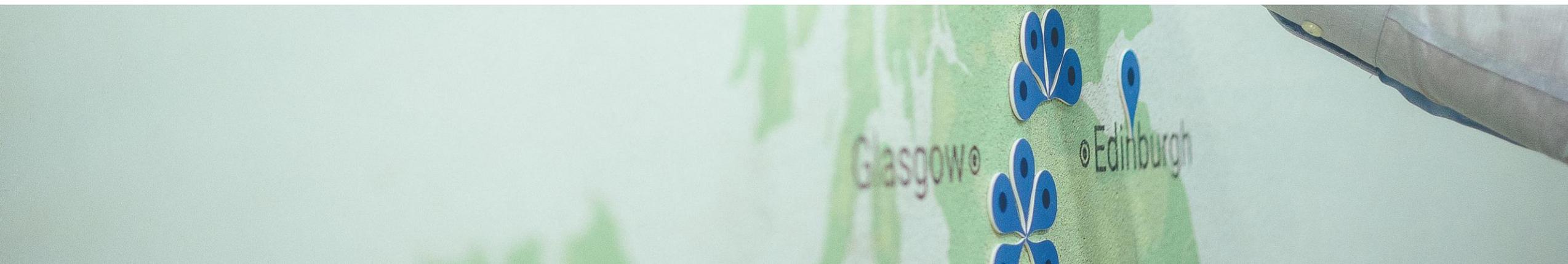
Current Technical Curriculum Framework

Specific issues:

- **Vagueness** of language use in the Es & Os (and benchmarks)
- Issues in the use of **'I Can' statements**
- Ineffective and overly complex position of **cross-curricular areas / core competencies**
- Linking of experience to outcomes **pre-determines pedagogical approaches**
- One size fits all model does not take into account **differences between subject disciplines.**



Evolving the Technical Framework



Key principles for evolving the Technical Framework

Provide parameters for the selection of content as part of decluttering the curriculum

Clarify the knowledge learners should have at key points in their learning

Outline what progression looks like within and between levels

Clearer and more coherent guidance

Ensure an evolved framework is adaptable to realities of the differing nature of subjects

Allows for flexibility and autonomy at the level below the key ideas

A 3-18 'framework': alignment and consistency between the BGE and Senior Phase

A clearer and coherent position for cross curricular expectations (core competencies)

Evolving the Technical Framework



A risk of over focus on content in response to a lack of clarity



Over-prescription of knowledge can limit the autonomy of teachers



Develop a framework focusing on conceptual knowledge and not content



The framework should be to make clear what concepts need to be taught and how progression in knowledge is related to developing understanding of these concepts

MEMBERSHIP OF LANGUAGES CIC

1. Collaboration Group

Network of around 130 practitioners from every local authority in Scotland. who represent different sectors and contexts across the system.



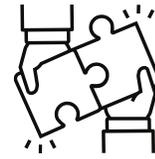
2. Core Group

Smaller team of around 35-40 practitioners from across primary, secondary, higher education, ITE, LANGS, SCILT and SQA.



3. Critical Friends

The team (around 20-25) should conduct a proof of concept, testing the new system.



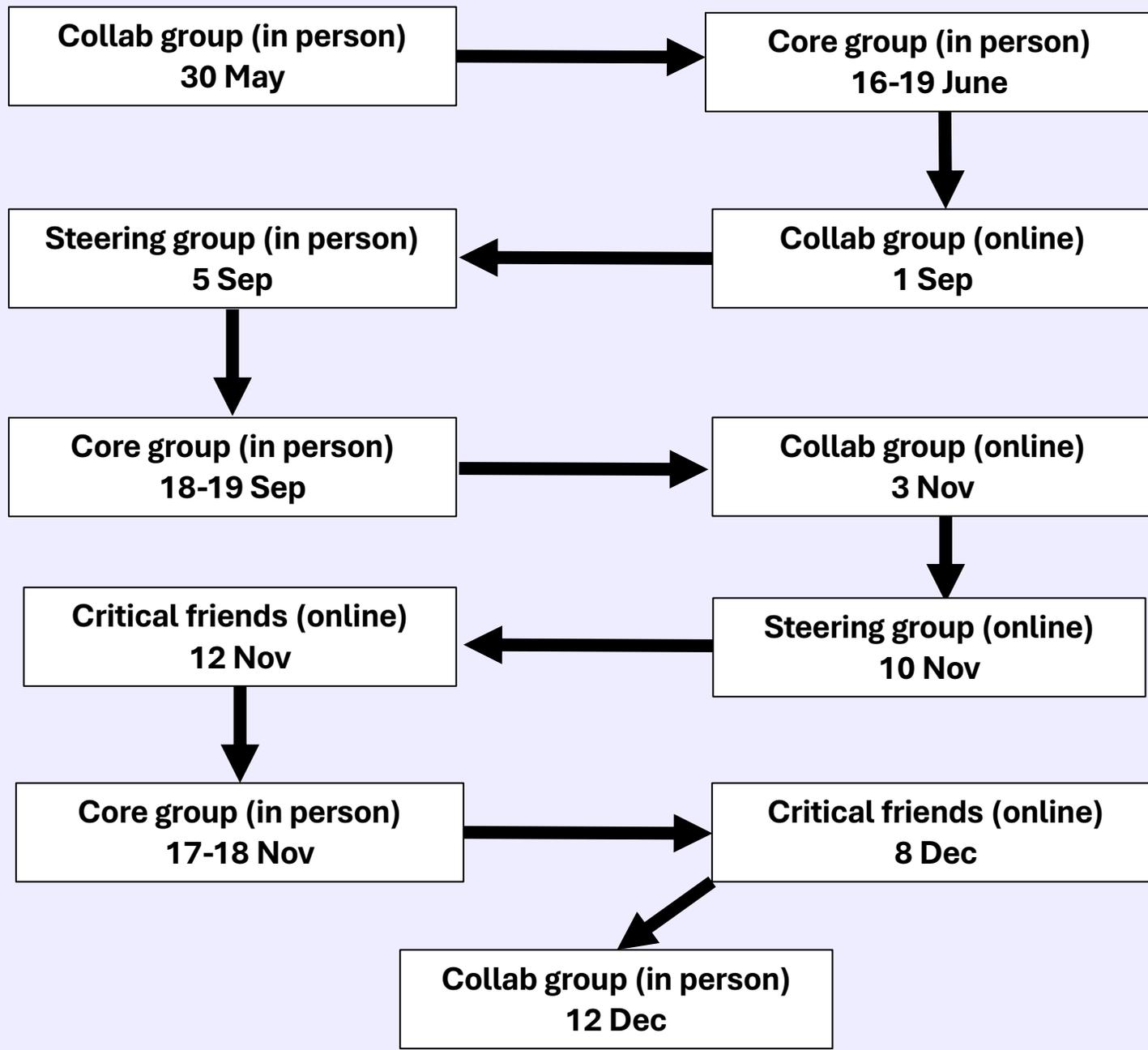
4. Steering Group

The Steering Group (around 12) brings together senior leaders and representatives from across the system to provide strategic leadership





Engagement: May to December (collab, core, critical friends, steering)





THE LANGUAGES TECHNICAL FRAMEWORK

What needs to be included in the next iteration of the Languages technical framework?

What key information do practitioners need to plan for their learners?

Outline – Technical Framework



Layer 1: What do we want learners to UNDERSTAND
The **Big Ideas** and **Concepts**



Layer 2: What do we want learners to KNOW and be able to DO
Outline **Conceptual Knowledge** and **Skills**



Layer 3: What do we want learners to know and be able to do at different stages in their learning journey
Clarify what **PROGRESSION** will look like (**deepening understanding of the concepts**)

The Big Ideas in Languages (Dec 2025)

Communicating and understanding in different languages



Understanding people, places and cultures



Thinking like a linguist





Layer 2 – Overview: Know and Do





Layer 1: What do we want learners to UNDERSTAND
The **Big Ideas** and **Concepts**



Layer 2: What do we want learners to KNOW and be able to DO
Outline **Conceptual Knowledge** and **Skills**



Layer 3: What do we want learners to know and be able to do at different stages in their learning journey
Clarify what **PROGRESSION** will look like (**deepening understanding of the concepts**)

What does **conceptual knowledge** look like for languages?

What will this look like in a **national progression framework**?



The way forward...

Purpose and Big Ideas

Concepts and conceptual knowledge

National progression framework and exemplification

National Qualifications / Qualifications Scotland



Other considerations

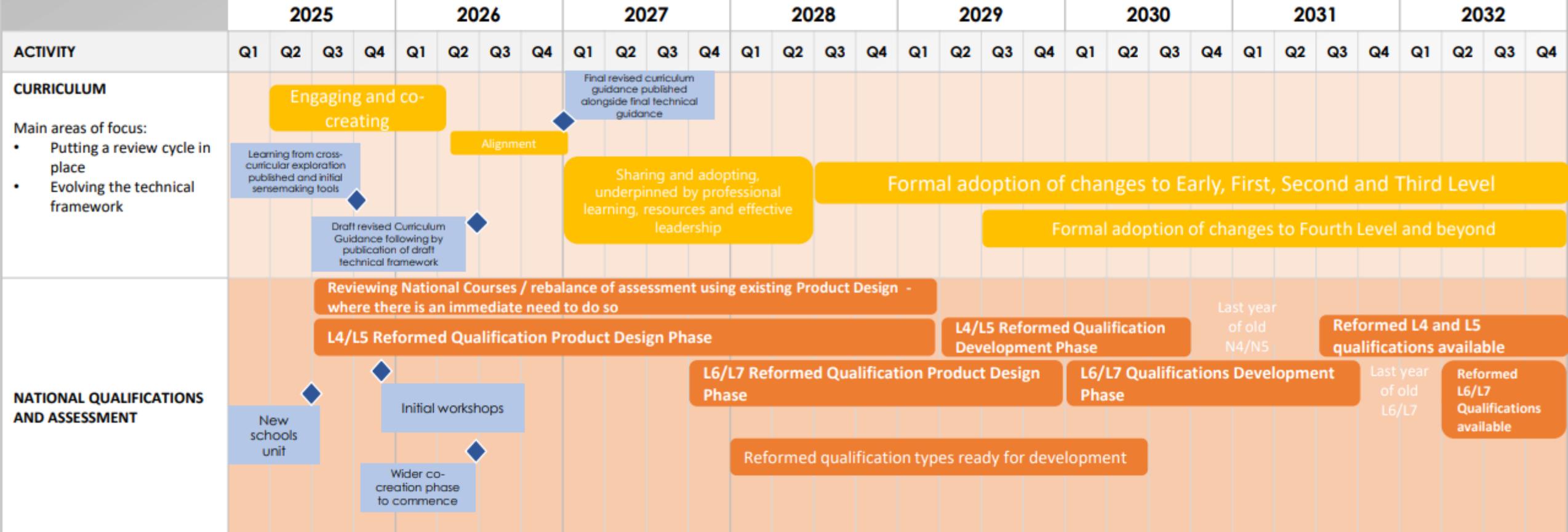
Language-specific guidance for grammar progression?

Principles and Practice (pedagogy and planning for learning)

Prescription vs autonomy in curriculum planning (primary vs secondary)

Alignment with CEFR?





Curriculum, Qualifications and Assessment Reform – Timeline

This diagram illustrates our current and shared understanding of how reform to curriculum, qualifications and assessment will be taken forward over a number of years. The diagram starts in 2025 with the Curriculum Improvement Cycle well underway (the Cycle having commenced in early 2024) and concludes with the availability of new qualifications at SCQF Levels 6 and 7 in 2032. The timeline has been developed by the Scottish Government in conjunction with key partners including Education Scotland and SQA/QS and has also been tested with the Curriculum Assessment Board.

Any questions or feedback?

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