



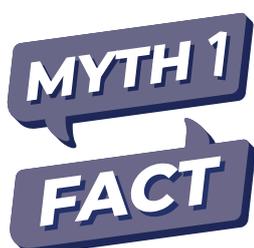
TransformED

TRANSFORMING TEACHING AND LEARNING

This myth-buster sets out to challenge some of the most common misunderstandings about TransformED. By separating fact from fiction, it highlights the evidence behind the reforms and explains what is really changing.

10

MYTHS

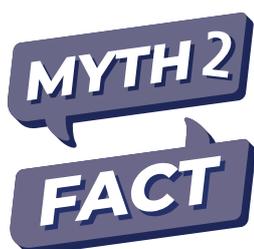


TransformED is focusing on the wrong things

Every reputable international study makes one thing clear: the greatest levers for improving outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged pupils, are the quality of teaching and learning. Effective curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment are the foundations of all high-performing education systems.

Pretending otherwise, or suggesting that these can be secondary priorities, ignores decades of evidence from the OECD, McKinsey and the world's most successful jurisdictions. These areas have had almost no investment or reform in Northern Ireland for over a decade, making renewal long overdue. That is why renewal is now essential.

These are the parts of the system that matter most for children's life chances and strengthening them sits at the very heart of **TransformED**.



Reform is happening at breakneck pace

TransformED has one of the most carefully phased timelines of any education reform programme in the UK or Ireland. Schools will have several years to prepare for the new curriculum, new GCSEs and A levels, and the new statutory assessment framework.

This deliberate pacing is designed to provide clarity, stability and confidence. By taking a measured, step-by-step approach, the programme will ensure that reforms are introduced in a way that supports teachers, protects professional learning time and allows schools to embed change effectively.

The **TransformED** Implementation Roadmap sets out this phased approach clearly, showing when each element of reform will be introduced and how the different strands – curriculum, assessment and qualifications – fit together.

September 2028: First implementation of new curriculum phased over three years

September 2029: First teaching of new GCSEs

September 2030: First teaching of new A levels

March 2030: First new Year 4 Key Stage assessments in literacy and numeracy

March 2031: First new Year 7 and 10 Key Stage assessments in literacy, numeracy and science.

We want every school to have a predictable path forward so that implementation is thoughtful, well-supported and successful.



MYTH 3

FACT

TransformED will increase teacher workload

The opposite is true. TransformED is specifically designed to reduce workload, not increase it. It replaces the current vague curriculum framework with clear, sequenced content and high-quality resources, removing the need for teachers to design extensive programmes of study or build progression models from scratch. For the first time in many years, teachers will be supported with coherent materials rather than having to fill system-level gaps themselves.

Workload will also reduce through Key Stage Assessment reform, which will remove current workload-intensive arrangements based on teacher judgement with short, standardised, often auto-marked assessments. These are designed to be quick, consistent and low-stakes, giving teachers useful information without the heavy administrative burden.

At GCSE and A level, the new CCEA specifications will remove controlled assessment and coursework wherever they are not essential. At present, these tasks require teachers to design, supervise, mark and moderate large volumes of work often under tight deadlines. Streamlining this will significantly reduce workload pressure across Key Stage 4 and post-16.

Taken together, these reforms represent one of the most substantial opportunities in a generation to ease teacher workload. Suggesting otherwise overlooks the realities teachers have expressed for years: the system has been asking them to do too much, with too little structure or support. TransformED is designed to change that.

MYTH 4

FACT

TransformED sidelines Northern Ireland expertise in favour of English experts

TransformED brings together the best of international expertise and strong local professional insight.

An International Ministerial Advisory Panel has been established to provide advice and guidance. It consists of seven members: four from England, the former Chief Inspector of the Republic of Ireland, and experts from New Zealand and Australia.

This global perspective is balanced by extensive local involvement. Alongside the International Panel, there is a local academic panel and two Northern Ireland Principals' Panels.

The Curriculum Taskforce Advisory Committee bring together international advisors with representatives from ETI, CCEA and three local practitioners, and the Subject Working Groups drafting the new curriculum are staffed by teachers and academics from across Northern Ireland.

International expertise is included for a simple reason: every successful education system learns from global evidence. It brings fresh insight, challenges assumptions and helps us build on what has been proven to work elsewhere. Ignoring this would mean turning away from the lessons that consistently underpin the world's highest-performing systems.

TransformED is designed to combine the best of global insight with the strengths of our own system and those who claim otherwise are mischaracterising the programme for political effect.

10
MYTHS



MYTH 5

FACT

TransformED is simply following Conservative reforms in England

This claim is factually wrong and politically convenient for those who wish to caricature the programme rather than deal with its substance. TransformED does not include academies, free schools, league tables or market-driven accountability. Those were key elements of the Gove reforms. TransformED does not have this focus rather focussing on investing in professional development and strengthening teaching and learning.

Northern Ireland is learning from what works internationally, and this certainly includes some of the lessons from England, who are performing strongly in international assessments in recent years, but applying them in a way that reflects our own context and values. TransformED is a distinct, locally shaped plan that draws on evidence not ideology.

MYTH 6

FACT

The current Northern Ireland curriculum is working well

The 2007 curriculum is now almost two decades old and does not provide the clarity, sequencing or subject-specific structure modern education requires. Its extreme vagueness leaves teachers guessing what to teach and how to build progression leading to enormous variation between schools and widening disadvantage.

At primary level, entire subjects are often condensed into just a few brief bullet points. This does not offer the coherence, ambition or progression that children need to build secure understanding over time.

The evidence from Lucy Crehan's independent review is unambiguous: the current framework is outdated, inconsistent and inequitable. It lacks a clear progression pathway within subjects, places excessive planning burdens on teachers, and leaves pupils, particularly our most disadvantaged pupils without a consistent, clearly defined entitlement to essential knowledge and support. Northern Ireland's children deserve a curriculum that is strong, structured and forward-looking.

MYTH 7

FACT

TransformED prioritises knowledge and downgrades skills

This argument misunderstands how learning works. Knowledge and skills are not in competition rather they are deeply interconnected and skills depend on knowledge. So called '21st century skills' – creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving and collaboration - cannot be developed in a vacuum. Pupils need secure foundations in literacy, numeracy and subject knowledge across the curriculum before they can develop and use these skills effectively.

Cognitive science consistently shows that pupils cannot think critically, solve problems or create without solid subject knowledge stored in long-term memory. Without that foundation, working memory overloads and higher-order thinking simply breaks down. The new curriculum addresses this directly. It embeds creativity, collaboration and critical thinking within a coherent knowledge structure, strengthening these skills by giving pupils the background knowledge they need to use them well.

10
MYTHS

The alternative – teaching abstract "skills" without meaningful content – has been discredited internationally. Systems that tried this approach have repeatedly found that it fails the very pupils who depend most on school to build secure understanding.



MYTH 8

FACT

A knowledge-rich curriculum is a right-wing agenda and harms working class children

This is one of the most persistent and misleading myths around curriculum reform. A knowledge-rich curriculum is not ideological. Rather it is grounded in contemporary cognitive science and endorsed by governments of different political tradition across the world. From the Francis Review and the current Labour government in England, to Labour-led Victoria in Australia to Sweden's centrist coalition.

As stressed in the Independent Review of Education, knowledge matters because it is the foundation of understanding, reasoning and higher-order skills.

Most importantly, vague, skills-only curriculum like the current Northern Ireland curriculum hurt working-class children the most. Children with limited access to books, museums and cultural capital depend on schools to build powerful knowledge systematically. When schools are not given clear content to teach, the children who depend most on the system are the ones left behind.

If we want fairness, social mobility and every child to have the same chance of success, we must replace this high-level, unspecific framework with one that builds knowledge and skills deliberately, week by week and year on year. Only then can we give every child the firm foundation they deserve.

MYTH 9

FACT

Removing controlled assessment from GCSEs and A levels harms SEN pupils and disadvantaged learners

The evidence simply does not support this claim. Ofqual's large-scale analysis (2004–2017) shows negligible to no benefit to SEN or disadvantaged pupils from coursework. In fact, coursework often advantages pupils from more affluent backgrounds due to home support.

There are also major concerns about authenticity and consistency, issues heightened by the rise of generative AI. It is notable that this proposal to remove unnecessary controlled assessment was strongly supported by school leaders and teachers. Where practical skills require it, controlled assessment will continue. But removing it, where it adds no educational value, reduces workload and strengthens fairness.

MYTH 10

FACT

Removing AS levels means all A level exams will be taken at the end of Year 14

This is simply untrue. The new modular A level will have three units across two years. Pupils can still 'bank' marks through an optional Year 13 unit worth 30% of the final grade. 70% is then taken in Year 14. Schools may also choose a linear model if they wish.

The new system reduces the number of exams, protects teaching time, and eliminates the well-documented problems associated with the current AS model.

The reality is that the existing AS structure harms learning by shortening Year 13 with many pupils losing eight to ten weeks learning in May and June, increasing exam load and allowing AS results to be misused as gatekeeping for progression into Year 14. The new modular A level fixes these problems while retaining the benefits of early assessment for those who wish it.

**10
MYTHS**