

Response of the Coalition for Marriage to the Department of Education consultation on the Northern Ireland Curriculum 2028

Submitted by: Coalition for Marriage (C4M)

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Consultation: Northern Ireland Curriculum 2028, Department of Education, opened 16 June 2026, closing at 11.59pm on Wednesday 30 September 2026, at <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-northern-ireland-curriculum-2028>

About the Coalition for Marriage

Coalition for Marriage is a grassroots campaign founded in 2012 to defend marriage as the voluntary, exclusive, lifelong union of one man and one woman. Our published work is at <https://www.c4m.org.uk>

Summary of our position

Every pupil in Northern Ireland should learn what marriage is, and why it's the gold standard for family life. The Personal, Social, Civic and Careers framework never names it. Yet it teaches pupils that two human rights documents which name marriage "outline foundational human rights", and it teaches how a man and a woman conceive a child. We ask the Department to name marriage at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3, to teach those two documents' own words on it, and to confirm that schools may teach it as the voluntary, exclusive, lifelong union of one man and one woman.

Marriage is missing from the entitlement

Marriage has no place in the new curriculum's entitlement. The Department's Curriculum Overview Document promises that "entitlement is no longer left to interpretation at school or classroom level", at <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2026-06/TransformED%20-%20Curriculum%20Overview%20Document.pdf>

The nearest the framework comes to marriage is at Key Stage 2, "that some adults are in romantic relationships, that these relationships involve care and commitment", at https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2026-09/TransformED%20-%20PSCC_04Sep.pdf The words mother and father don't appear in it at all. We searched all eighteen subject frameworks and key stage documents and the word marriage doesn't appear in any of them, at <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/subject-frameworks-and-key-stage-documents>

The Department's Equality Impact Assessment mentions marriage only as a status a pupil might hold, counting the 16 to 19-year-olds who married in 2024, at <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2026-06/Curriculum%20Framework%20-%20Equality%20Impact%20Assessment%20%28EQIA%29%20-%20June%202026.PDF>

The framework names the documents that name marriage

At Key Stage 3 pupils must learn that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights "outline foundational human rights". Both name

marriage in their own words. Article 16 of the Declaration says that “Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family”, and that “The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State”, at

<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights> Article 12 of the Convention says that “Men and women of marriageable age have the right to marry and to found a family, according to the national laws governing the exercise of this right”, at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/42/schedule/1> The Human Rights Act 1998 makes the Convention part of the law of Northern Ireland, at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/42/section/22>

The framework cites the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child only for “the right of the child to express views on matters affecting them”. It leaves out Article 7, which gives every child, “as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents”, at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child> It teaches a child's right to be heard and leaves out the right that marriage exists to protect.

The framework teaches the biology and leaves out marriage

From Key Stage 1 pupils learn “that there are differences between male and female bodies”. At Key Stage 3 they learn how the body changes “in preparation for reproduction”, and in Science “about fertilisation following sexual intercourse and about pregnancy and childbirth”, at

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2026-06/TransformED%20-%20Science.pdf> So a pupil learns that it takes a man and a woman to make a child, and never learns about marriage, which binds a mother and a father to each other and to their children. That's why marriage is the gold standard for family life.

Married parents are far more likely to stay together. The Institute for Fiscal Studies found in 2010 that 26 per cent of cohabiting couples had separated by their child's third birthday against 7 per cent of married couples, at https://ifs.org.uk/sites/default/files/output_url_files/bn107.pdf The American Institute for Family Studies found cohabiting relationships three to five times more likely to dissolve than marriages across Europe, at

<https://ifstudies.org/blog/cohabitation-marriage-and-union-instability-in-europe/> And the gap isn't only about who marries. The Marriage Foundation's research director followed 3,324 couples for his University of Bristol doctorate, which the Foundation summarised in June 2026. By their child's fourteenth birthday 45 per cent of parents who never married had separated, against 26 per cent of those who married before conception, even allowing for differences in their backgrounds, at https://marriagefoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/PhD-The-Timing-of-Marriage_digital-1.pdf

What we ask

1. That Key Stage 2 pupils learn that marriage is the promise a husband and wife make to each other, freely and in public, to be faithful for life.

2. That Key Stage 3 pupils learn why marriage gives children the best chance of growing up with both their parents.

3. That Key Stage 3 pupils learn Article 16 of the Declaration, Article 12 of the Convention and Article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in their own words.

4. That the Department confirms a school may teach marriage as the voluntary, exclusive, lifelong union of one man and one woman. The framework already lets schools explore its content “in ways that align with their own ethos”, at https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2026-09/TransformED%20-%20PSCC_04Sep.pdf Article 2 of the First Protocol to the Convention, also in Schedule 1 to the Human Rights Act 1998, requires the State to “respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions”, at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/42/schedule/1>

The Minister of Education calls this consultation “a once-in-a-generation opportunity”, at <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2026-06/TransformED%20-%20Curriculum%20Overview%20Document.pdf> The curriculum that comes out of it should teach every child what marriage is.

Dr Tony Rucinski

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