

Advancing Shared Education

Executive Summary

March 2013



Report of the

Ministerial Advisory Group

Professor Paul Connolly, Dawn Purvis and PJ O'Grady

Advancing Shared Education

Executive Summary

Report of the

Ministerial Advisory Group

Professor Paul Connolly, Ms Dawn Purvis and Mr P J O'Grady



PREFACE

This report presents our vision for how shared education can best be taken forward in Northern Ireland. We were appointed in July 2012 by John O’Dowd MLA, Minister of Education, to explore and bring forward recommendations to him on how to advance shared education in the region. Our appointment represents the first of three key commitments in the Northern Ireland Executive’s Programme for Government 2011-15 regarding shared education. The intention is that this report will inform the development of a strategy to achieve the other two commitments; namely that all children have the opportunity to participate in shared education programmes and that there is a substantial increase in the number of schools sharing facilities by 2015.

Since our appointment we have engaged in a widespread consultation exercise with key stakeholders across the region and visited a number of schools, colleges and institutions across Northern Ireland, including those involved in shared education. In addition we have directly sought the views of parents and children and young people and also undertaken a review of the evidence that currently exists, both locally in Northern Ireland and also nationally and internationally, regarding different models of shared education and their effectiveness.

We see our vision of shared education – where schools collaborate across sectors to ensure that all children and young people have opportunities to learn together – as providing a framework for creating a world-class education system for Northern Ireland. We therefore do not view shared education as just another policy initiative but rather as the core mechanism for improving schools, increasing educational outcomes for all children and young people and preparing them to play a full and active role in building and sustaining an open, inclusive and confident society.

We are under no illusions regarding the enormity of the task ahead. Our education system remains deeply divided, not just in relation to religion but also in terms of social class where there are clear trends at post-primary level for those young people from more

affluent backgrounds to attend grammar schools and those from less affluent backgrounds to attend secondary schools. Moreover, there remain significant concerns regarding the marginalisation and underachievement of those from low socio-economic backgrounds and of particular sub-groups of children and young people.

While there are difficult challenges ahead, we remain optimistic about the potential for shared education to address these problems and to help build an education system that can genuinely become one of the best in the world. However, achieving this will require some fundamental changes to how our education system is organised and the way schools operate.

While our recommendations are therefore ambitious and challenging, they are also realistic and achievable. In the context of the area-based planning process and also the rationalisation of the education support sector through the establishment of the new Education and Skills Authority, we have a unique opportunity to ensure that shared education is at the heart of the new system.

Our main fear is that this opportunity to transform our education system will be lost if key stakeholders simply retreat into, and seek to defend, their respective interests and sectors. Our children and young people deserve better than this. What we need is an open and wide-ranging debate about the future of our education system that is driven by a desire to improve the quality of education and outcomes for all children and young people, that is informed by evidence and that puts the interests and rights of children and young people at its heart. We sincerely hope that our report can help stimulate such a debate.

Professor Paul Connolly (Chair)
Mr P J O'Grady
Ms Dawn Purvis

March 2013

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Northern Ireland is a society emerging out of a sustained period of armed conflict. For over 25 years, and during the period commonly referred to as 'The Troubles' (1969-1994), over 3,600 people in the region lost their lives and a further 40,000 were injured. Not surprisingly, this violence led to significant population shifts and increasing segregation as the two main religious/political communities, Catholics/nationalists and Protestants/unionists, sought to protect themselves.

Since the ceasefires of the mid-1990s, there has been a clear movement towards peace. While there have been setbacks and intermittent periods of violence, there is a sense that Northern Ireland is now emerging out of conflict as devolved government has been restored and politicians from across the political divide begin to work together.

The legacy of the conflict remains however, with nearly half of the population continuing to live in areas that are predominantly Protestant/unionist or Catholic/nationalist. In relation to education, the vast majority of children and young people in primary and post-primary schools (92.6%) attend either Catholic maintained schools or schools that are either state controlled or voluntary and that are mainly attended by Protestant children and young people.

Moreover, the education system in Northern Ireland currently experiences significant divisions in other respects as well. The most notable of these is in relation to socio-economic background where a clear tendency exists at post-primary level for young people from more affluent backgrounds to attend grammar schools and those from more economically deprived backgrounds to attend non-grammar schools. These divisions are, in turn, associated with significant achievement gaps.

There also remain concerns as to whether the educational and social needs of particular groups of children and young people are being met,

including: Irish Travellers; black and minority ethnic children and young people; children and young people in care; children and young people with disabilities and those with special educational needs; and children and young people who are lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT).

This report presents the findings of the work of the Ministerial Advisory Group on Advancing Shared Education that was appointed by the Education Minister in July 2012. Given the context outlined above, the Group was asked by the Minister to advise him on how best 'shared education' might be taken forward to meet the needs of all learners and to provide for children and young people from a variety of backgrounds to be educated together.

In undertaking this work, the Ministerial Advisory Group was asked to bear in mind wider education policy changes and initiatives taking place in Northern Ireland including:

- The reorganisation of the education sector in relation to the new unitary Education and Skills Authority;
- The major review of the existing schools estate being taken forward through the area based planning process;
- The review of the common funding formula for schools being led by Sir Robert Salisbury; and
- A range of key policy initiatives including, for example: the post-14 Entitlement Framework; the Department of Education's *Community Relations, Equality and Diversity* policy; the Department's overall framework for raising standards and tackling gaps in attainment, *Every School a Good School*; the review of teacher education; and a range of reviews of proposed frameworks in relation to such areas as early years provision, Irish medium education and special educational needs and inclusion.

Whilst mindful of the enormity of its task, the Ministerial Advisory Group also recognises that this period of change provides a unique opportunity

to influence how these changes might best be steered to ensure that the needs of all learners are met and that children and young people from across the different divides can learn together.

Terms of Reference

The terms of reference for the Ministerial Advisory Group were to advise the Minister on how best to advance 'shared education' in Northern Ireland, within the context of overall education policy and the aim of improving educational outcomes for learners.

The Group was asked by the Minister to take a broad focus in relation to 'education': from preschool through to primary and post-primary schools, special education provision and the youth services. It was also asked to take account of: the evidence on the preferences of learners and parents; the evidence on the effectiveness and value for money of existing approaches and of best practice locally and internationally; any barriers to the advancement of 'shared education'; and how 'shared education' might best address issues such as ethos and identity.

The definition of 'shared education' that the Ministerial Advisory Group was asked to use involved the organisation and delivery of education so that it:

- Meets the needs of, and provides for the education together of, learners from all Section 75 categories and socio-economic status;
- Involves schools and other education providers of differing ownership, sectoral identity and ethos, management type or governance arrangements; and
- Delivers educational benefits to learners, promotes the efficient and effective use of resources, and promotes equality of opportunity, good relations, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion.

Working Methods

Since its appointment, the Ministerial Advisory Group has engaged in a widespread consultation exercise with key stakeholders across the region that has resulted in: the receipt of 111 written submissions from a wide range of organisations and individuals; 25 face-to-face meetings with a range of stakeholders; and visits to a number of examples of shared education in practice and other schools, colleges and institutions across Northern Ireland. All of the written submissions, together with full transcripts of all of the face-to-face meetings are available on the Group's website.

In addition, the Group has been supported by Parenting NI in seeking the views of parents and by the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) in seeking the views of children and young people. Alongside this work, the Ministerial Advisory Group has also undertaken a review of the evidence that currently exists, both locally in Northern Ireland and also nationally and internationally, regarding different models of shared education and their effectiveness.

Through all of its work, the Group has been guided by the need to be:

- *Outcomes-focused* and concerned with what works best for improving the education of all learners;
- *Evidence-informed* and committed to ensuring that any advice given is based upon the best available evidence; and
- *Children's rights-based* and committed to ensuring that the work of the Group and the advice it makes to the Minister are all fully compliant with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and other relevant human rights standards.

Definitions

In taking into account a wide range of evidence submitted, the Ministerial Advisory Group endorses the broadened definition of 'shared education' provided in the Minister's terms of reference. As such:

Shared education involves two or more schools or other educational institutions from different sectors working in collaboration with the aim of delivering educational benefits to learners, promoting the efficient and effective use of resources, and promoting equality of opportunity, good relations, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion.

The focus of shared education should encompass early childhood services through to primary and post-primary schools, further education colleges (that currently fall under the remit of the Department for Employment and Learning) and special education provision and youth services. By 'different sectors', the definition refers to schools and other education providers of differing ownership, sectoral identity and ethos, management type or governance arrangements.

By 'collaboration', the Ministerial Advisory Group refers to a range of sustained activities that schools and other educational institutions can be engaged in together locally to achieve the aims set out in the definition. However, these activities must include two key elements:

- Teachers across the schools and/or educational institutions working together, whether that be in relation to training and professional development activities or curriculum planning and the delivery of lessons; and
- Children and young people from across those schools and/or educational institutions actively learning together through face-to-face interaction, whether that is working together on specific projects or through participation in the same classes and/or the same sporting and extra-curricular activities.

Teachers' coming together from different schools for the purposes of professional development does not count, in itself, as an example of 'shared education'. Similarly, schools that bring children and young people together for isolated events, such as a school quiz or Christmas carol singing, also does not count, in itself, as 'shared education'.

Vision, Values and Key Principles

At the heart of this definition of shared education is a vision of change that sees sustained and meaningful collaboration between schools at local level helping to improve the quality of educational provision and raise standards while also, in encouraging sustained and meaningful contact between children and young people from different backgrounds, helping to build a greater understanding and respect for diversity and thus contribute to a more open, inclusive and confident society.

It is with this in mind that the Ministerial Advisory Group identifies two values that stem from the definition of shared education above and that should be at the heart of any future education system. These values also are in line with the current vision of the Department of Education, the statutory requirements of the Northern Ireland Curriculum and key policies, including *Every School a Good School*:

- An ability to recognise and respond to the diverse range of talents and abilities that exist among children and young people to ensure that all learners have the opportunity to reach their full potential at each stage of their development; and
- An emphasis on developing the whole child so that they have a strong sense of their own identity and an understanding and respect for others and that they are able to develop a wide range of knowledge and skills to enable them to make a full and positive contribution to building a prosperous, open, diverse and inclusive society.

From the wide range of submissions received and evidence considered, and guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), it is clear that there are seven key principles that need be at the heart of efforts to advance shared education. These combine to create a blueprint for education that:

1. Welcomes and celebrates diversity and respects the right of children and young people to be educated in accordance with their own religious, cultural or philosophical traditions while also

ensuring that they develop an understanding and respect for others by having significant and meaningful opportunities to be educated together with those from different backgrounds;

2. Ensures that all children have access to a quality education and enjoy equal opportunities within the education system, and thus has a particular concern with identifying and meeting the needs of children and young people from vulnerable and/or marginalised backgrounds;
3. Is built upon strong links with parents and care-givers, fostered in early childhood and maintained throughout each child's progression through the education system, and respects the role they play in supporting their child's education and development;
4. Provides all children and young people with a broad-based and holistic education whilst also ensuring that this is progressively tailored to meet their individual needs and to help develop their particular strengths and talents to the fullest;
5. Helps children and young people develop a greater awareness of and respect for diversity, in all its forms, and equips them with the knowledge and skills to be able to live in an open, inclusive and confident society;
6. Respects the rights and dignity of all children and young people, ensures that their views and opinions are heard and responded to and promotes their safety and wellbeing; and
7. Acknowledges the central importance of good leadership in schools and the quality of teachers and support staff and thus places a particular emphasis on ensuring high quality initial teacher education and continuing professional development opportunities that encourage teachers and educationalists learning and sharing together.

Existing Approaches to Shared Education

There now exists a strong and compelling body of research evidence internationally that demonstrates the benefits of schools collaborating together across sectors in a sustained and meaningful way.

Schools that work together in relation to the sharing of resources, expertise and good practice, and that bring their children together to engage in meaningful educational activities, have been shown to produce clear and measurable improvements in outcomes compared to those that do not. Similarly, there is overwhelming evidence internationally that when meaningful and sustained opportunities are provided for children and young people from different backgrounds to learn together then this can result in improved attitudes and relationships.

In Northern Ireland, there have been laudable examples over the years of a variety of programmes, policies and initiatives aimed at developing and enhancing opportunities for children and young people from across the religious divide to learn together and for schools from across different sectors to work together to share expertise and resources.

Such efforts have been given increased momentum since 2007 with the efforts of the Sharing Education Programme, based at the School of Education, Queen's University Belfast, and the shared education initiatives delivered by Fermanagh Trust and the North Eastern Education and Library Board through its Primary Integrating/Enriching Education Project. Together, these three programmes have involved 66 partnerships drawing together over 210 schools and 16,000 children and young people across Northern Ireland. Each of these partnerships has involved schools engaging in cross-sectoral collaboration concentrating on substantive, curriculum-based activities.

These programmes have, in turn, generated a substantial evidence base demonstrating that:

- Cross-sector collaboration between schools, even in very difficult and religiously-divided localities, is possible;

- Shared education provides an important mechanism for ensuring that children and young people have access to a wider range of subjects and courses and thus enabling the delivery of the entitlement framework;
- Collaboration between schools provides a welcomed and effective means for teachers to share good practice and engage in professional development; and
- Most children and young people and their parents and/or care-givers involved in these initiatives find the experience a positive one and there is evidence that, for the majority, such experiences are encouraging more positive attitudes and relationships between children and young people from different backgrounds.

There are also, however, some very clear and consistent messages emerging from this substantial body of practice:

- There is no 'one size fits all' model for how schools should collaborate but, rather, how this is done will vary from one context to the next;
- It is important that particular models of collaboration are not imposed on schools but that they are allowed to develop organically, reflecting the needs and situations that exist at a local level;
- The existing funding model for schools tends to create competition between schools and can inhibit the extent to which schools feel able to genuinely collaborate;
- There are clear resource implications for schools and other educational institutions wishing to engage in shared education and thus some mechanism for supporting and incentivising schools to be involved in cross-sectoral collaboration is required;

- School collaboration is not easy and presents significant practical challenges in relation to matters such as timetabling, curriculum planning and transport and thus strong leadership within schools is essential; and
- The current process of area-based planning provides considerable potential to take forward the vision of shared education. Moreover, the Department of Education's guidance in its Terms of Reference includes the need to consider 'opportunities for shared schooling on a cross-sectoral basis'. However, there is limited evidence of a commitment to developing such cross-sectoral collaboration within the current plans within each of the Education and Library Boards for the post-primary sector.

In addition, there is some evidence to suggest that there are particular issues that need to be addressed for children and young people and parents engaging in shared education programmes in areas that continue to experience high degrees of segregation and poor community relations. For example, some children and young people reported feeling uncomfortable and intimidated when visiting other schools. In addition, there is evidence that engagement in shared education activities for those living in areas where there is low positive contact between communities may increase negative attitudes in the short term.

The Perspectives of Parents and Learners

The existing evidence available, together with the findings arising from the consultation exercises with parents and with children and young people, suggests there is clear support for shared education in principle but that there are a number of concerns regarding how it will work in practice.

The evidence suggests that the vast majority of parents, children and young people feel that sharing facilities, sharing classes and doing projects with children from other schools is a good idea. Moreover, those that have taken part in shared education programmes have tended to report very positive experiences. They have identified a range of benefits

including: being able to mix with those from different backgrounds to themselves; enhancing learning opportunities; and having access to a wider range of activities and subjects than they would otherwise have.

The parents, children and young people also raised a number of common concerns that tended to focus on a range of logistical issues regarding the problems of timetabling and the transportation and supervision of children and young people between schools.

In addition, and through the many consultation groups undertaken by NICCY, children and young people raised a number of more specific concerns in relation to their experiences of shared education initiatives. These included: worries regarding being bullied; only having limited or negative interactions with other children and young people; and feeling vulnerable and out of place. In addition, some young people expressed concerns regarding the inappropriateness of young people from grammar and non-grammar schools engaging in shared activities and classes.

The children and young people involved in the focus groups made a number of suggestions for how shared education might best be advanced. On some issues, the children and young people had differing views. However, the key points where there was broad agreement were the need to:

- Begin shared education early, especially in pre-school and primary school;
- Provide opportunities for children and young people to meet prior to beginning shared projects or classes in order to develop relationships;
- Focus on subjects and activities that involved practical activities and working together, including technology, art, PE, science and music; and
- Consult children and young people when planning shared activities.

Integrated Education and Shared Education

The Ministerial Advisory Group recognises the significant efforts of parents over the last 30 years to develop an integrated education system for their children and the gains they have made in this regard. Latest figures indicate that there now exist 62 integrated schools (42 primary and 20 post-primary) educating just over 21,500 children and young people that have, as a fundamental goal, the need for Catholic, Protestant and other children to be taught together, under one roof. Moreover, integrated schools have a clear Christian ethos and seek to provide for the different faith-based needs of the Protestant and Catholic children and young people whilst meeting the needs of those of other religious faiths and none.

It has been suggested by representatives and members of the integrated sector that integrated schooling represents the most effective and efficient model for shared education and that the promotion of integrated schools should be at the heart of any attempts to advance shared education in Northern Ireland. Moreover, significant concerns have been expressed regarding the perceived failure of the Department of Education to fulfil its statutory duty to encourage and facilitate integrated education.

The Ministerial Advisory Group notes these concerns and the fact that while other sectors are to be represented in the new Education and Skills Authority, there are currently no plans in the Education Bill for the integrated sector to have representation. However, the Group does not agree that integrated schools should be viewed and actively promoted as the 'preferred option' in relation to plans to advance shared education.

Parents and children have the right to their religious, cultural and philosophical beliefs being respected. The vision of the Ministerial Advisory Group, as set out above, is therefore predicated on parental choice. Where there is sufficient parental demand, the system should actively encourage the development of a range of schools with differing types of religious, philosophical and/or cultural ethos.

For some parents this will mean a preference for an integrated school so that their children can learn in a multi-faith environment, while for others it will mean a preference for a particular faith-based school or for a secular school. The key issue, for the Ministerial Advisory Group, is that while the vision of a plurality of different schools is respected and encouraged, this must be within the context where strong efforts are made to ensure that these different types of school collaborate together in a sustained and meaningful manner to ensure that educational standards are enhanced for all children and young people and good relations are promoted.

It is in this respect that the Ministerial Advisory Group views integrated schools as a sector, rather than as a model of shared education. As a distinctive school sector that reflects a particular religious and philosophical ethos, the Department of Education should make every effort to ensure that parental demand for integrated schools is met, where this is feasible, as it should for any other type of school.

However, promoting one particular school sector runs counter to the vision of a diverse and plural system outlined above and is not a model for advancing shared education. By definition, shared education involves schools and other educational institutions of different types and from different sectors collaborating together. Actively promoting one sector over other sectors will not only be divisive but it will not, in itself, lead to the educational benefits that accrue from schools sharing good practice and collaborating together; nor will it necessarily ensure that children and young people from a wider range of backgrounds learn together.

Academic Selection at 11 and Shared Education

Within the existing shared education initiatives there are a number of examples of successful collaborations between grammar and non-grammar schools. While this is to be welcomed, it is clear from the evidence that the existing system of academic selection at the age of 11 presents a serious obstacle to fully realising the vision and key principles set out above for a shared education system.

This obstacle can be seen in three key respects. Firstly, there is clear evidence of a social class divide in relation to the young people that attend grammar and secondary schools. For example, the odds of those entitled to free school meals securing a place at a grammar school are nearly five times lower than others. The selective system therefore works against the vision of children and young people learning together from different socio-economic backgrounds.

Moreover, and secondly, there is clear evidence that a child's or young person's educational opportunities differ depending on whether he or she attends a grammar or secondary school. When comparing like-with-like, the odds of a young person achieving the basic standard at 16 of five or more GCSE passes at grades A*-C, including English and maths, in Northern Ireland are over three and a half times higher if they attend a grammar school compared to a secondary school.

The consequences of the particular selective system in operation in Northern Ireland therefore not only generates divisions and militates against children and young people from different socio-economic backgrounds working together but, equally importantly, it undermines the fundamental rights of all children and young people, under the universal United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), to non-discrimination.

This link between selective educational systems and increased achievement gaps between children in relation to socio-economic background is also well established in the international research literature. This is equally true for Northern Ireland where the achievement gap is higher than in comparison with England. While the odds of young people entitled to free schools meals not achieving the basic standard of five GCSE A*-C passes at 16 are three times higher than other young people in England, this figure rises to being four times higher in Northern Ireland.

It is because of this link between the particular system of academic selection in Northern Ireland and the wider achievement gap in the region that the UN Committee on the Rights of Child has raised specific concerns regarding the selective system in its last two country reports.

Thirdly, the maintenance of distinct grammar and secondary schools will continue to impede the most effective rationalisation of the schools estate through the area-based planning process. At the post-primary level, it will ensure that there are a larger number of schools than are needed for each local area. This is not only wasteful but it will leave some schools, largely secondary schools, remaining vulnerable to falling numbers and reduced funding.

Removing the ability of post-primary schools to select on the basis of academic criteria will enable the development of a smaller number of larger schools that will each have the economies of scale to deliver the entitlement framework while also enabling strong and sustainable collaborative relationships to develop with other schools in their locality.

It is for the three reasons above that the view of the Ministerial Advisory Group is that advances in relation to shared education will remain seriously limited while the current system of academic selection at age 11 continues in Northern Ireland. In making this argument, however, the Group is keen to stress two points.

Firstly, the Group is concerned not to impede the progress that has already been made in relation to advancing shared education. As outlined above, there is widespread support for advancing shared education even within the current selective system and also an impressive body of evidence of good practice to build upon in this regard. As such, the lack of a political consensus regarding the future of academic selection should not be an obstacle to making significant progress now regarding implementing the first 17 of the 20 recommendations made below.

Secondly, the Ministerial Advisory Group recognises that academic selection, *within* schools with all-ability intakes, can have an important role to play in relation to ensuring that all children and young people are able to receive a bespoke education that is tailored to their particular skills and talents and thus ensures that they reach their fullest potential. However, this can best be achieved through a more flexible and sophisticated system of banding and streaming within schools that recognises that each child and young person develops at a different rate

and is likely to have strengths in certain areas while possibly requiring additional support in others.

In this sense, the current system that only offers two educational pathways – grammar or secondary – and that determines which pathway a child will follow based upon one high-stakes and currently unregulated test at the age of 11 is divisive, archaic and not fit for purpose. As such, if the true vision for shared education is to be realised then the current system of academic selection for education needs to be replaced with a more sophisticated system of selection within education.

Recommendations

The recommendations set out below reflect a view of shared education as providing a central mechanism for improving the quality of educational provision, expanding the range of opportunities open to children and young people and for preparing them with the skills required to make a full and active contribution to building an inclusive society based upon respect for diversity and difference. As such, shared education is not viewed merely as an 'add on' to the mainstream business of education. Rather, it is seen as the key driver for creating and sustaining a world-class education system.

Given the wide-ranging and systemic nature of the recommendations made below, it has not been possible to undertake a detailed assessment of the likely costs associated with implementing these. However, the Ministerial Advisory Group notes that there are likely to be significant savings associated with some aspects of the advancement of shared education while other aspects will require additional investments. It is therefore quite possible that the implementation of the recommendations below would be cost-neutral.

Moreover, the Group notes that a number of international funding bodies have expressed an interest in helping support the advancement of shared education in Northern Ireland, including the International Fund for Ireland and The Atlantic Philanthropies. In addition, consultations undertaken by the Special European Union Programme Body in relation to its next phase of peace funding for Northern Ireland have identified education as a clear priority area. It is quite possible, therefore, that a strong commitment to advancing shared education in Northern Ireland may attract significant levels of new investment in the region.

It is with the above in mind that the Ministerial Advisory Group makes the following 20 recommendations:

Mainstreaming Shared Education

1. The Education Bill should be amended to place a statutory duty on the Department of Education and the new Education and Skills Authority (ESA) to encourage and facilitate shared education as defined in this report. This should include reviewing all existing and proposed policies within education, and providing advice as required, to ensure that all activities seek to encourage and facilitate shared education where appropriate.
2. ESA should establish a central unit, or identify an existing unit, that should take lead responsibility for encouraging and facilitating shared education. This unit should:
 - Develop and drive forward a strategy for advancing shared education that includes setting targets and goals, monitoring shared education activities and producing an annual report on progress being made;
 - Establish and maintain a regional structure for supporting schools and other educational institutions engaged in shared education; and
 - Commission research and evaluations into shared education and facilitate the sharing and dissemination of good practice.
3. As part of the proposed revised common funding formula suggested by Sir Robert Salisbury in his independent review for the Department of Education, a 'shared education premium' should be incorporated into the funding formula for schools and other educational institutions. This premium would recognise the added value of shared education and should be weighted in terms of:
 - The number of children and young people that are engaged in shared education activities, as defined in this report; and
 - The proportion of school time that children and young people are engaged in such activities.

Supporting Schools in Shared Education

4. Where schools and other educational institutions are in receipt of a shared education premium, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) should include an explicit review of the use of that funding in its inspection reports particularly in relation to:
 - The added value of such shared education activities;
 - The value for money of the funding provided; and
 - The quality and effectiveness of the shared education activities.
5. The ETI should produce a biennial report that reviews the current range and extent of shared education activities across Northern Ireland, highlights good practice and makes recommendations regarding how these could be extended and enhanced, within the overall context of school improvement.
6. The Department of Education, in its review of teacher education and continuing professional development, should develop a framework for supporting the early and continuing professional development of teachers that encourages its delivery through shared education and thus via effective collaboration between schools and other educational institutions. It is recommended that such a framework should encourage collaborative networks of schools and other educational institutions identifying their own professional development needs and being devolved appropriate levels of funding through the common funding formula to commission the training, courses and/or other support that they require from the most appropriate providers.
7. ESA should ensure that all teachers and principals in schools and other educational establishments have access to a range of training courses and resource materials, and ongoing advice and support, to help them develop the particular knowledge and skills associated with effectively organising and managing shared education activities and classes. This should include a focus on:

- Establishing and organising collaborative activities, projects and classes between schools and other educational establishments;
 - Ensuring the meaningful participation of children and young people in the planning and delivery of shared education initiatives (see also Recommendation 11);
 - Promoting positive relationships and dealing constructively with any negative incidents and poor interactions between children and young people that may arise;
 - Covering sensitive topics and issues which might arise in the context of a diverse group of children and young people; and
 - Developing and maintaining meaningful and effective relationships with parents and other care-givers.
8. The Department of Education and the Department of Employment and Learning, in conjunction with the higher education institutions responsible for delivering teacher training and professional development courses, should review existing provision to consider appropriate mechanisms for collaboration to ensure that student teachers and teachers returning for professional development can be provided with opportunities to learn together, including in relation to preparation for teaching through shared education.

Schools and Other Educational Institutions

9. Schools and other educational establishments should develop more meaningful relationships with parents and caregivers to ensure that their rights to be involved in the education of their children are fully respected and supported. To achieve this, it is recommended that:
- ESA establish an appropriate network that supports schools and other educational institutions in developing relationships with parents and care-givers and in creating and sharing best practice regionally; and

- Schools and other educational establishments include a specific section in their Development Plans, that includes clear plans and goals, for how they intend to engage parents and caregivers and ensure their active and sustained support in the education of their children.

10. An independent review should be undertaken of current practice in relation to the delivery of:

- Personal, Social and Emotional Development (Pre-School Education);
- Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (Foundation Stage and Key Stages 1 and 2);
- Local and Global Citizenship (Key Stages 3 and 4); and
- The Curriculum Framework for Youth Work (Youth Service).

The review should consider the effectiveness of the current Community Relations Equality and Diversity (CRED) policy and also include consideration of the opportunities that are provided for children and young people to discuss and explore issues associated with divisions, conflict and inequalities in Northern Ireland. The review should make recommendations regarding the content of these areas of learning and also how teachers and other educationalists can best be supported to deliver these.

11. In fulfilment of its duties under Article 12 of the UNCRC, the Department of Education should make it a requirement that all schools establish School Councils. Within this, School Councils need to:

- Be fully representative of the school body and of all year groups;
- Provide a mechanism for consulting children and young people on all school matters that affect them, including plans for shared education activities;

- Support children and young people in forming and expressing their views; and
 - Include appropriate mechanisms for the views of children and young people to then be considered and given due weight by the school.
12. The necessary legislation should be brought forward for schools and other educational institutions to be designated as ‘public authorities’ under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and thus to be required to comply with the statutory duties to promote equality of opportunity and good relations. In doing this, consideration should be given to whether it is possible to reduce the demands that will be placed on schools and other educational institutions in terms of meeting their specific responsibilities under Section 75 whilst maintaining their core duties to promote equality of opportunity and good relations.
13. The Education and Skills Authority, in conjunction with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, should establish a unit to provide training, produce support materials and to advise schools and educational institutions in relation to preparing, implementing and monitoring the equality schemes they would be required to produce under Section 75. It is expected that one aspect of meeting the duty to promote good relations will include engagement in shared education initiatives.
14. The Department of Education should undertake a review of how shared education, and the enhanced collaboration between mainstream schools, special schools and educational support centres, can most effectively meet the needs of children and young people with disabilities, those with emotional and behavioural difficulties and those with special educational needs. The review should focus on the development of effective models for collaboration that can:
- Ensure, wherever possible, that children and young people are taught in mainstream schools; and

- For the small minority of children and young people where mainstream schooling is not suitable, that they have meaningful opportunities to learn with children and young people in mainstream school environments.

Area-Based Planning and the Schools Estate

15. The Department of Education, Education and Library Boards and the CCMS should play an active role in promoting shared education through the area-based planning processes for post-primary and primary schools. This should include:
 - Being proactive in identifying opportunities for shared education that may not have been considered and setting out options for schools and colleges to consider; and
 - Supporting and advising schools that wish to develop shared education arrangements, including providing advice on how two or more schools can transfer their status into a 'shared school' whereby they maintain their respective forms of ethos.
16. Where there is sufficient, viable and consistent parental demand, the Department of Education should actively support the establishment of schools and other educational institutions with a particular religious, philosophical or cultural ethos.
17. In relation to all existing schools, the Department of Education should:
 - Establish a transformation process for schools where there is clear parental demand wishing to adopt a particular ethos – whether, for example, this be faith-based, integrated, secular or Irish Medium – and to ensure that it is user friendly and not bureaucratic and that parents are made aware of their powers under the processes established;
 - Identify how, in the light of parental demand, the process can be made easier whereby a school can incorporate the badge of a particular school type or sector in its title; and

- While recognizing the responsibility of the Department to ensure the viability of schools in each local area, where there is clear evidence of over-subscription, it should allow existing schools to expand, in a phased and careful manner, in order to meet the demand that exists among parents.

Academic Selection

18. The Northern Ireland Executive should, without delay, introduce the necessary legislation to prevent schools from selecting children on the basis of academic ability and require schools to develop admissions criteria that are truly inclusive and egalitarian in nature.
19. The Department of Education, through the area-based planning process should consider how best to plan for sustainable post-primary schools with all-ability intakes. In doing this, the Department should have regard for parental demand in each local area for schools with a different religious, philosophical or cultural ethos and make every effort to ensure diversity of provision to meet this demand where it is feasible.
20. The Department of Education should initiate a fundamental review of the use of selection *within* schools with all-ability intakes to explore the benefits and limitations of different models of banding and streaming. The review should be tasked with making recommendations regarding how best to take forward selection within schools so that all children and young people reach their full potential.

Further copies of this Executive Summary, in English and Irish, can be downloaded from the website: www.qub.ac.uk/mag as can copies of the full report and associated documents.

