

EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Submission to the Ministerial Advisory Group on Advancing Shared Education

November 2012

- 1.1 The Equality Commission welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Ministerial Advisory Group on the advancement of shared education in Northern Ireland.
- 1.2 The Commission recommends a move to a system of sharing across the full range of education providers at each level of provision; one which routinely teaches students together via a shared curriculum in shared classrooms. The Commission considers that such an approach could better provide children with shared awareness, understanding and experience of the value and range of diverse cultures, identities and backgrounds in Northern Ireland; while also enabling children from different cultures/communities to experience a shared society.
- 1.3 The Commission considers that sharing in education must impact meaningfully and substantively on every child and that a shared experience should be central to the education system as a whole.
- 1.4 The Commission welcomes the establishment of a ministerial advisory group to consider the best way to promote the advancement of shared education in Northern Ireland. The Equality Commission welcomes, in particular, the emphasis within the Advisory Group's definition of 'shared education' on the need to ensure that the organisation and delivery of education meets the needs of, and provides for the education together of, learners from all section 75 categories.
- 1.5 The Equality Commission seeks to have an active and involved role in informing the Advisory Group's views on the advancement of shared education in Northern Ireland and would be interested to meet with the Ministerial Advisory Group.

2 Summary of Recommendations

2.1 The Equality Commission advocates support for a shared system of education in Northern Ireland.

2.2 In our February 2012 response¹ to the consultation on the Draft Programme For Government 2011-2015 we endorsed:

*“the development of a clear focus on shared education so as to maximise equality of opportunity and good relations, recognising that this will be facilitated through the teaching of a shared curriculum in shared classrooms”.*²

2.3 The Commission considers that societal mixing and social cohesion is limited by separation in our education provision. It is the Commission’s view that a system of shared education has a central role to play in advancing a shared society. The Commission also recognises the important role that education can play in cultural development.

2.4 It is for this reason that the Commission recommends a move to a system of sharing across education providers which routinely teaches pupils together via a shared curriculum in shared classrooms. The Commission considers that such an approach could better provide children with shared awareness, understanding and experience of the value and range of diverse cultures, identities and equality groups in Northern Ireland.

2.5 The Commission also considers that a shared system of education is aligned to the delivery of a range of government strategies and programmes (Programme for Government; Cohesion, Sharing and Integration; Every School a Good School etc) and maximising efficiencies in the school system and estate.

2.6 In particular the Commission would highlight:

¹ECNI (2012): Consultation response to the draft Programme for Government 2011-2015. Available at http://www.equalityni.org/archive/word/PfG_ECNIResponse_PfG220212.docx

² ECNI (2012): Consultation response to the draft Programme for Government 2011-2015, page 3. Available at http://www.equalityni.org/archive/word/PfG_ECNIResponse_PfG220212.docx

- The need to see improved equality of opportunity and educational outcomes across all equality grounds, in particular taking account of particular circumstances (e.g. Travellers; Protestant working class boys; children with disabilities and/or special educational needs; and those for whom English is an additional language etc).
- The need for advancement of sharing in education to maximise good relations across all relevant equality grounds, including community background.
- That a future based on cohesion, sharing and integration should seek to maximise sharing in a range of areas, including in education; and that we would expect to see Government investing in a shared educational experience as a route to increased social cohesion in society.
- That sharing in education must impact meaningfully and substantively on every child and that a shared experience should be central to the education system as a whole.
- The importance of sharing at each stage of educational provision – pre-school; early years; primary; post-primary; special needs and tertiary levels.
- The importance of sharing across the full range of education providers (ethos; identity or management / governance arrangements etc).
- That promoting equality and good relations within a school should complement school ethos and reinforce the importance of promoting equality and good relations in education.
- The importance of the rights of parents to choose individual schools (within appropriate economic constraints) - but in a context that does not impact on the development of a shared system as a whole.
- The potential to enhance existing mechanisms (e.g. the Entitlement Framework, Area Learning Partnerships, Area Based Planning; Common Funding Formula etc) using lessons learnt to date (such as from the Integrated Education Model and that emerging from the QUB Shared Education Programme³), while providing appropriate mechanisms to

³ The SEP encourages schools to make cross-sectoral collaborations an integral part of school life, creating enhanced educational and personal development opportunities for everyone involved. The SEP has, since 2007, involved over 100 schools at Post-Primary and Primary level in cross-sectoral collaboration concentrating on substantive, curriculum based activities. In the year beginning Sep 2010, SEP2 partnerships involved over 4,000 students across Northern Ireland. See <http://www.schoolsworkingtogether.co.uk/>

incentivise and advance partnership working and shared delivery (e.g. via funding mechanisms etc).

- The importance of engaging with pupils, parents, education providers and wider stakeholders to communicate the rationale for the proposed system and model(s) - to improve associated policy proposals and to incentivise a move.
- The importance of agreeing and mainstreaming indicators to measure and review on sharing and collaboration in education provision and governance – both to acknowledge success and promote improvement.
- The importance of addressing wider issues linked to sharing in education – including academic selection at age 11; teacher training; the teacher’s exception under FETO; and better understanding the reasons for, and impacts of, any differential patterns of enrolment to education providers.

3 Background

- 3.1 The history of education in Northern Ireland has been, to varying degrees, one of separate provision for boys and girls, disabled and non-disabled, Traveller and settled, and children of differing faith backgrounds. An added separation occurs at age 11, when children are further differentiated through the current academic selection process, with outcomes influenced by socio-economic status.
- 3.2 Sharing in education also needs to be considered in the context of wider sharing. Shared services, shared housing and shared spaces have the potential to enhance and be enhanced by sharing and integration within the education system. It is anticipated that the Cohesion Sharing and Integration Strategy (CSI) will provide Government with the opportunity to set priorities across a range of Departments.
- 3.3 The Equality Commission has long advocated support for a shared system of education in Northern Ireland. In 2008 the Commission affirmed:
- continued concern about the system of academic selection at eleven years old;
 - that all teachers should be able to enjoy the same legislative protection as other workers and the exemption in FETO should be abolished at secondary level, as previously

recommended, with early consideration given to urging the removal of the exemption at all levels; and

- the provision of shared education should be encouraged.

3.4 In the Commission's resultant (November 2008) publication "Every Child an Equal Child: An Equality Commission Statement on Key Inequalities in Education and a Strategy for Intervention"⁴, the Commission noted:

"It is hard to escape the conclusion that educating children of different backgrounds together has the potential to reduce the fears and tensions between communities that are founded on ignorance. It is equally difficult to avoid the conclusion that the long experience of separate educational provision has represented a lost opportunity for everyone in Northern Ireland."

3.5 In 2010 the Commission jointly published a challenge paper entitled "Ensuring the Good Relations Work in our Schools Counts - A Strategy to meet our needs for the 21st Century."⁵ The paper included a number of recommendations to progress sharing and good relations in education, including highlighting the need for 'greater sharing and collaboration between teacher training colleges'⁶.

3.6 In our February 2012 response⁷ to the consultation on "Building A Better Future: Draft Programme For Government 2011-2015" we recognised "the steps taken in terms of shared resources, including the schools estate and teachers, and shared programmes" and endorsed:

"the development of a clear focus on shared education so as to maximise equality of opportunity and good relations,

⁴ECNI (2008): Every Child an Equal Child – An Equality Commission Statement on Key Inequalities in Education and a Strategy for Intervention, pages 5 and 6. Available at <http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/ECKeyinequalities.pdf>

⁵ The Good Relations Forum (2010): Ensuring the Good Relations Work in our Schools Counts – A Strategy to meet our needs for the 21st century. Available at <http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/EnsuringGoodRelationsWorkinourSchoolsCounts.pdf>

⁶ Ibid, page 17

⁷ECNI (2012): Consultation response to the draft Programme for Government 2011-2015. Available at http://www.equalityni.org/archive/word/PfG_ECNIResponse_PfG220212.docx

*recognising that this will be facilitated through the teaching of a shared curriculum in shared classrooms”.*⁸

- 3.7 Priority 4 ‘Building a Strong and Shared Community’ (page 51) of the Executive’s Programme for Government 2011-2015⁹ includes the following key commitments:
- Establish a Ministerial Advisory Group to explore and bring forward recommendations to the Minister of Education to advance shared education by 2012/13 (DE)
 - Ensure all children have the opportunity to participate in shared education programmes by 2015 (DE)
 - Substantially increase the number of schools sharing facilities by 2015 (DE).
- 3.8 Mainstreaming shared education also fits within a number of the Department of Education’s priorities – including a commitment to improving education performance at GCSE level, particularly for those from a disadvantaged background. The Department’s Community Relations, Equality and Diversity (CRED) policy also commits to “*encourage greater sharing and collaboration across and between all educational settings on a cross community basis*”¹⁰.
- 3.9 The Commission recognises the crucial role that schools have in contributing to the reconciliation of our society. This is not solely a job for schools, but schools do play a critical role¹¹. The current policy environment provides a timely opportunity to address persistent inequalities in education and make a substantial contribution to improved social and community cohesion within our society.

⁸ ECNI (2012): Consultation response to the draft Programme for Government 2011-2015, page 3. Available at http://www.equalityni.org/archive/word/PfG_ECNIResponse_PfG220212.docx

⁹ See page 51 of the document at: <http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/pfg-2011-2015-final-report.pdf>

¹⁰ Department of Education (2011): *Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education*, page 25. Available at <http://soap.tibus.com/credni/filestore/documents/Final%20CRED%20Policy%20-%20March%202011%20-%20English%20PDF.PDF>

¹¹ The Good Relations Forum (2010): *Ensuring the Good Relations Work in our Schools Counts* (2010), page 11. Available at

<http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/EnsuringGoodRelationsWorkinourSchoolsCounts.pdf>

4 Scope of this Submission

4.1 The focus of the Commission's consideration in this submission is on the impact that a system of education can have on equality of opportunity and good relations. It is neither the Commission's intent nor remit to advocate a specific *model* or models of education, but rather to indicate the broad equality and good relations goals that we would expect a *system* to deliver.

4.2 The Commission intends that the positions set out in this paper to be forward facing, mindful of the past but not bound to it. The Commission has referenced evidence on shared education and educational inequalities throughout the submission and in the Annexes to the document. The submission also makes some suggestions as to how existing education policy may afford additional opportunities to advance shared education.

Good Relations

4.3 In November 2008, the Commission published *Every Child an Equal Child*¹², which set out the vision we had for ensuring the mainstreaming of equality of opportunity and good relations in Northern Ireland's education system. In Chapter 2 of the document, the Commission noted:

'It is hard to escape the conclusion that educating children of different backgrounds together has the potential to reduce the fears and tensions between communities that are founded on ignorance. It is equally difficult to avoid the conclusion that the long experience of separate educational provision has represented a lost opportunity for everyone in Northern Ireland.'

4.4 The Commission remains of the view that the overall system of education provision in Northern Ireland has an important role to play, not only in the development of the child, but in advancing cohesion, sharing and integration across all equality grounds, with particular reference to promoting good relations.

¹² The publication following from the Commissions endorsement of public policy positions on key educational issues" (paper EC/08/5/4)

Equality of Opportunity

- 4.5 The Commission is mindful that any consideration of the role of the education system in maximising good relations must also take account of the important role of education in maximising equality of opportunity across the full range of equality grounds, including the need for a particular focus being on the steps required to assist those groups identified as being at particular disadvantage to facilitate delivery of improved educational attainment for particular groups.
- 4.6 The Commission's 2007 'Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland'¹³ and subsequent (2008) publication 'Every Child an Equal Child: An Equality Commission Statement on Key Inequalities in Education and a Strategy for Intervention'¹⁴, set out a range of key educational inequalities in Northern Ireland and strategies to address same. The Commission's further 2010 publication "*Inequalities in Education: Facts and Trends 1998-2008*"¹⁵ sought to consider patterns of educational attainment in Northern Ireland by different equality grouping – noting differential patterns by, for example, community background; gender; disability and for Irish Travellers (see Annex 1 for a summary).
- 4.7 As well as differing patterns of attainment among equality groupings, wider work has continued¹⁶ to highlight that those from disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly Protestant boys, are most likely to be non-progressors within the education system in Northern Ireland. Recent research has shown that free school meals (FSM) pupils constitute 17% of post-primary pupils but only 7% of grammar school enrolment. It is also the case that Protestant grammars enrol less FSM pupils than Catholic grammars (4.2% compared to 9.9%).¹⁷
- 4.8 While this paper focuses on the importance of shared education in advancing good relations it also recognises that Sharing in education, across the full range of equality grounds,

¹³ [http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/Keyinequalities\(F\)1107.pdf](http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/Keyinequalities(F)1107.pdf)

¹⁴ ECNI (2008): Every Child an Equal Child – An Equality Commission Statement on Key Inequalities in Education and a Strategy for Intervention, pages 5 and 6. Available at <http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/ECKeyinequalities.pdf>

¹⁵ ECNI (2010): Inequalities in Education – Facts and Trends 1998-2008. Available at http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/InequalitiesinEducation_ResearchReport.pdf

¹⁶ Purvis and the Working Group on Educational disadvantage and the Protestant Working Class (2011). Available at <http://www.nicva.org/sites/default/files/Call-to-Action-Summary-Mar2011.pdf>

¹⁷ Boraooh and Knox (Nov 2012) Delivering Shared Education: Knowledge Exchange Seminar

not only has the potential to provide meaningful and sustainable relations between pupils of different cultures and backgrounds, but also has the potential to improve educational outcomes for pupils from a diverse range of backgrounds and abilities.

5 Evidence and Arguments in favour of Sharing in Education

- 5.1 This section seeks to summarise the broad arguments that have been advanced in favour of shared education, as a precursor to a more focused consideration of the Commission's own views on advancing good relations in education.
- 5.2 The arguments in favour of sharing in education are broadly-based and generally rest on three inter-related factors: the educational case; the economic case; and the societal case.
- 5.3 While the relative importance of each of these will depend on specific goals, research¹⁸ has shown that, in the most successful cases of sharing, the three objectives were satisfied simultaneously.

Educational Case

- 5.4 Shared education allows pupils to access the full range of the curriculum. This access to a wider range of subjects can bring about long term benefits. Ultimately, students may develop an interest in subjects delivered via the shared learning programme and may be encouraged to study those subjects at a further or higher education college.
- 5.5 Access to the full range of the curriculum *'is vital in areas where deprivation is more prevalent and is an important driver in breaking the cycle'*¹⁹. Shared Education could provide a mechanism through which more effective schools are paired with less effective schools to help them improve. This process

¹⁸ O'Sullivan et al (2008) *Education and a Shared Future – Options for Sharing and Collaboration in Northern Ireland schools*, page 63. Available at

<http://www.schoolsworkingtogether.co.uk/documents/education-and-a-shared-future.pdf>

¹⁹ Oxford Economic (2010): *Developing the case for Shared Education*, page 12. Available at <http://www.ief.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Economic-case.pdf>

of ‘peer learning’ has the potential to close achievement gaps by improving standards and outcomes for all learners²⁰.

- 5.6 Shared education also has the potential to allow pupils to access up-to-date facilities and allows teachers to share expertise. Shared Education, through school collaboration, *‘may help sustain provision in an area without diminution of a school’s ethos. Indeed, such sharing could provide an enhanced learning experience’*²¹. Shared facilities and teaching can act as a means of ensuring that all young people have access to a wider range of sporting and cultural resources as well as community based activities.

Economic Case

- 5.7 *In 2006, the Bain Review*²² *highlighted the surplus of school places across all sectors and argued strongly for sharing resources to ensure that the schools estate was affordable and used efficiently. A central plank of the Bain review was that the existing plethora of school management systems and the separation of children into different school management types was inefficient both economically and in relation to promoting a vision of a shared Northern Ireland.*
- 5.8 In Northern Ireland, the supply of school places exceeds demand by some 85,000²³ although this is expected to reduce in the coming years²⁴. A large number of primary and post primary schools are under ‘stress’ in terms of their finances, enrolment levels and educational performance, and overall public spending is being significantly reduced.²⁵
- 5.9 There are almost 1,150 schools in Northern Ireland. Over the next 10 years it is estimated that around £3.6 billion is needed to be invested in the schools estate including, major and minor

²⁰ Boroah and Knox (2012): Delivering Shared Education: Knowledge Exchange seminar

²¹ Ibid, page 13

²² Schools for the Future: A Policy for Sustainable Schools DE 2006

²³ NI Executive Press Release (2011): Putting pupils first and shaping our future. Available at <http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/index/media-centre/news-departments/news-de/news-archive-de-september-2011/news-de-260911-putting-pupils-first.htm>

²⁴ NB: The school population is projected to rise by 12,800 (3.9%) by 2018/19 - DE Statistics and Research Branch (2012). Figures available at [http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/32-](http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/32-statisticsandresearch_pg/32-)

[statistics_and_research_statistics_on_education_pg/32_statistics_and_research_numbersofschoolsandpupils_pg/32_statistics_and_research-northernirelandsummarydata_pg.htm](http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/32-statistics_and_research_statistics_on_education_pg/32_statistics_and_research_numbersofschoolsandpupils_pg/32_statistics_and_research-northernirelandsummarydata_pg.htm)

²⁵ Colin Knox ((2012): *Community Engagement in the Education Policy Debate*, page 2.

works and refurbishment.²⁶ There is currently a backlog of applications for both maintenance and capital works across the different types of management in the Northern Ireland schools system.²⁷

- 5.10 Shared education has the potential to reduce the number of separate schools estates across Northern Ireland and to focus on actual demographic patterns. This should, in turn, reduce the level of ‘stress’ experienced by some schools and focus capital investment on fewer schools - *‘Sustainability issues may be addressed through increased co-operation and working with other schools particularly where the main issue affecting a small school is declining enrolment numbers.’*²⁸
- 5.11 There is the potential for shared education to contribute to the wider goal of lowering the costs of a divided society, ‘both directly and indirectly in the future (for example the direct costs arising from civil unrest or the provision of separate services). Additional income may also be generated through inward investment or tourism.

Societal Case

- 5.12 Research examining the effects of integrated and segregated schooling on Northern Irish children found *‘that those attending separate schools were likely to hold more prejudiced attitudes towards the ‘out’ group²⁹ than their peers attending integrated schools³⁰*. The study also found that the mere fact that pupils are given an opportunity to engage with each other on a sustained basis is a key variable in the generation of more positive inter-group attitudes.³¹

‘Theory emanating primarily from the discipline of social psychology provides a strong rationale for contact-based interventions and there is now a considerable body of internationally generated evidence that endorses inter-group

²⁶ Oxford Economic (2010): *Developing the case for Shared Education*, page 11. Available at <http://www.ief.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Economic-case.pdf>

²⁷ Ibid, page 18

²⁸ Ibid, page 13

²⁹ The central hypothesis of social identity theory is that group members of an in-group (‘us’) will seek to find negative aspects of an out-group (‘them’), thus enhancing their self-image.

³⁰ Hughes and Donnelly (2012): *Chapter 4 Promoting Good Relations – the role of schools in Northern Ireland*, page 59

³¹ Ibid, page 60

*encounter as a mechanism for ameliorating prejudice and promoting mutual understanding*³².

*‘Certain modes of shared education (e.g. integrated) not only promote Protestant and Catholic children coming together but also children from other countries. Schools across Northern Ireland are welcoming more and more migrant children to learn differences are to be encouraged and are not something to fear’.*³³

- 5.13 A shared approach to education can also result in the provision of education which is more suited to the needs of local communities and address any gaps in educational delivery.
- 5.14 Recent surveys have also indicated a high level of expressed public support for sharing resources³⁴ and an Ipsos MORI poll in March 2011, commissioned by the Integrated Education Fund, found that almost nine in ten people surveyed were in favour of integrated education as a level of sharing in education³⁵. There is also strong support for lower levels of sharing such as sharing capital facilities, sharing facilities for one-off projects and sharing teachers and facilities between schools³⁶.

6 Further Evidence on the Good Relations Impacts of Sharing in Education

- 6.1 In Northern Ireland, the majority of children are educated separately with little opportunity to mix with children from a diverse range of backgrounds. Recent research³⁷ supports that post-primary provision in Northern Ireland remains mainly one of separate provision. With regards to Community background:

³² Ibid, page 56

³³ Oxford Economic (2010): *Developing the case for Shared Education*, page 12. Available at <http://www.ief.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Economic-case.pdf>

³⁴ 3 out of 4 respondents who expressed an opinion favoured sharing resources, with an overall majority support of 54% of all respondents - Research report from Deloitte for the Belfast Telegraph (June 2012). See – “Overwhelming support in NI for Sharing Schools”. Available at <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/politics/overwhelming-support-in-northern-ireland-for-sharing-schools-16172756.html> See also [IPSOS MORI 2011](#) on public attitudes and attitudes to incentives for sharing.

³⁵ Nolan P (2012) Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report, page 2. Available at http://www.community-relations.org.uk/fs/doc/publications/NIPMR_2012_new_1.pdf

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Borooh and Knox (Nov 2012) Delivering Shared Education: Knowledge Exchange Seminar

- In 2011/12, only 0.8% of children attending **non-grammar** Catholic Maintained schools were from a Protestant background while 2.6% of children attending non-grammar State Controlled schools were from a Catholic background.
- In 2011/12, only 1% of children attending Catholic Maintained **grammar** schools were from a Protestant background while 10% of children attending State Controlled grammar schools were from a Catholic background³⁸.
- Around 5 percent of total pupils³⁹ currently attend grant-aided integrated schools in Northern Ireland.

6.2 While all publicly funded schools are technically open to pupils from any background, the general pattern of school enrolment is not one of diversity and while integrated schools *'represent a highly significant and distinctive approach to integrated education...only the minority of the school population attend them'*⁴⁰. Tertiary education, where formal separation is not a feature, may thus be the first place for many students in which informal mixing occurs among people from a diverse range of equality backgrounds⁴¹.

6.3 Understanding the reasons for, and impacts of, differential patterns of enrolment to education providers may therefore in itself suggest factors of relevance in the development of a more shared system of education in Northern Ireland.

The Formal Integrated Sector

6.4 Research on integrated schools has *'been relatively positive in respect of the contact experienced by pupils'*⁴². A large study⁴³ of pupils attending Integrated, Catholic and Protestant schools, found that those attending separate schools were more likely to

³⁸ Knox and Borooah (Oct 2012): Delivering Shared Education Lecture

³⁹ Department of Education website (Oct 2012) Available at http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/schools-and-infrastructure-2/schools-management/10-types_of_school-nischools_pg/16-schools-integratedschools_pg.htm

⁴⁰ Bain (2006): Schools for the future – funding strategy and sharing, para.13.11, page 179. Available at http://www.deni.gov.uk/review_of_education.pdf

⁴¹ Hamilton, Hanson, Bell and Toucas (2008) Segregated lives: Social Division, Sectarianism and everyday life in Northern Ireland. Available at http://www.conflictresearch.org.uk/950B59D2-CE1A-4AEB-8F79-E8CF9CC61C2A/FinalDownload/DownloadId-9B96BC7D0BD0D77E405CD06536A6CAEE/950B59D2-CE1A-4AEB-8F79-E8CF9CC61C2A/Resources/Documents/P2_%20-%20Segregated%20Lives.pdf

⁴² Hughes and Donnelly (2012): *Chapter 4 Promoting Good Relations – the role of schools in Northern Ireland*, page 59

⁴³ Ibid

hold more prejudiced attitudes than those attending integrated schools.

- 6.5 Other research has shown that pupils attending separate schools tend to be more biased in favour of the in-group than those attending integrated schools and that they are likely to have fewer friends from the other community⁴⁴. However *'some research on integrated schools has suggested that teachers in such schools avoid reference to controversial issues or encounter difficulty in dealing with issues of division'*⁴⁵.
- 6.6 In contrast, evaluations of short-term school based contact *'have generally been critical, highlighting the light touch approach to cross community contact and the failure of many schools to engage in any meaningful way with the issues of division'*⁴⁶. In 2009, an Education and Training Inspectorate evaluation of Community Relations Funding stated that there may be a number of reasons for this, including the absence of a coherent policy framework that outlines what is required of schools; the lack of agreed quality indicators to monitor progress; insufficient teacher training; an overreliance on the goodwill of individual teachers; and limited mechanisms for the dissemination of good practice⁴⁷.

The Shared Education Programme (SEP)

- 6.7 In 2007, the Shared Education Programme (SEP) was launched. The project aimed to promote reconciliation by facilitating sharing between schools and their partners.
- 6.8 Unlike previous initiatives, instead of focussing solely on reconciliation objectives, SEP offered students the chance *'to share enhanced educational development opportunities, while at the same time building positive relationships with those from*

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Ibid, page 60

⁴⁶ Hughes and Donnelly (2012): *Chapter 4 Promoting Good Relations – the role of schools in Northern Ireland*, page 60

⁴⁷ Education and Training Inspectorate (2009): *An evaluation of the quality assurance of Community Relations Funding in a range of Formal and Non-Formal Educational settings*, page 2-4.
<http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/surveys-evaluations/surveys-evaluations-youth/surveys-evaluations-youth-2009/an-evaluation-of-the-quality-assurance-of-community-relations-funding-in-a-range-of-formal-and-non-formal-education-settings.pdf>

*different backgrounds and cultures*⁴⁸. Typical activities undertaken under the SEP project included pupils completing GCSE and 'A'-level subjects in cross-community classes and jointly provided vocational training courses.

- 6.9 In terms of the impact, recent research by the University of Ulster⁴⁹ has acknowledged the difficulties in measuring the effectiveness of the SEP programme. Despite these difficulties, teachers and senior staff *'were clear from their teaching experience that it was effective in breaking down identity barriers'*⁵⁰. For those partnerships which involved primary to secondary school partnership arrangements *'the educational benefits were clear and reference was made to the timeliness of the intervention before attitudes harden'*⁵¹. The research also found that the composition of partnerships had a direct bearing on what could be achieved in terms of educational outcomes – *'it was clear that partnerships which comprised grammar schools could achieve excellent results from the shared classes'*⁵².
- 6.10 In addition to the successes of the SEP, there were also areas for improvement. As well as the project resulting in limited interaction with the education policy system, current evidence suggests⁵³ that a small but persistent minority of pupils (10-16%) had anxieties about participating in shared education.
- 6.11 Sectoral bias has also featured as an obstacle in collaborative working. Partnerships involved in the SEP programme *"described 'two cultural fault lines' in the education system. The first fault line was the Catholic/Protestant divide and the second, and more difficult to tackle in their view, the split between selective and non-selective schools"*⁵⁴.

⁴⁸ Queens University Belfast News Release (Sept 2007): 3.6million Shared Education Programme launched at Queens,

⁴⁹ Knox (2010) *Sharing Education Programme – Views from the Whiteboard*. Available at <http://www.schoolsworkingtogether.co.uk/documents/Views%20from%20the%20White%20Board%20May%202010.pdf>

⁵⁰ Ibid, page 53

⁵¹ Ibid, page 53&54

⁵² Ibid, page 53

⁵³ Knox (2010) *Sharing Education Programme – Views from the Whiteboard*, page 49. Available at <http://www.schoolsworkingtogether.co.uk/documents/Views%20from%20the%20White%20Board%20May%202010.pdf>

⁵⁴ Ibid, page 19

- 6.12 Advocates of the SEP programme suggest that it offers practical solutions to bridge the gap between integrated schools and the short-term inter-schools contact currently offered through statutory provision. While limited contact between schools cannot equate to the integrated school environment, the SEP has, through regular contact and pupil/teacher interactions, established bonds and friendships which were impossible through the previous short term contact initiatives⁵⁵. The curricular focus of SEP also means that teachers and pupils see it as a central part of their work, where religious divisions diminish under the common goal of educational achievement.
- 6.13 Recent (2012) research also argues: *“Accepting the reality that any major structural change to the existing parallel education system is unlikely and that integrated education will remain a niche sector, the SEP initiative appears to offer an effective contact-based model for reducing division and normalising interaction between Protestant, Catholic and indeed other ethno-religious groups”*⁵⁶

7 The Way Forward: Advancing Good Relations via Shared Education

- 7.1 In our 2008 ‘Every Child an Equal Child’ publication⁵⁷ the Commission noted that the history of educational development in Northern Ireland was one of segregated provision across all the equality grounds with a further separation, based largely on socio economic grounds at age 11.
- 7.2 The Commission further noted that it considered that the schools’ estate could act as a focal point for community development (as envisaged by the Extended Schools programme) while developing links between institutions, teachers, children and parents, and that over time these links may develop and enhance a sense of commonality.

⁵⁵Ibid page 53.

⁵⁶ Hughes and Donnelly (2012) Everyday Life: Promoting Good Relations – the role of schools in Northern Ireland, page 66

⁵⁷ECNI (2008): Every Child an Equal Child – An Equality Commission Statement on Key Inequalities in Education and a Strategy for Intervention, pages 5 and 6. Available at <http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/ECkeyinequalities.pdf>

- 7.3 In April 2010 the Commission, along with the Community Relations Council, jointly published a challenge paper entitled “*Ensuring the Good Relations Work in our Schools Counts - A Strategy to meet our needs for the 21st Century.*”⁵⁸ The paper included a number of recommendations to progress sharing and good relations in education (see Annex 2 for a summary of relevant recommendations)
- 7.4 In our February 2012 response⁵⁹ to the consultation on “Building A Better Future: Draft Programme for Government 2011-2015” we recognised “the steps taken in terms of shared resources, including the schools estate and teachers, and shared programmes” and endorsed:
- “the development of a clear focus on shared education so as to maximise equality of opportunity and good relations, recognising that this will be facilitated through the teaching of a shared curriculum in shared classrooms”.*⁶⁰
- 7.5 The Commission considers that societal mixing and social cohesion is limited by separation in our education provision. It is the Commission’s view that a system of shared education therefore has a central role to play in advancing a shared society and that children should have the opportunity to be educated together regardless of faith or background.
- 7.6 This is not to undermine the rights of parents to make choices regarding their child’s attendance at specific schools, or for the provision of faith-based schools (within appropriate economic constraints). However such considerations cannot overshadow the importance of a system of education seeking to maximise equality of opportunity and good relations.
- 7.7 The Commission however also recognises the important role that education can play in cultural development – providing immersion in literature, language, sport, activities, art, music etc.

⁵⁸ The Good Relations Forum (2010): Ensuring the Good Relations Work in our Schools Counts – A Strategy to meet our needs for the 21st century. Available at <http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/EnsuringGoodRelationsWorkinourSchoolsCounts.pdf>

⁵⁹ ECNI (2012): Consultation response to the draft Programme for Government 2011-2015. Available at http://www.equalityni.org/archive/word/PfG_ECNIResponse_PfG220212.docx

⁶⁰ ECNI (2012): Consultation response to the draft Programme for Government 2011-2015, page 3. Available at http://www.equalityni.org/archive/word/PfG_ECNIResponse_PfG220212.docx

- 7.8 It is for this reason that the Commission recommends a move towards a system of sharing across the full spectrum of education providers which teaches a diverse range of pupils together via a shared curriculum in shared classrooms. The Commission considers that such an approach could better provide children from a wide range of backgrounds with shared awareness, understanding and experience of the value and range of diverse cultures, identities and backgrounds in Northern Ireland.
- 7.9 The Commission considers that sharing in education must impact meaningfully and substantively on every child and that a shared experience should be central to the education system as a whole. The Commission would also highlight the importance of sharing at each stage of educational provision – pre-school; early years; primary; post-primary; special needs and tertiary levels.

8 Existing Options for Enhancing Education Policy

- 8.1 In addition to the educational, economic and societal cases for sharing (discussed earlier in this paper) there are several education policy initiatives which impact directly on discussions on shared education.
- 8.2 The Commission considers that there are clear opportunities to build upon / extend existing education policy and recommends that consideration is given to how this might be achieved. Research⁶¹, for example, has pointed to the possibility of *'incentivising Area Learning Communities to deliver the entitlement framework on a cross community basis; incentivising the delivery as part of the core curriculum; promoting the reconciliation benefits as having wider societal value; and argue for the economic benefits when set alongside the costs of separate denominational provision'*⁶².

⁶¹ Bain (2006): Schools for the future – funding strategy and sharing. Available at http://www.deni.gov.uk/review_of_education.pdf

⁶² Knox (2010) Sharing Education Programme – Views from the Whiteboard, page 55. Available <http://www.schoolsworkingtogether.co.uk/documents/Views%20from%20the%20White%20Board%20May%202010.pdf>

8.3 The Commission considers that existing initiatives and/or contexts in education could facilitate a move towards increased sharing in education. This section sets out some examples.

The Entitlement Framework and Area Learning Partnerships

8.4 The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 provides the legislative framework for school collaboration in Northern Ireland. This piece of legislation gives effect to the Entitlement Framework which states that from September 2009 all post primary schools must ensure that children at Key Stage 4 (KS4) and post 16 have the opportunity to avail of 24 or 27 subjects. The obligation on schools to provide access to the full range of courses will become mandatory by 2013.

8.5 While there is no obligation on schools to collaborate, it was assumed that schools would not be able to provide children with access to the full curriculum unless they established collaborative partnerships with other schools and educational providers.

8.6 Even before inter-school collaboration had a statutory footing, schools were collaborating, or preparing to collaborate, in relation to delivery of the curriculum, with most schools becoming members of Area Learning Partnerships.

8.7 Research in 2008⁶³ showed that collaboration through the Area Learning Partnerships offered many benefits such as the opportunity to share expertise amongst teaching staff; a wider range of curricular opportunities for young people and the opportunity to break down barriers and build informal relationships, particularly between grammar and secondary schools.

8.8 Despite this generally positive assessment of collaboration '*participants indicated that sustainable collaborative relationships were difficult to establish and a range of factors were reported to have an impact on the process of school collaboration*'.⁶⁴ Of relevance is that schools were more hesitant about establishing collaborative links outside of their sector than those within it (only 35% of schools suggested that

⁶³ Queens University School of Education (2008) *School Collaboration in Northern Ireland – Opportunities for Reconciliation*, page 5. Available at

<http://www.schoolsworkingtogether.co.uk/documents/School-Collaboration-in-NI.pdf>

⁶⁴ Ibid, page 5

they had established collaborative links with a school which took a different approach to academic selection) or between State maintained and Catholic Controlled; or integrated and non-integrated schools. The research also suggested that schools placed *'considerable emphasis on cultural issues and sought to establish collaborative relations with schools where the culture was deemed to be compatible with their own'*⁶⁵.

- 8.9 The Commission considers that Area Learning Partnerships provide a context by which to further encourage sharing between providers of different management type etc in a way which could serve to advance good relations.

The Education and Skills Authority

- 8.10 2013 is likely to see the establishment of the new Education and Skills Authority (ESA), designed to replace the existing five education and library and CCMS. As well as streamlining bureaucracy with an estimated saving of £20m per year, its other key function will be to raise educational standards⁶⁶.
- 8.11 It is likely that the creation of ESA, and the associated streamlining processes will offer potential for increased collaboration between schools – providing new opportunities to promote equality of opportunity and advance good relations.

Area Based Planning

- 8.12 In 2011, in his statement to the Assembly, the Education Minister - John O'Dowd MLA - highlighted the need to move forward with the implementation of the Sustainable School Policy and the process of strategic planning on an area basis.
- 8.13 Following on from viability audits, the five Education and Library boards and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) were asked to develop strategic plans for their 5 geographical areas.
- 8.14 Guidance issued by DE indicated that *'realistic, innovative and creative solutions may be considered'* and may include options that increase sharing of education provision and infrastructure in line with Departmental Commitments in the Programme for Government (PFG). The Boards published draft post-primary

⁶⁵ Ibid, page 5

⁶⁶ Belfast Telegraph (July 2012): Is the O'Dowd formula working?

area plans for public consultation on 5th July 2012 and the general public will have the opportunity to comment until 26th October 2012.

8.15 Recent research on community engagement in the development of the area plans⁶⁷ suggests that there needs to be much more engagement by the Department and that there has been '*limited creative thinking*' in the draft area plans, which '*lack imagination and reinforce pre-existing ethno-religious boundaries*'⁶⁸. The Department has indicated final area plans will be published and work will begin on shaping the future schools estate by the end of the year.⁶⁹

8.16 The Commission considers that area-based planning offers the potential to transform communities and to move toward a system where more children are educated together, in a way that best meets the needs of the local community.

Common Funding Formula

8.17 The Department is currently gathering evidence in support of a review of the Common Funding formula for schools.

8.18 This, along with area based planning creates further room for 'creative thinking' in relation to directing funds so as to reward sharing between schools (of different management type etc) in a way that would advance Good Relations.

8.19 Further, where viability criteria put local education provision at risk, sharing between and/or merging existing schools, may both advance good relations and help ensure that a school provides an anchor point for the wider community as envisaged in the Extended Schools Initiative.⁷⁰

Academic Selection

8.20 School collaboration is set in the context of the wider political debate on education. There is currently no agreement on academic selection with 2009/10 seeing the introduction of unregulated tests in which some 7,000 primary school pupils took part in exams set by the Association for Quality Education

⁶⁷ Knox (2012): *Community Engagement in the Education Policy Debate*, page 22.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, page 23

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, page 3

⁷⁰ Education and Training Inspectorate Report (2006). Available at <http://www.etini.gov.uk/the-extended-schools-initiative-in-northern-ireland-a-baseline-survey-by-the-education-and-training-inspectorate.pdf>

(largely Protestant students) and 6,700 children sat the GL assessment tests (largely Catholic students)⁷¹.

- 8.21 The Commission reiterates our continued concern about the system of academic selection at eleven years old.

Teacher Training and Employment

- 8.22 In 2003, the Commission funded research by QUB which concluded that:

‘A significant barrier, identified by teachers, to their wider professional development in these areas was the relative lack of opportunity to teach or work outside their own community background. Aligned with this, was a concern about the unequal access for employment across the Controlled and Maintained school sectors for all teachers.’⁷²

- 8.23 Most recently, in 2010 the Commission jointly published, with the Community Relations Council, a challenge paper entitled “*Ensuring the Good Relations Work in our Schools Counts - A Strategy to meet our needs for the 21st Century.*”⁷³ The paper included a number of recommendations to progress sharing and good relations in education, including calling for:

“Greater sharing and collaboration between teacher training colleges – the Department and ESA to encourage stronger collaboration between the different teacher training institutions, to ensure all student teachers, whatever their community background, have the appropriate time and opportunity to experience other sectors and school ethos. All initial teacher training courses/programmes to encompass an element of teaching from different sectors on a cross-community basis.”

- 8.24 In 2012, teacher training in Northern Ireland represents the sole segregated area in the provision of third-level education in Northern Ireland.

⁷¹ Knox (2010) *Sharing Education Programme – Views from the White Board*, page 12. Available at <http://www.schoolsworkingtogether.co.uk/documents/Views%20from%20the%20White%20Board%20May%202010.pdf>

⁷² [Equality Awareness in Teacher Education and Training in Northern Ireland 2003 QUB](http://www.equalityni.org/EqualityAwarenessinTeacherEducationandTraininginNorthernIreland2003QUB)

⁷³ The Good Relations Forum (2010): *Ensuring the Good Relations Work in our Schools Counts – A Strategy to meet our needs for the 21st century*. Available at <http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/EnsuringGoodRelationsWorkinourSchoolsCounts.pdf>

- 8.25 The Commission remains concerned about the impact that the separate provision of teacher training has on both job opportunities professional development and the promotion of good relations and considers that closer collaboration between all initial teacher training providers in Northern Ireland would have a range of benefits, including in relation to good relations.
- 8.26 This issue is inextricably linked with the maintenance of the teachers exception within the Fair Employment and Treatment Order (FETO). In 2004⁷⁴, the Commission undertook a formal investigation and called for the removal of the teacher's exception from posts in secondary level education. In 2008, the Commission reiterated this position and further called for *early consideration to be given to the question of urging the removal of the exemption at all levels.*"

9 Concluding Remarks

- 9.1 The Commission considers that societal mixing and social cohesion is limited by separation in our education provision.
- 9.2 As noted at the outset of this paper, the Commission's intent is to highlight the value in a moved to a shared *system*. Undoubtedly, the nature of any specific *model(s)* will need further interrogation. Without unduly delaying progress, there will be merits in looking at lessons learnt from the formally Integrated sector; the Shared Education Programme; and other similar initiatives to identify aspects which might be mainstreamed within education policy.
- 9.3 Over time, the relative effectiveness of different types of partnerships and activities will need to be evaluated, including establishing what type of collaboration is most effective in delivering good educational outcomes and experiences as well as promoting good relations.
- 9.4 Research into any barriers to a shared system of education will be important, as will developing an understanding of anxiety of some pupils about participating in the Shared Education Programme. Systems of measurement and rolling evaluation of policies/programmes will also be important. Focus will need

⁷⁴ [Formal investigation under Art 41 \(FETO\) on the Teachers Exception](#) (2004)

to be placed the difficulties encountered by teachers in teaching in shared classes through training and learning already experienced.

- 9.5 School leadership and school ethos will be important drivers in future collaborative work as well as the schools relationship with the local community. The overall goal will be to create a system of shared education and collaboration which is curriculum- focused; has a shared educational experience at its core and is integral to the way all education is delivered in Northern Ireland.
- 9.6 In order to acknowledge success and promote improvement, sharing and collaboration between schools should be evaluated. Bain (2006)⁷⁵ recommends that all models of sharing and collaboration, from the locally evolving partnerships to the more formally structured arrangements of sharing and collaboration, can be evaluated against a set of indicators⁷⁶.
- 9.7 Evaluation should be through both self-evaluation and through inspection and should take account of both the distinctive character of the school and the community environment. Involvement of the Education and Training Inspectorate would likely provide an effective means to mainstream this process.
- 9.8 In summary, the Commission would highlight:
- the important role of education in maximising equality of opportunity across the full range of equality grounds, by improving educational outcomes – with a particular focus being on steps required to improve attainment for those groups identified as being at particular disadvantage.
 - that societal mixing and social cohesion is limited by separation in our education provision and that a system of shared education has a central role to play in advancing a shared society.
 - that advancing shared education is aligned not only to delivering good relations, but also to the delivery of a range

⁷⁵ Bain (2006): Schools for the future – funding strategy and sharing. Available at http://www.deni.gov.uk/review_of_education.pdf

⁷⁶ Ibid, page 170 - Bain recommended indicators covering: quality and effectiveness of provision; equality and accessibility; diversity and choice; community well being and cohesion; economy and efficiency (including matching provision to need and reducing overprovision); and cross-community and cross-sector sharing and collaboration. Source:

of government strategies and programmes (Programme for Government; Cohesion, Sharing and Integration; Every School a Good School) and maximising efficiencies in the school system and estate.

- that the existing environment (economic downturn and declining school registers in some areas) provide additional levers for change, while existing mechanisms (e.g. the entitlement framework and area learning partnerships; the review of the common funding formula; the establishment of ESA etc) provide an opportunity to incentivise, encourage and measure partnership working and shared delivery.
- The importance of engaging with stakeholders to refine and develop an improved system and model(s) and ensuring that any subsequent arrangements be evaluated against a set of indicators, in order to acknowledge success and promote improvement.
- The importance of addressing wider issues linked to sharing in education – including academic selection at age 11; teacher training; the teacher's exception under FETO; and better understanding the reasons for, and impacts of, any differential patterns of enrolment to education providers

**Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
November 2012**

10 ANNEX 1: Inequalities in Education: Facts and Trends 1998-2008

10.1 The Commission's 2010 publication "*Inequalities in Education: Facts and Trends 1998-2008*"⁷⁷ sought to consider patterns of educational attainment in Northern Ireland. Key findings included:

- Community background: Amongst school leavers, there has been considerable improvement in the highest level of educational attainment of both communities, although the gap between highest educational attainment of Protestant and Roman Catholic school leavers has widened. When the different equality groups are compared, community background is the area where fewest differences exist in 2007/08.
- Gender: Some differences are notable when looking at gender, particularly with regards to levels of highest educational attainment and subject choices within Further or Higher Education. While there has been considerable improvement in the highest level of educational attainment of both male and female school leavers, this improvement has been markedly more evident for females than for males.
- Those with / without a declared disability: There are still considerable differences in the highest educational attainment and in participation in Further or Higher Education between those with and without a declared disability. With regards to participation in third-level education, while those with a declared disability remain under-represented at this level, an improvement has occurred in the proportion who are accessing institutes of Higher Education in Northern Ireland.
- Irish Travellers: There has been a noticeable gap between the highest education attainment and destinations of Irish Traveller and non-Traveller school leavers. The majority of Irish Travellers left school with no GCSEs, while the majority of non-Travellers left school with GCSE or higher qualifications.

⁷⁷ ECNI (2010): *Inequalities in Education – Facts and Trends 1998-2008*. Available at http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/InequalitiesinEducation_ResearchReport.pdf

11 Annex 2: “Ensuring the Good Relations Work in our Schools Counts” (2010): Relevant recommendations

“i) Greater focus on sharing and collaboration within service delivery - the Department, ESA and other key educational stakeholders to focus on maximising value for money and avoiding duplication of educational provision, by placing a greater focus on existing drivers, policies and practices that encourage greater sharing and collaboration, particularly on a cross-community basis. These include:

- ***Every School a Good School – a Policy for School Improvement*** – with a focus on the best educational interests of all children, whatever the identity. This should particularly include the needs of those most at risk of not reaching their potential, such as the children of new residents and Travellers.
- ***Adding good relations conditions to budgetary allocations criteria***, particularly in relation to capital builds and development plans, so there is a greater focus on cross-community relationship building.
- ***The Review of Public Administration and Community Planning*** – by encouraging greater local and regional clustering of services, particularly with respect to school and community resources, based on whole community need and not upon continued separate community provision. Good relations must be a direct underpinning principle within this planning process. Education should be seen in the broadest sense of the word
- ***a holistic approach*** which takes account of external family and community life as well as the school environment.
- ***The Entitlement Framework*** – encouraging schools to see what actions they can take to collaborate on a cross-community basis to meet the Entitlement Framework requirements.
- ***Area Learning Communities*** – the Department of Education to add a cross-sectoral and cross-community element to the funding criteria for the Collaboration Element, and to support the roll out of ALCs to all areas.”

SOURCE: The Good Relations Forum (2010): Ensuring the Good Relations Work in our Schools Counts – A Strategy to meet our needs for the 21st century.