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[Blog article](#) by Chief Commissioner Dr Michael Wardlow

Some thoughts on the TEO Good Relations Indicators

In the past week The Executive Office released its annual update of 'good relations indicators'. In the context of continuing political deadlock, and pressure of increasing budget cuts, I welcome the fact that the survey shows some indications of improvement in attitudes towards community relations in this place we call home.

At a high level, the survey shows considerable cross-community support for the wider aspects of a shared society. For example, more than 3 out of 4 people (77%) surveyed said they would prefer to live in a mixed religion neighbourhood while almost 9 out of 10 (88%) indicated a preference for a mixed religion workplace. Those who would like their children to be educated at a mixed religion school remained high as well, with over 2/3rds (67%) supporting such provision.

Overall, the percentage of people who favour more cross-community sharing has significantly increased since the previous year, and are the highest annual figures for these choices since a peak in 2010.

Other welcome statistics emerge with indications that 60% of young people have carried out projects with pupils from other schools - an increase of 19 percentage points from the previous year, while more than half (55%) had shared classes with those of another religion - up by 12 percentage points from last year.

There is no doubt that such figures are encouraging - the Equality Commission believes more sharing, particularly in schools, can only be good for Northern Ireland. We have consistently called for our devolved government to produce a policy framework that moves us more clearly towards a system of education which will routinely teach pupils together, using a shared curriculum, in shared classes. In addition to the benefits for society, we believe that this approach will offer greater opportunities for all pupils and improve standards and outcomes for all.

We also believe that reducing the level of housing segregation, which persists in some areas, is an important element in the improvement of community relations. In addition to helping create a less contested and more peaceful and prosperous society, it can increase the ability of social housing to meet objectively assessed need and open up housing markets. That could help increase supply in areas of high demand and perhaps reduce waiting lists.

For this to happen, however, there needs to be more practical support for those who chose shared neighbourhoods in which to make their homes. Cantrell Court stands as a timely reminder that sharing, while sectarianism is a force in our society, can have adverse consequences for the people involved.

There is still a way to go to achieve a shared society and it needs a serious and concerted commitment by Government, communities and, significantly, by each of us as individuals. How many of the 77% of us who say they want to live in a mixed religion neighbourhood or the 67% who want shared classrooms will be able to make the choice to do so? What will it take for such a choice to be natural and available for all who choose to support more sharing?

Further information:

- [Key inequalities in housing and communities](#)
- [Shared education policy page](#)