

# MINISTERIAL ADVISORY GROUP ON THE ADVANCEMENT OF SHARED EDUCATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

## Response Form for Written Submissions

**Closing date for the receipt of responses is  
5:00pm on Friday 9 November 2012**

***Submissions made after this date will not be considered***

If you require the form in another format (such as large print, Braille, on audio cassette, easy read or on computer disk) and/or other languages please contact:

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**Please note that all written submissions will be made publicly available on the Ministerial Advisory Group website. By submitting a completed form you are giving your permission for the form to be made available in this way.**

The Ministerial Advisory Group will conduct face to face interviews with a sample of individuals and organisations selected to represent as wide a range of stakeholder perspectives as possible in November and December. If you would be interested in being considered for interview, please tick the box below.

I would be interested in meeting the Ministerial Advisory Group   
*As NICCY has already met with Advisory Group members and is carrying out research with children and young people in order to contribute their views to the Group, we have*

*not ticked the above box. However, if the MAGASE would find it helpful to meet again in the context of our submission below, we would be happy to do so.*

## 1. RESPONDENT DETAILS

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I am responding: As an individual   
On behalf of an organisation

(Please tick one box)

## 2. DEFINITIONS

**The following definitions have been provided as part of the terms of reference for this review:**

**Education:** includes pre-school education, early years services, primary schools (including nursery schools), post-primary schools, special education provision and youth services.

**Shared education:** means 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.

**Section 75 categories:** Section 75 and Schedule 9 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998 places a statutory obligation on public authorities to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity:

- between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- between men and women generally;

- between persons with a disability and persons without; and
- between persons with dependants and persons without.

### 3. QUESTIONS

At the outset of this submission, it is important to highlight that the Children’s Commissioner’s office is currently undertaking research with children and young people to gather their views and experiences about the issues explored through the questions below. We will be feeding through the findings from our work with children and young people to the Ministerial Advisory Group (MAGASE). The findings of our work will also help to inform our own positions on the issues.

#### Question 1

**Given the definition of shared education outlined above, what are your views on the best way to advance shared education in Northern Ireland?**

NICCY welcomes the MAGASE’s adoption of a rights-based approach to its work in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and additional international standards. The children’s rights framework identified by the MAGASE<sup>1</sup> should be adhered to by the Department of Education in developing subsequent policy or making subsequent policy decisions in support of the advancement of shared education in Northern Ireland.

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child advises that the success of a children’s rights-based approach to education lies in a balance being struck, “*which succeeds in reconciling diverse values through dialogue and respect for difference*”<sup>2</sup>. The challenge is to find a balance, for example, between engaging in efforts to develop respect among children for their “*own cultural identity, language and values*”, and in engaging in “*efforts to promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all peoples*”<sup>3</sup>.

Given the diversity of school types and parental preferences towards a variety of types of educational provision in Northern Ireland, it will be a challenge for the Department to identify one model with which all sectors of the community in Northern Ireland will be satisfied.

From NICCY’s point of view, education policies must have a clear focus on addressing disadvantage and improving experiences for the most vulnerable groups, particularly

<sup>1</sup> From: <http://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/SchoolofEducation/MinisterialAdvisoryGroup/Filestore/Fileupload,343184,en.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2001) *General Comment Number 1 on The Aims of Education* (Geneva: United Nations) at paragraph 4.

<sup>3</sup> As above.

children and young people of low socio-economic status and those experiencing poverty. It is well established that a number of groups of children and young people in Northern Ireland are at greater risk of experiencing educational disadvantage and/or lower educational attainment than others<sup>4</sup>, including for example, children living in poverty; Protestant boys in low socio-economic groups; children with disabilities and/or special educational needs; Traveller children; black and minority ethnic children; children for whom English is an additional Language; young people with caring responsibilities; care-experienced children and young people; gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender young people; children and young people who are excluded from school; children and young people in alternative education provision.

There are two relevant recommendations from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child regarding education provision in Northern Ireland in its 2008 Concluding Observations in respect of the UK's compliance with the UNCRC. Firstly, the UN Committee, recommended that the Executive, in the Committee's own words, "*Take measures to address segregation of education in Northern Ireland*", and secondly, "*put an end to the two-tier culture in Northern Ireland by abolishing the 11+ transfer test and ensure that all children are included in admission arrangements in post-primary schools*" (NICCY's position in respect of academic selection is highlighted in our response to Question 2).

In terms of the former, the initiation of the current exploratory process by the MAGASE is clearly to be welcomed. In terms of 'advancing shared education' in Northern Ireland, clarification is required in respect of the relationship between 'shared education' according to the definition that the Department has outlined in the terms of reference to the MAGASE and 'integrated schools'. The key recommendation from the Bain report was that the Department "*should make clear that, in discharging its legislative duty in respect of integrated education, it is committed to facilitating and encouraging a variety of approaches to integrating education within a framework of sustainable schools*"<sup>5</sup>.

NICCY's current research with children and young people should identify what children and young people view as good practice in terms of both collaboration and integration.

The broad definition which the Department has applied to the term shared education implies that shared education should be delivered holistically through schools, rather than being confined to, for example, shared classes between post-primary schools of different management types or sectoral identities, in pursuit of the requirements of the entitlement framework. There is a need for clarification regarding the central concept and objective of shared education, as defined by the Department. NICCY would be particularly interested to hear if many respondents to the MAGASE's call for submissions have identified with shared education in the broadest sense, or if respondents continue to identify shared education in the sense of sharing across school

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<sup>4</sup> See for example, reports by both NICCY and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, referenced in our response to Question 7 of this call for evidence.

<sup>5</sup> The Bain Report (2006) *Schools for the Future: Funding Strategy, Sharing* (Bangor: Department of Education), page 162.

management types and sharing across community backgrounds. In short, there needs to be clear criteria in terms of what constitutes 'shared education' in practice<sup>6</sup>.

It is also important to clarify the link between the Department's 'Community Relations, Equality and Diversity' (CRED) policy and any future decision-making in respect of shared education.

In terms of progressing collaboration in practice, shared education will require a strong commitment at the senior management level within schools and other educational establishments. Boards of Governors must also be fully on board. Shared education in the sense of sharing of classes or staff among schools and other institutions will require a significant degree of flexibility among schools and teaching staff, essentially putting the needs and requirements of pupils first and foremost, which will, in any case, be a central focus for all good schools. We recognise that flexibility may be a greater issue for post-primary schools than primary schools.

In advancing shared education, there must also be a role for the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) in terms of encouraging and acknowledging good practice among educational institutions, and ensuring that the focus is not solely directed at post-primary level.

Children and young people themselves must also be encouraged to have a role in planning 'shared' provision and to understand the rationale and purpose of any initiative in line with the principle of 'evolving capacities'. Therefore, for example, in advance of commencing a programme, school staff/youth sector staff should consult with and work with children and young people to talk through and resolve any issues or concerns they may have, with a view to ensuring that their needs are met.

## **Question 2**

### **What do you feel are the barriers to advancing shared education in Northern Ireland?**

Shared education presents a major challenge for educational or youth sector services in communities where deep divisions remain in respect of political, religious, cultural and/or other identities, where the majority of the pupils identify with opposing viewpoints, or where there is a particular feeling of mistrust between different communities. In some cases, the division may lie with children and young people themselves, while in others, the challenge may sit with parents or guardians. This could present a particular barrier, for example, in a case where a post-primary school delivers particular GCSE or A Level subjects in partnership with a neighbouring school. There may be examples of parents who do not wish for their child to study with the

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<sup>6</sup> Colin Knox elaborates on this point in *Community Engagement in the Education Policy Debate*, July 2012.

neighbouring school, which could impact on whether the young person is able to opt to study a particular subject. Examples of good practice where schools have overcome such scenarios would be helpful to consider.

There also may be instances where the challenge of collaboration between educational settings of different religious, cultural and/or political ethos lies simply in the fact that the majority of the population of the general geographical area identifies with one particular community in Northern Ireland. Therefore the majority of educational establishments in a given area may identify with one of the two main religious communities in Northern Ireland.

In NICCY's view, academic selection at post-primary transfer remains a significant barrier to shared education, particularly on the grounds of socio-economic status. For example, Department of Education figures for 2011/12 reveal that 27% of pupils in non-grammar post-primary schools were entitled to free school meals, compared to 7.1% of grammar school pupils in 2011/12 (referenced at Question 7 below). NICCY's report on pupils' experiences of the transfer process during 2009/10 (referenced in our response to Question 7 below) also highlighted that an analysis of the data from the 2010 Kids' Life and Times survey (referenced at Question 7 below) indicated that pupils from lower income families were less likely to have sat the entrance tests in 2010 than pupils from higher income families. Observations made by some teachers NICCY interviewed for our transfer report corroborated this finding.

NICCY favours the withdrawal of academic selection. However if academic selection is going to remain, the Department of Education must acknowledge this and take into account the continuing detrimental impact it will have on the successful promotion of shared education for children and young people of low socio-economic backgrounds. NICCY would surmise, for example, that some parents of young people attending grammar schools, or indeed some young people themselves, may disagree with the notion of collaboration between grammar and non-grammar schools in curricular activities. The Department of Education must consider the implications of this and consider how such barriers can be overcome.

Collaboration between schools attended mostly by children and young people from affluent backgrounds and schools attended mostly by young people from less affluent backgrounds may also present a challenge in terms of finding common ground. The Department should consider existing models of good practice in this area and consider how these might be replicated.

Variability among schools in terms of educational outcomes may also present a barrier. For example, if there are two post-primary schools (either grammar or non-grammar) situated in the same locality, and one is a much 'higher achieving' school than the other, there may be a reluctance on the part of parents, teachers and senior management in the 'higher achieving' school for pupils from the two schools to learn together in case this has a detrimental impact on pupils' educational attainment. This may be an issue

which school senior management believe they should consider in making a decision about whether to pursue a shared education initiative.

Funding may be identified by schools and other establishments as a major factor affecting whether a school can establish or maintain a shared education initiative. Initiatives may be programme-funded and therefore may only have a certain lifespan, and schools may therefore have to find other avenues in order to maintain provision.

For post-primary schools in particular, logistical issues such as distance, travel and transport between schools; school timetables; communication between schools; and differences in school rules or policies, are all practical issues which a school will have to spend significant time in addressing at the planning stages.

### **Question 3**

**How should the advancement of shared education meet the needs of, and provide for the education together, of learners from all Section 75 categories (outlined above) and all socio-economic backgrounds? Have you any particular experiences or advice to share in relation to any of these groups?**

We would refer to Article 29 of the UNCRC on 'the aims of education'. Good practice sharing initiatives should promote the development of children's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential, and respect for human rights (Article 29(1)(a) and (c)). They should also prepare children for later life, promoting 'understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples' (Article 29(1)(d)).

Examples of good practice and collaborative working across the range of sectors, including early years', pre-school provision, primary provision, post-primary provision, special schools and further education should particularly be considered.

Due to the requirements of the entitlement framework, there may be an emphasis on shared education within post-primary provision, however, it is important that shared education is also emphasised from the child's earliest development, through early years'/pre-school provision and primary provision.

Greater visibility must be given to the rights, needs and experiences of children and young people with special educational needs and/or a disability. SEN provision is a major concern for the Children's Commissioner's office, and currently around a quarter of all enquiries to NICCY's Legal and Casework Team relate to special educational needs provision. NICCY would recommend that schools which achieve high standards in meeting the needs of pupils with special educational needs also be considered as models of good practice. It is essential that the advancement of shared education is supported by appropriate education policies, and in this regard, it is important to note

the Commissioner's particular concerns regarding the Department's new SEN and Inclusion policy, and in particular, our fear that the new policy may have a detrimental impact on the principle of inclusion of children with SEN within 'mainstream schools', and could potentially result in a retrogressive system (NICCY papers are referenced at Question 7).

Case studies of successful integrated schools and successful sharing partnerships should also be disseminated. Leaders of such schools may also be useful sources of advice and expertise in terms of moving forward sharing across all schools. We would also refer back to our comments above in respect of academic selection at Question 2.

The findings of the Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Education Inquiry into Successful Post-Primary Schools Serving Disadvantaged Communities may also be useful to note (referenced at Question 7).

As a final point, in light of the Department's emphasis on the Section 75 categories within the definition of shared education, NICCY would be particularly interested in the potential for shared education to address negative attitudes within education provision towards gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender young people. Again, it would be extremely helpful if examples of good practice could be highlighted and sensitively shared between schools.

#### **Question 4**

**How do you think the advancement of shared education might address issues such as ethos and identity? Please comment specifically on how such issues can best address the right of learners to participation, safety and welfare, and dignity and respect in educational settings.**

We would once again refer to Article 29 of the UNCRC on 'the aims of education'. Good practice sharing initiatives should promote the development of children's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential, and respect for human rights (Article 29(1)(a) and (c)). They should also prepare children for later life, promoting 'understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples' (Article 29(1)(d)), and furthermore, promote the inclusion of the different Section 75 identities, including multiple identities, within learning.

Section 39(7) of the draft Education Bill, introduced in the Assembly in 2 October 2012 introduces a requirement for the appointment of persons to the Boards of Governors of a school appearing to be committed to the school 'ethos'. It would be important to consider how such a requirement would sit with respect to a policy of 'shared education' which 'meets the needs of, and provides for the education together of learners from all Section 75 categories and socio-economic status' and 'involves schools and other education providers of differing ownership, sectoral identity and ethos, management type or governance arrangements', according to the definition provided.



In terms of rights in respect of safety and welfare, Article 3 of the UNCRC dictates that the best interests of children and young people must be a primary consideration within decision-making. The key focus within educational provision should be to ensure that the needs of all children and young people are at the forefront of all decision-making.

In respect of rights relating to safety, dignity and respect in educational settings, emerging findings from the module of questions on shared education commissioned from ARK in the 2011 Kids' Life and Times survey, reveal that issues such as bullying may be a significant concern for Primary 7 pupils in considering a number of the shared education survey questions. NICCY will report on this issue in further detail directly to the MAGASE. Fear of bullying is also an issue which is emerging in NICCY's current consultations with Primary 5s and Primary 6s. In terms of NICCY's own experience, bullying continues to be a predominant theme within enquiries to NICCY's Legal and Casework Team. This is an issue which we will consider in further detail as findings from our research emerge. However, it is possible to state for the purposes of this submission that preparation of children and young people for participation in shared education programmes should be a major focus in terms of encouraging the success of such initiatives.

In terms of participation rights, where children and young people play a part in the planning or outworking of a shared education initiative, this could promote a sense of ownership of the programme or even allow them to play an active role in bringing down barriers. Through our consultations with young people, NICCY has heard positive experiences of young people who act as 'mentors' to younger pupils from neighbouring schools who travel to the school to participate in a collaborative initiative. They have explained that their role involves them 'mentoring' younger pupils to ensure that they are feeling safe and welcome. On a more basic level in respect of participation rights, shared education may also play an important role in addressing barriers where children and young people actively engage with each other through learning. For example, in terms of collaborative sports provision, where children and young people can play practical games, mix together in teams, and learn to play each other's sports.

Shared education could provide a further useful mechanism for implementing participation rights in cases where participative structures such as school councils, where effectively established, are availed of as a method of shared education. For example, joint school councils may be established. In other instances, an effective school council might also provide a forum for pupils to assist school senior management and/or board of governors to plan shared education initiatives.

### **Question 5**

**What are the implications of advancing shared education for the curriculum and the types of knowledge and skills that are taught in educational settings? Please**

**comment specifically on how the right of learners to develop a broad range of essential life skills should be met.**

In light of the revised curriculum and the requirements of the entitlement framework, shared education is particularly relevant to education provision.

As well as seeking to increase standards of educational attainment in Northern Ireland, it is essential that education provision is delivered in a manner which reflects the aims of education as set out in Article 29 of the UNCRC, referenced above. In schools where there is a major focus on academic attainment, the added benefits of shared education in the sense of developing pupils' essential life skills and promoting positive attitudes such as 'tolerance' and 'friendships among all peoples' should be promoted.

The requirements of the entitlement framework may necessitate sharing/collaboration between post-primary schools, particularly where schools' finances may prevent them from offering a full complement of subjects.

#### **Question 6**

**How do you think shared education can be advanced in ways that ensure equality of opportunity and access to education for all learners?**

The Department must set a clear definition of what constitutes shared education in practice and demonstrate how pupils, representative of all Section 75 groups and socio-economic status, might be effectively and meaningfully involved. The MAGASE should play a key role in advising on the 'operational' definition, and we anticipate that NICCY's research with children and young people will contribute to this. There is a need for creative approaches to be promoted that would make shared education relevant and meaningful to the range of identities represented by children and young people across NI.

It is essential to find solutions to the barriers to shared education, including those we have outlined in our response to Question 2 above, and particularly our comments in respect of academic selection at post-primary transfer. It is also important to take into account the issue of rising child poverty and the increased proportion of children with free school meal entitlement across a number of schools.

Children and young people, parents and guardians and communities must also be brought on board. The evidence of the benefits of shared education must be promoted to every education sector if communities as a whole are to recognise its value.

#### **Question 7**

**Is there any particular research evidence on shared education that you believe should be considered? If so, please provide full references below and, where possible, attach a copy with your submission (preferably in electronic format).**

Given NICCY's central focus on promoting the voice of children and young people, we would particularly recommend that the results of the annual Young Life and Times Surveys be considered, as appropriate: <http://www.ark.ac.uk/ylt/results/index2.html>.

We provide references below for research and reports cited in our submission:

Research cited in response to Question 1:

In respect of educational disadvantage and vulnerable groups:

NICCY (2008) *Children's Rights: Rhetoric or Reality. A Review of Children's Rights in Northern Ireland 2007/08* (Belfast: NICCY)

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (2008) *Every Child an Equal Child: An Equality Commission Statement on Key Inequalities in Education and a Strategy for Intervention* (Belfast: ECNI).

Research cited in response to Question 2:

In our response to Question 2 above, we also reference results of the 2010 Kids' Life and Times Survey: ARK. Kids' Life and Times survey, 2010 [computer file]. ARK <http://www.ark.ac.uk/kltwww.ark.ac.uk/klt> [distributor], September 2010. In respect of the result referenced at Question 2, that is, pupils from lower income families were less likely to have sat the entrance tests in 2010, using the World Health Organisation Family Affluence Scale, the KLT Survey results revealed that 72% of pupils surveyed and categorised as 'high affluence' sat the tests, 56% of 'medium affluence' sat the tests and 39% of pupils categorised as 'low affluence' sat the tests.

NICCY (2010) *Talking Transfer: Pupils' perspectives of the transfer process in 2010* (Belfast: NICCY).

Department of Education statistics in respect of free school meal entitlement:  
Department of Education (2012) *School Meals Tables -Table 8: Percentage of pupils entitled to free schools meals by school type: 2007/08 – 2011/12* (DE: Bangor).  
Available at: [http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/facts-and-figures-new/education-statistics/statistics\\_and\\_research\\_-\\_statistics\\_on\\_education-school\\_meals.htm](http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/facts-and-figures-new/education-statistics/statistics_and_research_-_statistics_on_education-school_meals.htm)

Papers cited in response to Question 3:

NICCY (February 2012) *Advice to the Department of Education regarding proposals for progressing the Review of Special Educational Needs and Inclusion* (Belfast: NICCY).  
Available at: [http://www.niccy.org/uploaded\\_docs/2012/Consultations/Jan-](http://www.niccy.org/uploaded_docs/2012/Consultations/Jan-)

[Mar/Advice%20paper%20on%20updated%20SEN%20proposals%20FINAL%20word%20version.pdf](#)

NI Assembly Committee for Education (2011) *Report NIA 57/10/11R: Inquiry into Successful Post-Primary Schools Serving Disadvantaged Communities* (Session 2010/11).

Thank you for your time. Your views are important and will be considered carefully by the Ministerial Advisory Group.

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