

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 x

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

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?

We believe the definition of education above is too narrow in that it excludes the further education sector. Long and extensive links and collaboration exists between further education colleges post primary schools, both maintained and controlled. The development of policy in respect of shared education must acknowledge that, draw upon the experience gained not only in the curriculum management of cross-sector relations but in the significance of diverse social interactions which result in school pupils engaging with others from different and diverse backgrounds.

Question 2

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

We believe multiple factors arising from political compromises and departmental carve ups have created overly complex and segregated education arrangements for children's schooling. Structurally there are numerous management agents and funding streams. The LMS funding mechanism has resulted in some schools within the same education and library board area running in the luxury of surplus, while others find opportunities for broad curriculum delivery constrained by budgetary deficit. The current arrangements treat the child as an economic unit allocating funding per student head, such exacerbates the debt of schools most in need of cash injection while adding to the monetary gain of schools operating in surplus. We believe the department needs to develop a funding calculus that does not deepen financial disparity between schools but instead allocates funding on the basis of need, thus ensuring each school is able to offer a similar breadth of opportunities and curriculum range irrespective of geographical location and estates legacy.

The Bain report highlighted existing links between schools, Further Education Colleges and training organisations. The report recommended an urgent review of education provision for the 14-19 year old category to establish a coherent education and training strategy for collaborative working across institutions. We believe this proposal should be revisited and implemented. Further, we believe that the failure to establish a common approach to work-based learning for teenagers stems from the decision to place FE, training organisations and HE outside of the Department of Education. UCU believe schools and colleges should be working in partnership, not competition, to maximise educational opportunity for young people. The current consultation concerning measures to improve the NI Assembly provides the possibility to create a fully inclusive Department of Education. We believe sharing resources and incentivising collaborative working between education providers will be simpler to administrate when all institutions delivering academic and vocational learning are placed under the jurisdiction of just one ministerial department.

A significant barrier to advancing shared education is the absence of policy consensus amongst political parties and the many powerful stakeholders within the multi-sectoral structure of our education system. There are no simple remedies to this. However, Bain's recommendation for the department to provide a financial incentive favouring schools and colleges who work collaboratively on a cross

community premise is a reasonable starting point. Over time it is envisaged that the expansion of educational opportunity through shared provision will ameliorate historical community antagonisms and generate a snowball effect for future participation. The Integrated School Movement provides a glimpse of what is possible.

There are significant obstacles to providing shared resources in sparsely populated rural areas where provision is often already limited. However, Bain recommended the expansion of provision through sharing resources of larger organisations such as further education colleges. Suggestions included college lecturers travelling to schools and creation of online learning communities to broaden curriculum experience.

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 live in a very divided society where the two main religious groupings, protestant and catholic hold deep and sincere convictions regarding the educational ethos they seek for their children. A shared education programme must take cognisance and respect that such is the case. However, religious ethos must not serve as the excuse to ignore the significant educational inequalities that emanate from a system based upon academic selection, which, in our view, is the most important obstacle to creating equality of educational opportunity and achievement for Northern Ireland school children. Academic selection by its very nature will always create a disadvantaged group.

Research undertaken by leading academics in the Province showed 95% of Year 12 pupils from grammar schools achieved 5 or more GCSEs at grades A* - C, by comparison secondary schools achieved 31%(Gallagher & Smith 2000). Differential achievement occurred even in instances where the transfer grade at 11 was comparable between grammar and secondary school pupils.

The same study revealed that affluent parents pay for private tuition to increase their child's chance of obtaining entry to grammar school which is estimated to be circa £15 per session. Such findings undermine the ethos of academic selection that entry to grammar school is based solely upon ability, it is not. To a significant extent, a high scoring transfer grade is dependent upon the amount of tuition the child receives to be schooled through the test.

Since the findings of the Gallagher & Smith study, the department abolished the 11+ but a transfer test remains. The new system is deregulated, based upon recommended selection criteria that schools are not legally obliged to adhere. Under the new arrangements, it is perfectly possible for a child to undertake different

transfer tests at numerous schools. Again, this system favours affluent parents who are able to maximise their child's chance of obtaining grammar school entry by virtue of their economic position. Provision of private tutoring and facilitating carriage to schools outside the immediate locality of the family home is not financially viable to those in receipt of low income or state benefits.

Academic selection creates an education system which perpetuates and deepens disadvantage on the basis of socio-economic class, such should not remain the elephant in room to creating a progressive education policy. To ignore the 'grammar effect' upon academic attainment is to strategise around a fundamental cause of educational inequality.

Our recent "troubles" show that persons with higher level academic achievements are less likely to engage in activity of a paramilitary or criminal nature. It is imperative that a system premised upon only a minority of the province's school children gaining access to institutions that provide the best opportunity for educational attainment, is challenged and changed.

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.

Lessons may be drawn from the Integrated Education movement. Research by The Centre for the Study of Conflict at the University of Ulster produced a helpful report in examining the motivations and experiences of parents who opted to send their children to integrated schools. The research sample contained deeply committed Protestant and Roman Catholic parents. A view was expressed by parents from both denominations that the nature of division within N. Ireland was inconsistent with a Christian ethos, believing a tenet of faith to be reconciliation between communities. Many parents expressed their view for integrated schools to embrace children of all religions, as well as those who have none, and considered such to sit comfortably within a Christian framework of morality.

The curriculum in integrated schools delivers religious education emphasizing shared Christian values. In addition, parents are given the option of choosing whether their child should receive supplementary denominational teaching. In a divided society, maintaining a route for communities to preserve and continue their ideology demonstrates that shared cross sectoral resources need not precipitate loss of cultural identity.

Again, providing financial incentives for non-integrated schools to share resources with integrated schools may provide a fast track for participants to witness the benefits of joint community education.

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.

The recent programme of school closures, merges and teacher redundancies has led to the classroom teacher being required to deliver a vast range of curriculum subjects. This allows teachers less chance to update and impart knowledge of their specialist curriculum area to provide the best, innovative learning experience for students. A successful shared education project where resources are pooled should create space for classroom teachers to be re-allocated back to the specialist curriculum area in which they trained.

Shared resources should ease the difficulties associated with obtaining substitute cover for absent teachers and render a reduction of administrative burdens upon academic staff through the sharing of support services. Such should free up classroom teachers to concentrate efforts on what must be the core priority of delivering teaching and learning to students.

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?

A shared education strategy provides the opportunity to address gaps in educational provision for disadvantaged minority groups such as those with special educational needs, the Traveller community and those with disabilities. In this respect the funding mechanism must be revisited. Presently, if a student is withdrawn from a school and placed in alternative education after October, the school retains the funding for the pupil despite no longer being responsible for his/her education. UCU believe this to be a flawed arrangement and one which benefits the more fortunate child at the expense of those who find themselves in challenging and unconventional circumstance. UCU believe shared educational resources will enable pupils in alternative education to utilise the facilities of large organisations such as schools and colleges, even where such does not involve on-site tuition. Sharing of facilities might further assist in maintaining a link, where appropriate, for pupils receiving alternative education to reintegrate back into conventional education.

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).

<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/csc/reports/mould.htm>

<http://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/education/selection/mainreport.pdf>

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

<http://www.ark.ac.uk/publications/updates/update16.PDF>

<http://www.deni.gov.uk/strategic-review-of-education-contents-foreword-and-summary.pdf>

http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/facts-and-figures-new/departmental-publications/6-ppa-rap-cr_pg-3.htm

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

Updates on the work of the Ministerial Advisory Group can be found on the website:
<http://www.qub.ac.uk/mag>

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