

**Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Education
Inquiry into Shared and Integrated Education**

The NASUWT's submission sets out the Union's views on the key issues identified by the Committee in respect of shared and integrated education in Northern Ireland.

The NASUWT is the largest teachers' union in Northern Ireland representing teachers and school leaders.

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Executive Summary

- The NASUWT believes that the education system has a critical role to play in the promotion of social cohesion and the development of safe, just, inclusive and tolerant communities.
- The NASUWT acknowledges and respects the right of the Minister of Education to identify shared education as a policy priority and recognises, in this context, that advancing shared education was highlighted as a key objective in the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government.
- The definition of shared education in the remit given by the Department of Education to the Ministerial Advisory Group on Advancing Shared Education represents a viable and potentially helpful starting point from which to evaluate the nature of shared education and its implications for the education system.
- The NASUWT endorses the view of the Ministerial Advisory Group that integrated education represents a distinct and important sector within the education system, rather than a model upon which the development of shared education should be based.
- In evaluating the proposals set out for inter-school collaboration within the context of the shared education agenda, the Committee should recognise the benefits of an education system organised on the principles of partnership and co-operation and work to ensure that the stated commitment of the Minister of Education to develop policy on this basis is realised in practice.
- The NASUWT welcomes the recommendation of the Ministerial Advisory Group that the Department of Education should undertake a review of how shared education and enhanced collaboration between mainstream schools, special schools and educational support centres might most effectively meet the needs of children and young people with disabilities, those with emotional and behavioural difficulties and those with special educational needs.

- Without clarity of definition, potential policy options for shared education cannot be developed or evaluated on a meaningful basis.
- The Department of Education should work with the NASUWT and other relevant stakeholders to identify potential barriers to the involvement of academically selective schools in inter-school partnership arrangements and to develop any necessary policy actions required to facilitate purposeful collaboration between these schools and other schools within their localities.
- The current school accountability system should be reformed to ensure that it encourages and celebrates collaborative working between schools and other educational providers more effectively.
- More attention would need to be given, within the context of a shared education agenda, to developing the capacity of institutions to establish collaborative arrangements in areas where there is no history of partnership working.
- Inter-school partnership arrangements must be properly assessed in terms of their impact on teacher and school leader workload and evaluated against criteria agreed with the workforce, including the NASUWT and other recognised trade unions, with the results of these evaluations being taken into effective account in the development and implementation of policy.
- The NASUWT is concerned that the implications of the introduction of a shared education premium for other areas of education-related funding and what, if any, conditions would be attached to its use, have not been identified by the Department of Education.
- It is essential that any proposals for the development of local shared education arrangements are not used as a pretext either to seek to reduce overall levels of investment in schools or to undermine the job security of the school workforce through the adoption of inappropriate approaches to school rationalisation.
- Before schools are designated as public authorities for the purposes of the provisions of Section 75 of the 1998 Northern Ireland Act, a thorough

review should be undertaken of the potential implications of implementation of this proposal for learners and members of the school workforce.

Introduction

1. The NASUWT welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Education Inquiry into Shared and Integrated Education.

2. The Union's evidence addresses the specific issues identified by the Committee in its call for evidence by:
 - considering the nature and definition of shared education and integrated education, including consideration of the need for a formal statutory definition and the introduction of a legal obligation in statute on the Department of Education to facilitate and encourage shared education;
 - assessing the key barriers to shared education, with specific reference to the Community Relations Equality and Diversity (CRED) policy, parental and carer engagement and the role of Special Schools; and
 - where appropriate, identifying experiences from other jurisdictions that might guide the development of future policy in Northern Ireland.

3. The NASUWT's response therefore:
 - places issues related to shared and integrated education into their appropriate current policy context (p.4);
 - considers the definition, nature and promotion of shared education (p.8);
 - examines policy lessons from other jurisdictions (p.10);
 - sets out key issues related to the operation of academic selection in systems that seek to promote inter-school collaboration (p.16);
 - describes approaches to school accountability that promote inter-school collaboration (p. 17);

- evaluates resource, governance and workforce considerations that should guide the development of policies focused on the promotion of inter-school collaboration (p.X); and
- assesses the Community Relations Equality and Diversity (CRED) dimensions of any shared education agenda and the role of special schools in this context (p.X).

Background and context

4. The NASUWT believes that the education system has a critical role to play in the promotion of social cohesion and the development of safe, just, inclusive and tolerant communities.
5. Alongside the important contribution made to building social cohesion by other key public and social services and institutions, the work of schools in creating high quality educational opportunities for children and young people, celebrating diversity and difference and tackling inequality, discrimination, prejudice and bigotry must be recognised in the development and implementation of public policy in these key areas.
6. The Committee will recognise that public discourse on approaches to the achievement of these objectives has continued to focus on the potential contribution of shared and integrated education. The NASUWT notes in this regard that the Report of the Ministerial Advisory Group on Advancing Shared Education, published in March 2013, identified shared education as the core mechanism by which educational quality and equality could continue to be sustained and further progressed in Northern Ireland and advocated its continued emphasis in the development of policy.¹ Critically, the Ministerial Advisory Group assessed the potential value of shared

¹ Connolly, P.; Purvis, D. and O'Grady, P.J. (2013). *Advancing Shared education: The Report of the Ministerial Advisory Group*. Available at: <http://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/SchoolofEducation/MinisterialAdvisoryGroup/Filestore/Filetoupload,382123,en.pdf>; accessed on 17/10/14.

education not only in terms of the religious beliefs of pupils, parents and wider communities but also in respect of their socioeconomic status, the extent to which they encounter social exclusion or marginalisation and the special and additional learning needs of children and young people .

7. The NASUWT further notes that in October 2013 the Minister for Education, after a period of reflection, accepted the recommendations set out in the Report and sought to encourage a public debate on how best to advance shared education.² The Union welcomes the Committee's Inquiry as an important means by which this debate can be progressed on a purposeful and appropriately informed basis.
8. The NASUWT acknowledges and respects the right of the Minister to identify shared education as a policy priority in light of the recommendations of the Ministerial Advisory Group and recognises that advancing shared education was highlighted as key objective in the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government.³
9. As a trade union committed to organising teachers and school leaders on a non-sectarian basis and to maintaining a genuinely inclusive and world class education system that meets the needs and interests of all children and young people, the NASUWT takes a particular interest in those areas of the Executive's work related to the promotion of equity, diversity and high standards of provision in all schools.
10. Having set out its position on the value of promoting shared education, it is incumbent on the Department for Education to ensure that it develops a coherent and credible strategy that recognises the particular economic and social context within which Northern Ireland is located. This submission

² Department of Education (2013). *Advancing Shared Education: Ministerial Statement*. Available at: http://www.deni.gov.uk/advancing_shared_education_-_22_october_2013_docx.pdf; accessed on 18/10/14.

³ Northern Ireland Executive (2011). *Programme for Government 2011-15*. Available at: <http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/pfg-2011-2015-final-report.pdf>; accessed on 17/10/14.

therefore seeks to engage with the key themes identified as significant by the Committee with reference to the policy challenges that the Department for Education and the wider Executive will need to address if the Minister's aspirations for shared education are to be realised.

The definition, nature and promotion of shared and integrated Education

11. The NASUWT is concerned that, too frequently, consideration of the merits or otherwise of shared education has been attempted without a commonly recognised working definition. Without clarity of definition, potential policy options cannot be developed or evaluated on a meaningful basis.

12. The Union notes the support given by the Ministerial Advisory Group to the definition of shared education in the remit given to it by the Department for Education:

*'Shared education involves two or more schools or other educational institutions from different sectors working in collaboration with the aim of delivering educational benefits to learners, promoting the efficient and effective use of resources, and promoting equality of opportunity, good relations, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion.'*⁴

13. While debates about the nature of shared education are likely to remain contested, the NASUWT believes that this definition represents a viable and potentially helpful starting point from which to evaluate the nature of shared education and its implications for the education system in Northern Ireland. It should, therefore, be adopted as the basis for the development of future policy in this area.

⁴ Connelly *et.al.* (2013). *op.cit.*

14. This invites further reflection on the important distinctions that should be drawn between shared and integrated education. The NASUWT notes the view of the Ministerial Advisory Group that integrated education represents a distinct sector rather than a model upon which the development of shared education should be based.
15. The NASUWT endorses this analysis. It is clear that integrated schools have had an important and legitimate role to play in the education system in Northern Ireland and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. The Union notes ongoing perceived concern that the Department of Education has failed to discharge its statutory responsibility to encourage and facilitate integrated education. Given the nature of this requirement, it is important that the Committee and other relevant stakeholders should seek to examine and, if necessary, address these concerns.
16. However, integrated schools are settings with an intentionally multi-denominational but unambiguously Christian character. Consequently, the Ministerial Advisory Committee has recognised correctly that the privileging of integrated education in its current form cannot be regarded as a cohesive or credible approach to the development of shared education. Given the increasingly diverse nature of society in Northern Ireland, it must be recognised that many parents would hold legitimate and understandable objections to their children's education being undertaken wholly within institutions founded on a multi-denominational Christian ethos. Such an approach would be inconsistent with the definition of shared education advocated by the Ministerial Advisory Group.
17. Therefore, while integrated schools would have a distinctive and potentially powerful contribution to make to the development of shared education, the likelihood that parents will continue to prefer an education system that reflects the diversity of religious, cultural and philosophical beliefs across Northern Ireland suggests that the establishment of

alternative approaches to shared education would be necessary in order to secure and maintain a reasonable degree of policy sustainability.

18. The NASUWT notes the interest in debates on shared education in the desirability of establishing a statutory definition of shared education. The Union recognises that the acceptance by the Minister of the recommendation of the Ministerial Advisory Group that a legal requirement should be placed on the Department of Education to advance shared education would require the introduction of a statutory definition.

19. However, the NASUWT is concerned that the introduction of a statutory duty in respect of the promotion of shared education prior to the development of a clear, coherent and practical implementation framework would lead to the imposition of a duty on the Department of Education that it would not be able to discharge effectively. The Union is clear that significant barriers to the development of shared education exist within the education system and that until these barriers are addressed, it would be inappropriate to introduce a statutory duty on the basis proposed by the Ministerial Advisory Group. These impediments to the advancement of shared education are set out elsewhere in this submission.

Policy lessons from other jurisdictions

20. The NASUWT notes the interest of the Committee in evidence from other jurisdictions that could support the development of shared education. The Union's views in this regard are shaped by its extensive experience of organising across jurisdictions and its active role in the global education trade union federation, Education International.

21. The NASUWT is clear that education systems benefit from approaches to school organisation that promote collaboration and partnership not only between schools but also between the school sector and other services

that support children and young people. The Union therefore welcomes the commitment of the Minister in his statement to the Assembly on shared education to ensure that policy is guided by a determination to promote inter-school collaboration and the provision of education for all learners through the securing of effective partnership arrangements.⁵

22. The NASUWT recognises that the development of education policy in Northern Ireland must acknowledge the unique post-conflict context within which its education system operates. Policymakers must therefore resist simplistic attempts to transplant approaches to the development of enhanced inter-school collaboration from other jurisdictions that do not take the particular circumstances pertaining in Northern Ireland into effective account. However, the NASUWT is clear that it is possible to identify some broad policy lessons from other jurisdictions that are relevant to the development of shared education strategies in Northern Ireland.

23. The direct experience gained by the NASUWT from its work across jurisdictions confirms its understanding of the importance of collaboration and partnership within education systems. This derives from the Union's recognition of the fundamental status of education as a public good and a universal human right.

24. The status of education as a public good means that policy and practice should not only seek to secure benefits for individual pupils and learners but should also recognise the importance of education to the economic, cultural, civic and democratic wellbeing of wider society.

25. These inherent characteristics of education have profound implications for the principles upon which education systems are organised. In particular, they confirm that notions of education as a commodity to be consumed by individuals and provided for in a competitive and marketised context are

⁵ Department of Education (2013). *op.cit.*

wholly inconsistent with an understanding of education as a public good and a human right.

26. In its Report to its 2013 Annual Conference, *Maintaining World Class Schools*, the NASUWT described the profoundly negative consequences of attempts to use market mechanisms, including competition between providers, as a guiding principle for the organisation of provision in the education system.⁶

27. In particular, the NASUWT's report draws attention to the fact that there is no credible international evidence that the development of education systems on the basis of conceptualising pupils and parents as consumers of education in a marketised context, with the promotion of competition between providers as a means of raising standards of provision, generates improved educational outcomes.⁷ Instead, the use of such mechanisms has been associated with high rates of variation in levels of pupil performance⁸ and increased social and economic segregation.⁹

28. In such a context, it is also apparent that collaboration between schools and providers of wider services for children and young people to promote and improve children's wider wellbeing is also likely to be emphasised insufficiently where inter-school competition is a prevalent characteristic of the education system.

29. The impediments to institutional collaboration generated by marketised approaches to the operation of the education system also have important implications for its productive and allocative efficiency by undermining the

⁶ NASUWT (2013). *Maintaining World Class Schools*. NASUWT; Birmingham.

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ Hickman, R. (2011). 'Education and Fairness' in Lawson, N. and Spours, K. (eds.). *Education for the Good Society: The Values and Principles of a New Comprehensive Vision*. Available from:

http://clients.squareeye.net/uploads/compass/documents/COM0972_Education_for_Good_Society_WEB.pdf; accessed on 18/10/14.

⁹ NASUWT (2013). *op. cit.*

ability of schools to generate economies of scale through effective partnership working and impeding the distribution of finite resources across the school system on a strategic basis.¹⁰

30. It is therefore clear that models of educational provision based on collaboration work to create circumstances within which significant educational, organisational and economic benefits can be secured. This has been recognised by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and was an unequivocal message of the recent independent investigation of the academies programme in England undertaken by the independent Academies Commission.¹¹

31. Evidence gained by the NASUWT from England is particularly instructive in this respect.

32. It is important to recognise that, notwithstanding the compelling evidence of the importance of institutional collaboration in securing positive outcomes for individuals and for wider society, policy development in England has long sought to embed quasi-markets and competition between schools as key features of the state education system.

33. This approach was initiated by the 1979-1997 Conservative Government and was based to a significant extent on the introduction of performance league tables and punitive individual school inspection, a fundamental purpose of both policies was to provide 'market' information to parents in

¹⁰ Atkinson, M.; Springate, J.; Johnson, F. and Hulsey, K. (2007). *Inter-school collaboration: a literature review*. NFER; Slough.

Huxham, C. and Vangen, S. (2005). *Managing to Collaborate: The Theory and Practice of Collaborative Advantage*. Routledge; Oxford.

¹¹ Exley, S. (2013). 'Mind the gap between the best and the worst: it's widening'. *Times Educational Supplement* (8 February).

(<http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6318807>), retrieved on 18/10/14; The Academies Commission (2013), *op. cit.*

order to allow them to exercise consumer choice in relation to the schools attended by their children.¹²

34. These reforms were supported by the granting of significant degrees of financial autonomy and control over key personnel-related functions to individual schools, reflecting the view of proponents of marketisation in the education system that such autonomy is a necessary condition of the efficient operation of quasi-markets as, in theory, it permits schools to respond more effectively to prevailing market conditions.¹³ The necessary corollary of the re-location of financial authority and control of resources at school level was a weakening of the strategic role of local authorities in supporting and maintaining effective collaborative arrangements between schools.¹⁴

35. While the Labour Government of 1997-2010 retained many of the features of a quasi-marketised education system, it is important to note that the value of collaboration was recognised to an increasing extent in the development of policy during this period.¹⁵ This revised approach was reflected in, for example, the introduction of school behaviour and attendance partnerships, 14-19 curriculum and qualification consortia and the co-ordination of admissions arrangements through Admissions Forums. In relation to school accountability, considered in more detail elsewhere in this submission, the previous administration's School Report Card proposal, subsequently discarded by the Coalition Government, sought to examine ways in which systems of accountability might be

¹² Reed, J. and Hallgarten, J. (2003). *Time to say goodbye? The future of school performance tables*. IPPR; London.

¹³ Glennester, H. (1991). 'Quasi-markets for Education?'. *The Economic Journal*. Vol. 101 No. 408 pp.1268-1276.

¹⁴ Institute for Government (2012). *The development of quasi-markets in secondary education*. Institute for Government; London.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

recast to emphasise more effectively the importance of collaboration between schools.¹⁶

36. More broadly, the critical importance of cooperation and partnership working between schools and other agencies and organisations within the wider children's services sector was recognised in the development of statutory local authority-led Children and Young People's Trusts. These bodies were established not only to enhance the educational opportunities available to children and young people but also to promote their wider wellbeing through the adoption of strategic local approaches to inter-agency collaboration.

37. However, since taking office, the Coalition Government in Westminster has removed many of the remaining key drivers of cooperation within the education system, through its abolition of previous requirements on schools to collaborate with others and by undermining local-level structures through which effective inter-school partnership arrangements, as well as those between schools and other children and young people-focused public services, could be secured in practice.

38. The undermining of support for effective collaboration within the education and wider children and young people's services sectors has been driven by a clear commitment on the part of Coalition Government Ministers to the use of competition and quasi-market structures as the principal drivers of system improvement, despite an asserted recognition by the Department for Education of the value of inter-school and inter-sectoral collaboration.¹⁷ This approach to policy has been characterised particularly clearly by the emphasis placed by the current Westminster Government on its academies and free schools agendas.

¹⁶ Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF)/Ofsted (2008). *A School Report Card: consultation document*. DCSF; Nottingham.

¹⁷ Institute for Government (2012). *op. cit.*; The Academies Commission (2013). *op. cit.*

39. In evaluating the proposals advanced for inter-school collaboration advanced through an agenda for shared education, the NASUWT therefore invites the Committee to take note of the considerations set out above. In particular, the Committee should emphasise that the commitment of the Minister to promote collaboration will only be secured in practice through a continuing rejection of policies based on the establishment of quasi-markets and fragmentation of the school system.

Academic selection and inter-school collaboration

40. The Minister's commitment to the promotion of inter-school collaboration draws attention to the ways in which academically selective schools within a shared education context might contribute effectively to the learning of all children and young people present in the communities within which they are located. The Union welcomes the particular attention given to this issue by the Ministerial Advisory Group.¹⁸

41. Development of policy in this area would need to consider how the approach to shared education advocated by the Minister will require active consideration of the ways in which settings currently operating systems of academic selection might need to amend their current practices to enable them to play a meaningful role in collaborative arrangements at a local level.

42. In this context, the Union notes the Minister's acceptance of the recommendation of the Ministerial Advisory Group that effective use should be made of area-based planning to promote the development of schools with all-ability intakes. However, given the fact that the Assembly has to date declined to take steps to end academic selection, it is likely that selective schools will remain a significant feature of the education system in Northern Ireland for the foreseeable future, regardless of the

¹⁸ Connelly *et al.* (2013). *op.cit.*

powers available to the Minister through the area-based planning process referenced above.

43. As a result, prior to the introduction of any formal requirement on the Department of Education to promote shared education, the Assembly will need to give consideration to the ways in which academically selective schools can be integrated into genuinely collaborative arrangements with non-selective schools. This collaboration, if it is to be meaningful, would need to include provision, where appropriate, for selective schools to take an active and direct role in the education of pupils enrolled formally in other schools as part of their contribution to the local learning partnerships advocated by the Ministerial Advisory Group.

44. The Committee should, therefore, recommend that the Department of Education should work with the NASUWT and other relevant stakeholders to identify the potential barriers to the involvement of academically selective schools in local education partnerships and to identify any necessary policy actions required to facilitate purposeful collaboration between these schools and others within their localities.

Approaches to school accountability that promote inter-school collaboration

45. The NASUWT is clear that a fit for purpose framework of accountability is critical to ensuring that public trust and confidence in the state education system can continue to be secured.

46. However, it is not only critical that the school accountability system reflects accurately the quality of education made available to pupils, it is essential that it does not operate in ways that contradict or undermine other important system-wide education policy priorities.

47. In the context of the commitment of the Minister to shared education and increasing levels of inter-school collaboration, it is important that consideration is given to the extent to which the current school accountability system in Northern Ireland operates in ways that are consistent with these policy objectives.
48. It is evident that, at present, the current framework for holding schools to account in Northern Ireland works against the establishment of effective collaborative arrangements between schools and other learning providers. In particular, the increasingly high-stakes nature of the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) establishes powerful incentives for schools and other learning providers to focus on their own pupil performance indicators rather than on addressing, through collaboration, the needs of all learners within the communities they serve.
49. In a context where greater emphasis is placed on shared education, pupils would be likely to be educated in more than one institution. In such circumstances, it would be highly anomalous to continue to attempt to hold schools and colleges to account solely on the basis of the progress and attainment of their formally enrolled pupils.
50. It is therefore evident that effective collaboration between institutions would necessitate a fundamental review of the way in which schools and colleges are held to account for the work they undertake with learners. The introduction of effective approaches to shared education would depend upon the establishment of an approach to accountability that incentivises schools and colleges to focus to a greater extent on the work they undertake in collaboration with other institutions.
51. In *Maintaining World Class Schools*, the NASUWT set out clearly the extent to which models of school accountability based on the use of a narrow range of pupil performance indicators and punitive, data-driven

school inspection, such as that in place currently in Northern Ireland, result in their failure to capture the totality of the work that institutions, individually and collectively, undertake with pupils and the benefits that derive from this work for individual learners as well for wider social and economic wellbeing.¹⁹

52. The commitment of the Minister and the Executive to promote shared education therefore creates an important opportunity to consider future policy options for school accountability in Northern Ireland.

53. In particular, effective note should be taken of the fact that many of the education systems in other administrations regarded as high performing or fast improving, are able to establish and sustain accountability-related processes that maintain high levels of public confidence and also support system development and improvement without use of the high-stakes approaches to school accountability that characterise arrangements in Northern Ireland to an increasing extent.²⁰

54. The NASUWT therefore advocates an objective and detailed review of the models of school accountability used in other education systems as a starting point for debate about the future of the school accountability framework.

55. This review should include consideration of the ways in which accountability frameworks in operation elsewhere work to engender enhanced levels of parental involvement in the education system, given evidence that the system in place in Northern Ireland, which is justified to a significant extent on the basis that it provides information about school performance to allow parents to make informed decisions about their children's education, does not serve to secure this important policy

¹⁹ NASUWT (2013). *op.cit*

²⁰ Eurydice (2007). *School Autonomy in Europe: Policies and Measures*. Eurydice European Unit; Brussels.

objective in practice.²¹ This consideration should be regarded as particularly critical given the identification by the Ministerial Advisory Group of effective parental engagement as a necessary condition for the development of sustainable approaches to shared education.²²

56. The concern of the NASUWT with current levels of parental engagement and commitment to the state education system reflects its understanding of education as a public good, underpinned by a culture of collaboration rather than contestability, and not as a commodity to be consumed by individual children and their families. As a result, the Committee should seek to promote a debate about the future of the school accountability system that explores ways in which a more effective balance can be struck between accountability at school, local and system levels. Critically, the recasting of public discourses on school accountability on this basis would serve to promote the public valuing and celebration of the education system evident within high performing jurisdictions such as South Korea and Finland.²³

Inter-school collaboration: resource considerations

57. The NASUWT welcomes the recognition by the Ministerial Advisory Group that collaborative arrangements between schools need to take account of and reflect their local contexts and that partnerships also need time to develop levels of trust and thereby establish appropriate and effective arrangements.

58. It is important that the Department of Education acknowledges that collaborative arrangements should encourage co-operation, facilitate and support networking and enable teachers and school leaders to concentrate on their core responsibilities for teaching and leading teaching and

²¹ NASUWT (2013). *op.cit.*

²² Connelly *et.al.* (2013). *op.cit.*

²³ NASUWT (2013). *op.cit.*

learning. In the establishment of such arrangements, the NASUWT and other recognised trade unions and members of the school and college workforce should be involved actively in decision-making processes.

59. As the report of the Ministerial Advisory Group acknowledges, positive examples of effective collaboration between providers across all sectors of the education system are emerging. However, it is evident that more attention would need to be paid within the context of a shared education agenda to developing the capacity of institutions to develop collaborative arrangements in areas where there is no history of partnership working.

60. Schools and colleges need time and additional resources and support, to be able to develop and implement effective partnerships.

61. Issues related to the training and development of teachers and school leaders working within a shared education context, highlighted as particularly important by the Ministerial Advisory Group, would also need to be considered carefully.

62. With specific regard to the funding of shared education, the NASUWT notes the acceptance by the Minister of the recommendation of the Ministerial Advisory Group that provision would need to be made to address the additional cost to schools engaging in shared education and that the intention of the Department for Education is to mainstream this funding in the longer term.

63. The Union further notes that the Minister has reserved his position on taking forward the Ministerial Advisory Group's recommendation that a shared education premium within the common funding formula would represent the most effective means by which shared education could be funded.

64. It is critical that clarity is provided on these issues as a matter of urgency and before any attempt is made to implement the recommendations of the Ministerial Advisory Group. In particular, the NASUWT is concerned that the implications of the introduction of a shared education premium for other areas of education-related funding and what, if any, conditions would be attached to its use have not been identified by the Department of Education. The ongoing uncertainty over the Northern Ireland Executive's budget serves only to amplify these concerns.
65. As referenced elsewhere in this submission, area planning arrangements would have a central role to play in the development of a coherent shared education agenda and already are subject to terms of reference and guidance that seek to promote the development of shared education options.
66. The NASUWT believes that the current requirements that proposals for shared education models must have the support of the local community, be sustainable and be capable of delivering high-quality education are appropriate.
67. The Union is also clear that collaborative arrangements between schools can secure the more effective use of finite resources through the generation of economies of scale and minimising unnecessary duplication. However, it is essential that any proposals for the development of local shared education arrangements are not used as a pretext to seek to reduce overall levels of investment in schools or to undermine the job security of members of the school workforce through the imposition of inappropriate approaches to school rationalisation.
68. The Department of Education should seek to take forward greater inter-school collaboration on the basis that it provides an opportunity to make more effective use of the talents and expertise of the existing school

workforce and to thereby enhance the quality of educational provision for learners. This important principle should therefore be incorporated into terms of reference and guidance on the development of local proposals for shared education.

Inter-school collaboration: workforce considerations

69. It is important that the risks to the workforce of poorly managed collaborative arrangements are recognised by those with responsibility for the development of policy in this area. Policy should be progressed on the basis of a clear understanding of the centrality of the school workforce to maintaining and further enhancing standards of educational achievement.

70. Specifically, inter-school partnership arrangements must be properly assessed in terms of their impact on teacher and school leader workload. They must be evaluated against criteria agreed with the workforce, including the NASUWT and other recognised trade unions, and the results of these evaluations must be taken into effective account prior to the implementation of policy. This evaluation must examine the capacity for institutions to cope with the changes and the capacity of the workforce in terms of time, knowledge and skills. This is particularly important in relation to the increased demands that may be made of teachers and school leaders in the future development of shared education campuses.

71. The Committee should also note the significant levels of workload pressure to which teachers and school leaders are currently subject. The NASUWT's Big Question survey found that 84% of teachers and school leaders in Northern Ireland cite excessive workload as their main work-related concern. Attempts therefore to progress a shared education agenda in ways that do not take effective account of these pressures and that would intensify further the workload demands on teachers and school leaders would be entirely unacceptable.

Inter-school collaboration: governance considerations

72. The considerations set out above draw attention to issues related to the funding, management and governance of inter-school partnerships and collaboration. It is important to note that a significant proportion of the Ministerial Advisory Group's recommendations, and the Minister's acceptance of them, rested on the assumption that the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) would be established prior to their implementation. The decision not to proceed with the ESA therefore casts doubt on the extent to which a consistent approach to shared education can be secured in the absence of ESA or a comparable system-wide body.

73. The Union notes the intention of the Department of Education to review all the recommendations of the Ministerial Advisory Group in light of the Minister's proposal to replace the current five Education and Library Boards (ELBs) with a single board from April 2015.

74. However, in the absence of any meaningful detail about how a single board would operate in practice, it is not possible to determine with any reasonable degree of certainty the extent to which this body would be able to undertake functions in respect of shared education for which ESA was intended originally to have responsibility. It would therefore not be appropriate for the Department of Education to seek to take forward its shared education agenda until the functions and remit of the single board have been determined. Any attempt to take forward shared education through existing ELB structures would not be appropriate given the risks of unacceptable variation in the approaches adopted across different areas that may result.

Community Relations Equality and Diversity policy and the role of special schools

75. The NASUWT welcomes the recognition given by the Ministerial Advisory Group to the important role played by special and alternative education settings in the provision of a genuinely inclusive education system. It is clear that any meaningful commitment to the development of an effective shared education strategy must include consideration of the ways in which such settings can contribute to purposeful inter-school partnerships that seek to meet the educational needs and interests of all children and young people.

76. As the Ministerial Advisory Group acknowledges, highly skilled and experienced staff in special schools and alternative settings are particularly well-placed to support provision for pupils with special and additional educational needs in mainstream settings, while staff across both sectors can benefit from the sharing of expertise and experience in all areas of pedagogy and professional practice.

77. The NASUWT therefore endorses the recommendation of the Ministerial Advisory Group that the Department of Education should undertake a review of how shared education and enhanced collaboration between mainstream schools, special schools and educational support centres can most effectively meet the needs of children and young people with disabilities, those with emotional and behavioural difficulties and those with special educational needs. The Union looks forward to working closely with the Department of Education on the development of the terms of reference of this review, its methodology and the evaluation of its outcomes.

78. Specifically, the Union will seek early clarification from the Department of Education that the view of the Ministerial Advisory Group that, wherever possible, pupils with special and additional needs are taught in mainstream settings will not be interpreted in a way that undermines the

importance of ensuring that decisions about where such pupils are educated should continue to be guided by objective and professional assessments of the kinds of settings where these needs can best be met.

79. In relation to the Committee's specific interest in the relationship between the shared education agenda and the Community Relations, Equality and Diversity (CRED) policy, the NASUWT remains clear that a meaningful approach to shared education in the context of broader equality and diversity policy must seek to address the needs of pupils across all categories specified in the provisions of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and those living in materially deprived households.

80. In this regard, the Union takes particular note of the recommendation of the Ministerial Advisory Group that legislation should be brought forward for schools and other educational institutions to be designated as 'public authorities' under Section 75 and thereby required to comply with the statutory duties to promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

81. In principle, the Union has no objections to schools being designated as public authorities for this specific purpose. However, before any such proposal could be progressed, it would be necessary to undertake a thorough evaluation of the possible wider implications for schools of their designation as public authorities in order to prevent such a decision creating unforeseen and unwanted consequences. This evaluation would secure the confidence of the school workforce and the wider public that the sole implication of designation would be to introduce a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

82. In addition, as the report of the Ministerial Advisory Group implies, designation of individual schools as public authorities could impose responsibilities on schools that they may require additional support and resources to discharge effectively and manageably. Before any steps were

taken to implement this proposal, it would also be important to ensure that provisions are put in place to prevent responsibilities under Section 75 that should continue to remain within the remit of other public authorities being transferred inappropriately to schools.

83. The NASUWT recognises that responsibility for the introduction of legislation to designate schools and other educational institutions as public authorities falls within the remit of the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). The Union notes from evidence given to the Committee by the Department of Education that the Minister intends to write to the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to communicate the detail of the Ministerial Advisory Group's recommendations and to seek their views on the practicalities of designating schools as public authorities for Section 75 purposes.

84. The NASUWT further notes that to assist the Minister in this process, the Department of Education is undertaking a review of approaches to equality legislation for education settings in other jurisdictions. Given the potential significance of any decision to designate schools as public authorities for the school workforce, the NASUWT is clear that it should be consulted fully over the terms of this review in particular and on the development of this strand of policy more broadly.