



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Research and Information Service Briefing Note

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Shared and Integrated Education Inquiry Focus Groups

1. Background

The Committee for Education is undertaking an Inquiry into Shared and Integrated Education. The Terms of Reference are as follows -

The Education Committee will:

- Review the nature and definition of Shared Education and Integrated Education as it applies across all educational phases – including consideration of the need for a formal statutory definition and an obligation in statute to facilitate and encourage Shared Education;
- Identify the key barriers and enablers for Shared Education and Integrated Education;
- Identify and analyse alternative approaches and models of good practice in other jurisdictions in terms of policy interventions and programmes;
- Consider what priorities and actions need to be taken to improve sharing and integration – including the effectiveness of the relevant parts of the CRED policy; the need to engage more effectively with parents/carers; and the role of Special Schools.

The Assembly's Research and Information Service (RaISe) and Education Service are working together to find out about students' opinions and experience of Shared and Integrated education. The research will take the form of a qualitative study. Qualitative research generates words, rather than numbers, as data for analysis. It is effective in finding out about people's experiences and understanding different perspectives. The research will be performed using a focus group format.

2. Research Protocol

Aims and Objectives	<p>The research will assess:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attitude towards mixing in general • Attitude towards both models (Shared and Integrated) • Positive outcomes • Negative outcomes • Attitudinal Change • Behavioural change • Levels of enjoyment • Impact on motivation • Barriers • Thoughts for the future
Methods	<p>Research will survey the views of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils who have experienced Integrated Education • Pupils who have experienced Shared Education • Pupils who have experienced neither models <p>Research will involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structured Interviews lasting 40 minutes • Working with schools from a variety of sectors • Approximately 8 pupils in each focus group • Sessions performed in Parliament Buildings and the school setting
Ethical Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anonymity will be guaranteed • Measures will be taken to minimise bias

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parental consent will be sought
Resources Required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education Officers • Research Officer • Bursary Student • Education Administration Team • Recording Equipment • Rooms in Parliament Buildings • Hansard Irish Medium translator
Timescale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify Schools by 29 September • Approach Schools by 08 October • Develop Topic Guide by 10 October • Commence structured interviews 13 October • Deliver outreach 10 November • Complete report by 18 December
Dissemination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Results will be forwarded to the Committee for Education as a component of its report • Participating Schools will be alerted once the Inquiry report is published

3. Definitions

For the purposes of the research, Shared and Integrated Education have been defined in the following ways.

Shared Education

The Ministerial Advisory Group¹ defines Shared Education as involving 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

¹ <http://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/SchoolofEducation/MinisterialAdvisoryGroup/Filestore/Fileupload,382123,en.pdf>

- 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.

Integrated Education

The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education² describes Integration Education as bringing children and staff from Catholic and Protestant traditions, as well as those of other faiths, or none, together in one school.

The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education Statement of Principles can be found at the following URL: <http://www.nicie.org/about-us/nicie/statement-of-principles/>

4. Technique

The methodology is designed to ensure that the findings will reflect the research aims, rather than reflecting the bias of the researcher, or a very atypical group. This means that the technique will be:

- Reproducible: the same topic guide could be used to generate similar information;
- Systematic: interviewees will not be selected because they support our pre-existing ideas about the answers;
- Credible: the questions asked and the ways in which they are asked will be reasonable for generating valid accounts; and
- Transparent: methods will be written up so that readers can see exactly how the data were collected and analysed.³

4.1. Selection of Schools

The research aims to have a balance of responses from the following school categories.

Primary	Post-Primary
Controlled	Controlled
Maintained	Maintained
Integrated	Integrated
Irish Medium	Irish Medium
Rural	Rural
Urban	Urban
	Secondary
	Grammar

² NICIE website: <http://www.nicie.org/teachers/what-is-integrated-education/>

³ Brikci, N. (2007) *A Guide to Using Qualitative Research Methodology* Medecins Sans Frontieres

In the first instance, the schools booked on the Education Service programme were considered for participation in the focus groups. The visiting schools were listed by category to identify schools from specific phases and sectors. Schools were selected to represent a wide geographical area.

It was ascertained that a majority of the categories in the target cohort could be surveyed by working with schools booked on the Education Service programme. However, Irish Medium and Primary Integrated schools were not represented, so Education Service has arranged outreach to deliver focus groups in the school setting. School selection is illustrated in Appendix 1.

4.2. Topic Guide

Topic Guides are used mostly in semi-structured interviews (See Appendix 2). It has a list of the key questions relevant to the topic, with some useful prompts to encourage the interviewee to talk about specific issues if they do not arise spontaneously.

4.3. Briefing for Interviewers

RaISe has produced a briefing for interviewers to ensure that the process is standardised (See Appendix 3). The interviewers will meet prior to the first focus group to reaffirm the procedures.

4.4. Recording

All focus groups will be recorded using a digital audio recorder. The audio files will be saved on a shared network drive. The interviewers will be accompanied by a scribe who will summarise the salient points which arise during conversation.

4.5. Irish Medium Education

The Education Service will deliver an outreach visit to an Irish Medium school to carry out a focus group session. A member of Hansard who is fluent in Irish will translate the Topic Guide and accompany the interviewer during the focus group session. The interviewer in question has GCSE level Irish. The responses will be translated into English.

4.6. Analysis

The Assembly's Research and Information Service will analyse the data and write an associated report which will be forwarded to the Committee for Education in December 2014.

4.7. Briefing Pack for schools

The Education Service will create an information pack for schools which will explain the concepts of Shared and Integrated Education. This will be sent to schools and used to prepare the pupils for the focus groups.

Appendix 2: Topic Guide

Shared/Integrated Education Inquiry

1. The Government is currently working on plans to change schooling in Northern Ireland. All schools will be expected to think about sharing classes, teachers or facilities with other schools of different religions.

How do you feel about schools allowing pupils from other schools to use their sports facilities or equipment like computers?

2. How would you feel about having classes with pupils from other schools of a different religion? What about doing projects or sports?

3. Can you think of things that might be good if young people from schools of a different religion get together? (Unprompted, then probe if necessary)

- Using their sports facilities and computers or equipment
- Getting the opportunity to be taught by different teachers/ sports coaches
- Doing classes we don't normally get to do at our school, like learning a new language; getting the opportunity to do a different subject or qualification
- Making new friends
- Doing interesting projects

4. Can you think of any disadvantages if young people from schools of a different religion get together? (Unprompted, then probe if necessary)

- Having to share our sports facilities or computers
- Having to travel to get to the other school
- Having to be with young people of a different religion
- Having to mix with young people who are very different from me, or having difficulty mixing
- Wearing a different uniform

5. Integrated schools educate children from both Protestant and Catholic traditions together, as well as those of other faiths and those with no religious faith. This is different from shared education as pupils of different religions go to the same school rather than attending two different schools.

How would you feel about attending an integrated school? Why do you say that?

Appendix 3: Interviewer Guide

Shared education inquiry: focus groups

The main purpose of focus group research is to learn about participants' experiences and views: the idea is that listening to others' experiences stimulates memories and ideas in participants.

Introductions

- Facilitator to explain the reason for the group and what will be done with the findings. May be useful to let them know that we are there to learn from them
- Confidentiality – explain that they may be quoted but they will not be named, the quotations will be non-attributable (for example, we would remove the name of the school or teacher if they reference it)
- Ask them to be as honest as possible and to talk about both the good and the bad
- State that the discussion should be informal and that different views to those expressed by others are welcome
- Need agreement from all participants on the use of the recording. Reassure participants that the recording will not be used for anything other than note-taking purposes

During the group

- Always ask open questions and allow the discussion to flow. If one person gives an answer it can be useful to find out whether this view is widely held or not, for example by saying *'do you all agree with that?'* *'does anyone have a different view?'*
- It is often useful to probe to gain further information, for example *'tell me more about that'*, *'why do you say that,'* *'any other views?'*
- While discussion should be as free-flowing as possible, need to keep it moving and wind up particular questions as required, and also keep participants on topic

Ending the session

- Thank participants for their time and participation – let them know that the information they have shared is valuable for this project.
- Ask them if they have any questions or other points they'd like to make