



STRANMILLIS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE  
A College of Queen's University Belfast

## Stranmillis University College Response to Shared/Integrated Education Inquiry

### 0. Summary

0.1 We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate on shared/integrated education and support the need for agreed definitions and obligations in statute.

0.2 We believe that agreement should be sought on principles governing shared education but that, as a developmental approach is required, these principles should allow for many existing models of practice to exist and indeed for schools to develop their own models of practice if appropriate.

0.3 We acknowledge a range of barriers to shared education including wider societal issues and identify key enablers such as developmental work and equipping teachers and other education professionals.

0.4 We identify the need for key strategic investment in this area that encompasses the broad educational spectrum. Such investment needs to be sustained and systematic.

### 1.1 Brief introduction to the organisation

Stranmillis University College (a College of Queen's University) is an autonomous institution academically integrated with Queen's University.

The University College has been providing a high quality learning experience for its students for over 90 years. This is reflected in its exceptionally low dropout rate and high success rates. The most recent figures published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency indicate that in relation to the employment of leavers obtaining degrees from full-time courses, Stranmillis had a 95.7% success rate.

The current educational policy context presents many challenges but the University College remains committed to nurturing a student-centred learning environment where students are encouraged to engage in critical enquiry and academic challenge. The University College's increasing focus on international engagement and partnership is helping to transform its culture by enriching the learning community and widening the horizons of staff and students. Teaching, which is informed by scholarship and research, continues to be our primary focus, in the words of our motto: **Docendo Discimus: by teaching we learn.** In both our teaching and scholarship we seek to pursue a vision which aims to have a positive impact on the local community and beyond through sharing learning and resources. We believe education can have transformative power in the lives of individuals and communities.

## 1.2 Brief biography of response authors

### *Dr Patricia Eaton*

Dr Eaton has experience in post-primary schools and in Stranmillis University College, where she teaches on the undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes and researches in the field of education. She was project director of the International Fund for Ireland funded CREDIT (Classrooms Re-imagined: Education in Diversity and Inclusion for Teachers) project. The core aim of the CREDIT project was to provide substantive in-service courses for existing teachers across Northern Ireland in primary and post-primary schools to assist them in developing awareness and practical skills in dealing with division, diversity, inclusion and community relations/reconciliation in the classroom and on a whole school basis. Since she joined the staff of Stranmillis University College she has been a member of the Diversity and Mutual Understanding (DMU) Committee, with responsibility for designing and delivering DMU programmes to students. She is Head of Continuing Education with responsibility for Continuing Professional Development including master's level programmes.

### *Ms Lisa McKenzie*

Ms McKenzie previously taught in the post-primary sector for 8 years and now teaches in Stranmillis University College on the undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes, in addition to research in the field of education. She has a keen interest in contributing to the development of Learning for Life and Work in the curriculum. She was deputy project director of the CREDIT project and is also a member of the Diversity and Mutual Understanding (DMU) Committee, with responsibility for designing and delivering DMU programmes to students. Within College she has also contributed to the work of the DAISY project (Diversity Awareness Intervention: Start Young) and projects with Barnardo's developing resource materials to aid skill development of children and young people.

### *Dr Brian Cummins*

Dr Cummins is Head of Widening Participation (WP) in Stranmillis University College and lectures in Education Studies at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. In his WP role he is focused on ensuring that Stranmillis is a fully inclusive institution that welcomes diversity and offers a variety of support to students from underrepresented and disadvantaged groups within Higher Education. Dr Cummins is a strong advocate of direct community engagement as a core part of part of Stranmillis WP policy and practice and this includes providing opportunities for children from all backgrounds to meet and work together on campus activities. Within his teaching role Dr Cummins coordinates the year 1 education studies module which covers the History of Education in Ireland, introducing students to the development of shared schooling, the problems this faced and the debate surrounding the wider societal goals of schooling.

### *Dr Norman Richardson*

Norman Richardson teaches Religious Studies and intercultural education to student teachers at Stranmillis University College, Belfast, where he has also been significantly involved in organising the inter-college Diversity & Mutual Understanding programme and contributing to the CREDIT project. A former teacher, he worked for over a decade as

Peace Education Officer with the cross-community Churches' Peace Education Programme and has had a long-standing involvement in community relations, inter-church and inter-religious activities. He is currently the Secretary of the Northern Ireland Inter-Faith Forum and an Executive member of the UK Inter-Faith Network. He has written and lectured regularly in the field of religious and cultural diversity in education and is a member of several local, national and international professional and academic bodies concerned with religious education and inter-faith relations. He has also developed classroom resources to support work in inclusive religious education and related curriculum areas, particularly from the perspective of developing awareness of diversity and mutual understanding. Recently retired from full time work he continues to contribute as an Honorary Lecturer in Stranmillis and is also involved with various research projects and as a contributor to other cross-community and intercultural educational initiatives. Among his most recent publications are Education for Diversity and Mutual Understanding: the experience of Northern Ireland (2011 – co-edited and co-written with Professor Tony Gallagher of Queen's University Belfast) and Sharing Religious Education: a brief introduction to the possibility of an inclusive approach to Religious Education in Northern Ireland (2014).

## 2. Factual Information

### Stranmillis University College

The Bachelor of Education (BEd) degrees in Stranmillis provide students with a professional education in the foundations of teacher education from the Foundation Stage to Post-16. A Primary and Post-Primary BEd are offered and these programmes include Curriculum/Subject Studies, Education Studies, Professional Studies and School Placement. These parallel strands reflect the competence-based approach to initial teacher education required by the Department of Education, the relevant accreditation body, and the teacher competences as detailed by the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI). On both BEd programmes students follow common Education Studies modules for the first 3 years and then choose from a menu in their final year. The concept of Shared and Integrated provision is explored in all years.

In response to GTCNI competence 2 that, 'Teachers will have developed a knowledge and understanding of contemporary debates about the nature and purposes of education and the social and policy contexts in which the aims of education are defined and implemented' all BEd students in year 1 are introduced to the history of education in Ireland and required to know that a statutory system of 'Shared' education was implemented in 1831 and 1923 but that it subsequently failed in this ideal due to religious and political wrangling. The establishment of the current Integrated school sector is introduced to students along with Irish medium education. Post-Primary Students also have the opportunity in their first year to visit a Controlled, Maintained and Integrated school. A major part of assessment in the year 1 BEd is to investigate school aims and this requires students to appreciate the common and shared features of educational provision as well as why divisions exist in relation to religious and academic segregation. Theoretical insights provided on the module combined seminar discussions with peers who have experienced a different school system (controlled, maintained, international, further education) along with new personal experiences of different school types ensure that BEd students have a solid understanding of education to contribute to any debate surrounding shared education. Education Studies does not promote one preferred system but ensures that students are knowledgeable of the foundations of the system and appreciate the challenges and opportunities that changes may bring.

In Year 2 of the BEd, Education Studies begins to look beyond religious divisions towards fully inclusive education and meeting the needs of diverse learners, conscious of the need to develop in student teachers, 'a knowledge and understanding of the need to take account of the significant features of pupils' cultures, languages and faiths and to address the implications for learning arising from these' (GTCNI Teacher Competence 8). Through presentations, reading and sharing of experience, BEd students are prepared to engage in debate and are professionally prepared to deal with inclusion. Stranmillis does not promote either full inclusion or special provision; students are introduced to what exists and are encouraged to make their own professional judgements based on a greater degree of knowledge.

GTCNI Teacher Competence 9 states that, 'teachers will have developed a knowledge and understanding of their responsibilities under the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice and know the features of the most common special needs and appropriate strategies to address these'. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the BEd, Education Studies focuses on Special Educational

Needs provision. Students have the opportunity to build up their knowledge of how to meet the learning needs of students on the SEN continuum both in a mainstream environment and in a Special Needs School/Unit. This builds on the insights provided in year 2 and every BEd student undertakes a compulsory one week placement in a Special Needs School/Unit. Students experience first-hand a shared learning environment in which the focus is on meeting the needs of each child.

In the final year of the BEd, students undertaking Education Studies can choose from a variety of modules that highlight the importance of a shared approach to improving educational attainment for all children. Some modules are focused on particular aspects of SEN and meet with GTCNI competence 21 that, 'Teachers will employ strategies that motivate and meet the needs of all pupils, including those with special and additional educational needs and for those not learning in their first language'. Another focus is on the role played by community and other key stakeholders in addressing educational needs and this is in line with GTCNI competence 12 that, 'Teachers will have developed a knowledge and understanding of the interrelationship between schools and the communities they serve, and the potential for mutual development and well-being'. Students can undertake modules in DMU and Social Disadvantage that require a greater understanding of the impact of social division on educational aspiration and attainment. In Year 4 students undertake an education dissertation and in many cases they will carry out a small-scale research study that focuses on inclusion, diversity and shared education policy and practice.

In short Education Studies in Stranmillis progressively engages students in the contemporary inclusion and sharing debate, from introductions in year 1 through to in-depth studies in year 4. Drawing on arguments from the literature and other sources Education Studies encourages critical reflection on professional practice among students with a synthesis between the development of theoretical and practical aspects and the students' own personal philosophical position in relation to education. The role played by International students on Education Studies modules is crucial to inform and challenge local students on the system of education that exists here. Stranmillis students are clearly prepared to play their role in the debate regarding shared and integrated education based on informed insights into educational structures and systems.

## 2.1 Diversity and Mutual Understanding Programme

The Inter-College Diversity and Mutual Understanding (DMU) programme has operated for many years as a joint initiative between Stranmillis and St. Mary's University Colleges. It seeks to offset some of the obvious disadvantages of nominally separate teacher education and schooling by preparing student teachers for the challenges of living and teaching in a still divided and increasingly diverse Northern Ireland. It also seeks to offer broad global and intercultural perspectives on issues associated with the understanding, acceptance and management of difference in society and in schools. It provides a series of joint seminars and interactive workshops for BEd and PGCE students to challenge them to think through the personal and professional issues around identity, diversity and the creative handling of conflict, and it offers training and support in dealing with controversial issues. There are opportunities for students to engage in training as peer leaders/facilitators, for international and intercultural exchanges and for establishing links with organisations involved in supporting schools and other community groups in these areas. In these ways the DMU programme helps to support students in their preparation for the curricular areas of Personal

Development & Mutual Understanding (primary) and Local & Global Citizenship (post-primary), and in their general awareness of the Department of Education's Community Relations, Equality & Diversity (CRED) policy.

## 2.2 CREDIT Programme

The CREDIT (Classrooms Re-imagined: Education in Diversity and Inclusion for Teachers) project delivered during the period 2011-2013 was funded by the International Fund for Ireland (£839,000) and administered by the Department of Education. It was developed by Stranmillis University College, in joint collaboration with St. Mary's University College and aimed to help all qualified teachers, working in all phases and sectors, to develop skills and confidence in dealing with issues of diversity, inclusion and community cohesion in the classroom and on a whole-school basis. Youth workers and other educational professionals were also invited to participate.

The CREDIT project provided practitioners with insight into the broader diversity issues that impact upon young people beyond the classroom and helped to develop the practitioners' personal awareness, skills and confidence working in these areas within and between schools, in relation to the curriculum, extra-curricular activities, community involvements and whole-school policy and practice. It did this in a way that encouraged participation and long-term continuity. While supporting the development of specific curriculum areas such as Personal Development & Mutual Understanding (primary) and Local & Global Citizenship (post-primary), the courses also addressed other relevant curriculum areas.

The project developed a suite of professional programmes. These included the Exploring Skills in CREDIT course which was aimed at teachers who felt they would like to develop basic skills in this area of diversity and community relations. Extending Skills in CREDIT was a more in-depth course for teachers who had shown an existing awareness of community engagement issues and helped to equip participants to embed good practice in this area into their own settings. A Leadership Skills in CREDIT course was suitable for principals who wanted to lead the school forward in CRED practices through practical consideration of planning, implementation, monitoring and reviewing at a whole-school level. Each course aimed for a balanced representation to facilitate optimum sharing of experiences, learning and engagement at all levels of education.

The CREDIT project has emphasised the need to focus on skilled practitioners and has highlighted the power of transformation in providing teachers with the time and space to embed good practice. A central feature was the inclusion of an interim period in each course, in which each participant returned to school to reflect on their own learning and consider the next steps appropriate to the individual setting prior to returning to the programme, to reflect on how they had or were planning to change practice as a result of engagement with the programme. The collective wisdom of teachers and educationalists across the continuum of education provided a rich learning experience for everyone. Further the course accentuated the mixing of education and community as a powerful way of moving forward.

Ultimately CREDIT empowered teachers to help children and young people to learn to live peaceably together in a more inclusive and less divisive society and to help young people to reach their full potential and become meaningful contributors to society, better equipped to deal with specific challenges.

## 2.3 Community Engagement

*Strategic Aim 8* of Stranmillis University College's Operational Plan is to *'support and inspire students from the widest possible range of educational, social and cultural backgrounds'*.

This is achieved through the College Widening Participation policy which clearly demonstrates that the University College is a shared and integrated learning community. Stranmillis University College is strongly committed to ensuring that the environment can be shared by as wide a range of people as possible, including through its International and Erasmus programmes and Continuing Professional Development and Lifelong Learning courses which have attracted the local community to participate in a varied and interesting programme. The University College recruits students and staff from all sections of the community and the Widening Participation policy is attracting students from varied social backgrounds who may not in the past have considered Stranmillis University College as a place to study. We recognise that our student body is representative of all sectors of the Northern Ireland community. Through Widening Participation support our Health and Leisure Degree programme offers a 2-day residential induction to enable students from across, social and religious backgrounds to break down pre-conceived views of others and to begin their degree with a positive attitude to those from a different background to themselves.

While Stranmillis University College educates teachers to draw the best from every pupil they teach, we also recognise that schools alone cannot raise educational aspiration and attainment; what is required is effective partnership with communities and the various groups that serve them. With a core business in teacher education Stranmillis University College is influential in relation to community engagement. Our daily business concerns working directly with schools, the Regional FE Colleges and communities. While this informs student modules/placements and our research activity, our outreach work directly impacts on the wider community. Stranmillis has established strategic partnerships with various community groups struggling with social deprivation and educational underachievement. This generally involves homework clubs, support for special needs, games/sporting and enterprise activities. As part of our WP activity we bring children onto our campus to engage in 'curriculum enrichment' mini-university days that both raise their aspirations and contribute to achieving better educational attainment. On these days student groups are from different religious backgrounds and while the focus is on university insight, the opportunity to mix with someone from a different community replicates what it is like to attend a mixed university having come from a segregated community. Such initiatives have a direct relevance to community relations. Racial and sectarian incidents are most common in inner city socially deprived areas and when communities have low self-esteem and little expectation of a future in productive employment, they can too easily look at newcomers to their area with suspicion and resentment. Education can help to address the central issues of expectation and self-worth and Stranmillis University College provides quality volunteers to support communities in identifying solutions to local issues. In the main this involves working with community groups to support the work that they are undertaking in building good relations within and across communities. Student volunteers provide a link between communities and the resources that are available within Stranmillis. Commitment to Widening Participation and Community Engagement within Stranmillis University College ensures that support for local communities is integral to its mission. Crucially this support is not simply vocal or passive but can be seen in action within communities. Numerous initiatives have incorporated bringing

sections of the community together, to raise aspirations in a shared neutral environment. The value of higher education involvement in supporting local communities cannot be underestimated in promoting a shared education culture.

## 2.4 DAISY

The DAISY (Diversity Awareness Intervention: Start Young) programme, funded by Lisburn-Castlereagh PEACE III, focused on diversity practice in early years settings. A team from Stranmillis University College was awarded the tender to deliver a project aimed at increasing awareness amongst children, parents and staff in the identified cluster areas (Lisburn and Castlereagh) of diversity and inclusion related issues, including other cultures, religions and traditions. The early years' practitioners were engaged in a series of interactive sessions that involved many practical activities. Initially the sessions were based around raising knowledge and confidence of the practitioners, but towards the end of the planned series of sessions the onus moved towards the practitioners working directly with parents and children in their own settings. A mentoring process with staff and students of the University College supported practitioners, enabling them to start where they felt comfortable, providing them with the skills and support they needed to implement change within their practice.

As a result of involvement in the project, early years practitioners believed it has heightened their awareness of prejudice, increased their confidence in dealing with challenges to diversity and inclusion and made it more likely that they would challenge bullying or prejudicial behaviour.

## 3. Terms of Reference

*3.1 Review the nature and definition of Shared Education and Integrated Education 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;*

We acknowledge the need for clear definitions and the attempts in recent publications to develop clarity of language and purpose in shared or sharing or integrated or integrating education. Our understanding of the realities of the current situation means we do not need to opt for one model at the expense of others but that we do need to work together on many models with a common purpose and aim of ensuring a shared future for our society. It is important that this happens at all educational phases from early years through to the end of formal education and beyond. We would welcome statutes for the facilitation of shared education, and the need for clearly defined and agreed definitions. We believe that agreement should be sought on principles governing shared education but that, as a developmental approach is required, these principles should allow for many existing models of practice to exist and indeed for schools to develop their own models of practice if appropriate.

It is also evident that if schools are to be at the forefront of new models of shared education then it is essential that teachers, pre-service and in-service, are equipped with the knowledge, skills and confidence to develop this work. Together Building a United Community, section 2.67 recognises the central role for teachers in stating "*It is therefore*



*important that educators have the necessary continuous training and development to ensure that they are best equipped to play their part in addressing these issues adequately.”*

The CRED policy also identifies insufficient training for teachers as one of the weaknesses in the current policy.

### *3.2 Identify the key barriers and enablers for Shared Education and Integrated Education;*

The barriers to this type of approach in education include our existing divided society which is not conducive geographically to sharing in any form. Socio-economic factors can impinge as can an unwillingness for schools to be out of step with perceived attitudes in their own communities. There is also a danger in assuming that education alone can deliver solutions to a much wider societal issue – educational initiatives need to be couched in a broader societal framework.

Enabling approaches include:

- Equipping teachers and other education professionals( pre-service and in-service) with the skills, knowledge and confidence to ensure that they can engage in this work effectively;
- ensuring that this work is developmental so that schools are encouraged to move on from their existing position and not to have a “one size fits all” approach;
- ensuring that this work is embedded across all areas of school life and curriculum;
- developing an appreciation that this work is more than contact for its own sake and that any shared activities need to be prepared and planned over an extended period of time so that the work has a clear purpose and identified outcome;
- ensuring that shared education programmes are not token or superficial, but that they provide genuine opportunities for interaction and exchange, including the exploration of issues of identity, diversity and the creative management of difference;
- ensuring effective monitoring and evaluation of programmes that focuses on ensuring long-term change and sustainability rather short term goals. It is easy to measure if an activity has happened and more challenging to find effective ways to measure what impact such activity has and yet it is crucial to encourage schools and other agencies to ensure they are evaluating this long-term impact.

### *3.3 Identify and analyse alternative approaches and models of good practice in other jurisdictions in terms of policy interventions and programmes;*

The challenges of separation and division are not unique to Northern Ireland, and it is possible to learn generally from an awareness of international experience. Models similar to integrated education and shared education can be found in situations such as Israel/Palestine and the Balkans, although the additional complication for these regions is linguistic, which tends to limit the opportunities for shared education experiments. In all such cases known to us, however, the focus is on shared facilities, a shared curriculum and a supportive, open ethos of inclusion. Training and policy support is crucial for such work. Some international bodies, notably the Council of Europe and UNESCO, have developed support mechanisms in the form of publications and conferences and have encouraged positive policy development on the part of governments. If we are to learn anything from this it is surely that integration/sharing in education does not just happen automatically when

pupils and students find themselves in the same place together. It requires careful preparation, training, planning, policy development, curriculum development and conscious regular oversight of such initiatives in order for them to be effective.

*3.4 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;*

#### *3.4.1 Investment*

While we are aware of the budget constraints across all of Northern Ireland government at present, it is very clear that any serious commitment to understanding and promoting shared education of any sort requires substantial and sustained funding. Small scale projects and short term projects are incredibly valuable to support shared education but only as out-workings of a broader strategic investment. On their own they cannot bring the province-wide and education-wide development that is required. Investing in teacher development is critical as teachers are working in classrooms delivering, shaping views and modelling practice every day. Excellent models already exist of effective teacher development such as the CREDIT project which was evaluated very highly by ETI and such models should be developed and built upon. The CREDIT project demonstrated high impact on schools and on long term development of work in this area and should be developed as a model for future teacher development.

#### *3.4.2 Sharing of Good Practice*

Too often in the past, initiatives have come and gone without having real sustained impact on the system. We need to be prepared to invest for the long term so that good practice is shared and becomes embedded in education.

#### *3.4.3 Cohesion across the Education Continuum*

Initiatives that can make a real difference need to be across all phases and sectors of education, from beginning and pre-service teachers to leadership teams and governance of schools, from early years to post-compulsory and across all of Northern Ireland. Local small scale programmes then become supporting elements of a broader strategic vision rather than isolated pockets of excellence that can flourish briefly and then fade if key personnel move on. In relation to this, a small number of highly effective educational support NGOs have worked for many years (from long before government took these issues seriously) to assist schools and teacher educators in the development of this work. They have often provided the continuity that schools have not been able to sustain internally when committed members of staff move on. Yet their own work is also threatened by a tendency to dismiss their contribution and short-term thinking on the part of government officials. It would have been impossible for Stranmillis to develop its own work in these areas (DMU, CREDIT, etc.) without the support of such experienced and well trained professionals and it is highly disappointing to see their work side-lined and threatened by constant funding crises. The contribution of such organisations has been invaluable and needs to be recognised and properly engaged. Work on shared education cannot be in addition to other educational initiatives but should be an integral part – for example, area learning partnerships already provide an opportunity for shared work so should be built upon rather than duplicated;

existing work with parents, governors and other educational agencies needs to reflect the shared education agenda.

**Dr Anne Heaslett**  
**Principal**  
**23 October 2014**