

Ulster Teachers' Union

Position on Advancing Shared Education

UTU is a professional teaching union representing over 6000 teachers and principals in the nursery, primary, post-primary and special education sectors.

UTU believes that every child, regardless of cultural background, ethnicity, race or religion, should be given equal opportunity to access education and to reach their full potential.

UTU welcomed the announcement by the Minister of Education, John O'Dowd, in July 2012 regarding the establishment of a Ministerial Advisory Group on Advancing Shared Education to explore and bring forward recommendations as to how to advance shared education in Northern Ireland. The Group was independent of the Department of Education¹. The Advisory Group was based at Queen's University of Belfast's School of Education. It was chaired by Professor Paul Connolly (QUB) and the other members were: Dawn Purvis and PJ O'Grady.

The Advisory Group published their findings² on 22nd April 2013.

The Ministerial group's report was to inform the development of a strategy to achieve two commitments –namely:-

That all children have the opportunity to participate in shared education programmes.

That there is a substantial increase in the number of schools sharing facilities by 2015.

The Ministerial Group's Vision of Shared Education :

“Where schools collaborate across sectors to ensure that all children and young people have opportunities to learn together... Shared education can be the core mechanism for improving schools, increasing educational outcomes for all children and young people and preparing them to play a full and active role in building and sustaining an open, inclusive and confident society.”

Shared education involves two or more schools or other educational establishments 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”

¹ http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/schools-and-infrastructure-2/shared_education/shared-education-ministerial-advisory-group.htm

²

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

“Teachers across the schools and/or educational institutions working together, whether it be in relation to training and professional development activities or curriculum planning and the delivery of lessons; and

Children and young people from across those schools and/or educational institutions actively learning together through face-to-face interaction, whether that is working together on specific projects or through participation in the same classes and/or the same sporting and extra-curricular activities.”

The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, Patricia Lewsley, launched her report 'Shared Education - The views of children and young people' on the 24th April 2013³ and it will be important to listen to the views expressed in this report.

The Ulster Teachers' Union shares the vision of shared education as set out in the Ministerial Advisory Group on Advancing Shared Education Report. Many schools already collaborate across all sectors ensuring that all children and young people have opportunities to learn together we would agree that with continued support financially in this area we can continue to allow examples of good practice to be shown and modelled upon by other schools.

The current CRED funding isn't presently enough for every school to take part. The CREDIT courses run by QUB are currently oversubscribed and schools have no access to any other form of training and programmes.

Schools, Education, Teachers and Pupils play an important part in building and sustaining an open, inclusive and confident society as set out in the report and the UTU agree that Shared Education can be a core mechanism in moving this forward.

Pupils, regardless of gender, religion, class or locality should have access to the equal opportunities of Education in Northern Ireland.

The Ministerial Group have proposed twenty recommendations and the Ulster Teachers' Union have commented on each of them.

MAINSTREAMING SHARED EDUCATION.

1. The Education Bill should be amended to place a statutory duty on the Department of Education to encourage and facilitate shared education as defined in this report. This should include reviewing all existing and proposed policies within education, and providing advice as required, to ensure that all activities seek to encourage and facilitate shared education where appropriate.

The UTU fully endorses that the Education Bill should be amended to place a statutory duty on Department of Education to encourage and facilitate shared education as defined in the report.

³ <http://www.niccy.org/Publications/policyandresearchreportsandpapers/policyandresearchreportsbydate/shared-education-views-of-children-and-young-people>

DE should establish a central unit, or identify an existing unit, that should take lead responsibility for encouraging and facilitating shared education. This unit should:

Develop and drive forward a strategy for advancing shared education that includes setting targets and goals, monitoring shared education activities and producing an annual report on progress being made;

Establish and maintain a regional structure for supporting schools and other educational institutions engaged in shared education; and

Commission research and evaluations into shared education and facilitate the sharing and dissemination of good practice.

The UTU supports the idea that a central unit should take lead responsibility for encouraging and facilitating shared education. It should be fully funded and easily accessible to all. Staff should be provided with adequate time and resourcing to carry out their role effectively.

3. As part of the proposed revised common funding formula suggested by Sir Robert Salisbury in his independent review for the Department of Education, a ‘shared education premium’ should be incorporated into the funding formula for schools and other educational institutions. This premium would recognize the added value of shared education and should be weighted in terms of:

- The number of children and young people that are engaged in shared education activities, as defined in this report; and
- The proportion of school time that children and young people are engaged in such activities.

The UTU fully supports the proposal suggested by Sir Robert Salisbury in the independent review that a “shared education premium” should be incorporated into the funding formula to recognise the added value of shared education and should be weighted in terms of the number of children engaging in shared educational activities and the proportion of time that children and young people are engaged in such activities.

Supporting Schools In Shared Education.

4. Where schools and other educational institutions are in receipt of a shared education premium, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) should include an explicit review of the use of that funding in its inspection reports particularly in relation to:

- The added value of such shared education activities;
- The value for money of the funding provided; and
- The quality and effectiveness of the shared education activities.

The UTU fully agrees that where a shared education premium is received, then the ETI should include a review of how that funding is used in its inspection reports, especially in relation to :

- **The added value of such shared education activities:**
- **The value for money of the funding provided:**
- **The quality and effectiveness of such activities.**

- **The impact of shared education with regard to community cohesion.**

5. The ETI should produce a biennial report that reviews the current range and extent of shared education activities across Northern Ireland, highlights good practice and makes recommendations regarding how these could be extended and enhanced, within the overall context of school improvement.

The UTU would welcome a complete evaluation on a biennial basis to inform, extend and enhance future provision disseminating best practice across all sectors.

6. The Department of Education, in its review of teacher education and continuing professional development, should develop a framework for supporting the early and continuing professional development of teachers that encourages its delivery through shared education and thus via effective collaboration between schools and other educational institutions. It is recommended that such a framework should encourage collaborative networks of schools and other educational institutions identifying their own professional development needs and being devolved appropriate levels of funding through the common funding formula to commission the training, courses and/or other support that they require from the most appropriate providers.

The UTU recognises that it is of utmost importance that a framework should be developed for supporting the early and continuing professional development of teachers that encourages its delivery through shared education. It is *vital* that this is fully funded and ring-fenced for Shared Education purposes.

7. ESA should ensure that all teachers and principals in schools and other educational establishments have access to a range of training courses and resource materials, and ongoing advice and support, to help them develop the particular knowledge and skills associated with effectively organising and managing shared education activities and classes. This should include a focus on:

- Ensuring the meaningful participation of children and young people in the planning and delivery of shared education initiatives (see also Recommendation 11);
- Promoting positive relationships and dealing constructively with any negative incidents and poor interactions between children and young people that may arise;
- Covering sensitive topics and issues which might arise in the context of a diverse group of children and young people; and
- Developing and maintaining meaningful and effective relationships with parents and other care-givers.

The Ulster Teachers' Union fully endorses this recommendation and recognises the importance of each of the above points. However, on a cautionary note, it must be recognised that other agencies should support sensitive issues that arise. Voluntary and Community agencies who specialise in Conflict Resolution are best placed to lead workshops on sensitive issues (core issues that have been avoided in the past) both during teacher development training and pupil participation in programmes.

8. The Department of Education and the Department of Employment and Learning, in conjunction with the higher education institutions responsible for delivering teacher training and professional development courses, should review existing provision to consider appropriate mechanisms for collaboration to ensure that student teachers and teachers returning for professional development can be provided with opportunities to learn together, including in relation to preparation for teaching through shared education.

- **The UTU supports this recommendation as being an essential ingredient if shared education is to be successfully implemented.**
- **Best practice is emerging from CREDIT training programmes QUB.**
- **Teachers currently train together at ELB level**
- **Teacher Training Colleges need a Shared Programme**

Schools and Other Educational Institutions

9. Schools and other educational establishments should develop more meaningful relationships with parents and caregivers to ensure that their rights to be involved in the education of their children are fully respected and supported. To achieve this, it is recommended that:

- DE establish an appropriate network that supports schools and other educational institutions in developing relationships with parents and care-givers and in creating and sharing best practice regionally; and
- Schools and other educational establishments include a specific section in their Development Plans, that includes clear plans and goals, for how they intend to engage parents and caregivers and ensure their active and sustained support in the education of their children.

The Ulster Teachers' Union is in full support of both parts of recommendation number 9. Recognition of the important role played by carers and supporters is essential and it is vital that parents and carers "buy-in" to the advancement of shared education if it is to be implemented successfully. This also promotes the DE strategic plan for Parental involvement in the work of schools.

It is important to recognise Voluntary/Community groups who already exist and deliver conflict resolution/shared programmes and build upon the good practice already there.

10 An independent review should be undertaken of current practice in relation to the delivery of:

- Personal, Social and Emotional Development (Pre-School Education);
- Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (Foundation Stage and Key Stages 1 and 2);
- Local and Global Citizenship (Key Stages 3 and 4); and
- The Curriculum Framework for Youth Work (Youth Service).

The Ulster Teachers' Union fully support this recommendation and call upon the independent review of current practice to be carried out as soon as possible but allowing for enough time for respondents to give a

full and measured response. It is also essential that all key stakeholders have an input to this review. It may be necessary for information to be collected in a variety of ways due to the scope of the review.

This must include a collation of existing voluntary and community organisations that have programmes delivered in an educational setting. Many of these organisations already address the above curricular areas and all schools should be able to access their resources and services.

11. In fulfilment of its duties under Article 12 of the UNCRC, the Department of Education should make it a requirement that all schools establish School Councils. Within this, School Councils need to:

- Be fully representative of the school body and of all year groups;
- Provide a mechanism for consulting children and young people on all school matters that affect them, including plans for shared education activities;
- Support children and young people in forming and expressing their views; and
- Include appropriate mechanisms for the views of children and young people to then be considered and given due weight by the school.

The Ulster Teachers' Union support the call for all schools to establish School Councils as a mechanism for children's views to be considered. Furthermore, it is important that these bodies be given due weight by schools.

12. The necessary legislation should be brought forward for schools and other educational institutions to be designated as 'public authorities' under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and thus to be required to comply with the statutory duties to promote equality of opportunity and good relations. In doing this, consideration should be given to whether it is possible to reduce the demands that will be placed on schools and other educational institutions in terms of meeting their specific responsibilities under Section 75 whilst maintaining their core duties to promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

The Ulster Teachers' Union supports recommendation no.12 that Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 be legislated for in a manner in which schools and educational institutions can promote equality of opportunity and good relations without placing upon them added bureaucracy.

13. The Education and Skills Authority, in conjunction with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, should establish a unit to provide training, produce support materials and to advise schools and educational institutions in relation to preparing, implementing and monitoring the equality schemes they would be required to produce under Section 75. It is expected that one aspect of meeting the duty to promote good relations will include engagement in shared education initiatives.

The Ulster Teachers' Union supports the establishment of a fully funded and easily accessible unit where staff can offer support and networking opportunities to schools wishing to avail of shared educational initiatives. We would also point out that there are also good examples

and personnel who already use shared education in practical and substantive ways. These examples should be used and disseminated in practical and meaningful ways

14. The Department of Education should undertake a review of how shared education, and the 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 review should focus on the development of effective models for collaboration that can:

- Ensure, wherever possible, that children and young people are taught in mainstream schools; and
- For the small minority of children and young people where mainstream schooling is not suitable, that they have meaningful opportunities to learn with children and young people in mainstream school environments.

The Ulster Teachers' Union agree that all schools and educational centres should have equal access to shared education programmes outside of their own sector. The UTU would welcome further collaboration between mainstream and special schools and educational support centres.

Area-Based Planning and the Schools Estate

15. The Department of Education, Education and Library Boards and the CCMS should play an active role in promoting shared education through the area-based planning processes for

- post - primary and primary schools. This should include: Being proactive in identifying opportunities for shared education that may not have been considered and setting out options for schools and colleges to consider; and
- Supporting and advising schools that wish to develop shared education arrangements, including providing advice on how two or more schools can transfer their status into a 'shared school' whereby they maintain their respective forms of ethos.

The Ulster Teachers' Union firmly believe that Shared Education must be promoted in an active and feasible manner. Schools, School Leaders, Boards of Governors, Teachers, Parents and Pupils must be supported, advised and provided with realistic, feasible and long-term workable arrangements that allow shared education to be developed and sustained with the Educational needs of all students at the heart of the arrangements.

16. Where there is sufficient, viable and consistent parental demand, the Department of Education should actively support the establishment of schools and other educational institutions with a particular religious, philosophical or cultural ethos.

The Ulster Teachers' Union feel that the Department must produce clear and consistent guidelines on what sufficient, viable and consistent parental demand would entail.

17. In relation to all existing schools, the Department of Education should:

- Establish a transformation process for schools where there is clear parental demand wishing to adopt a particular ethos – whether, for example, this be faith-based, integrated, secular or Irish Medium – and to ensure that it is user friendly and not bureaucratic and that parents are made aware of their powers under the processes established;
- Identify how, in the light of parental demand, the process can be made easier whereby a school can incorporate the badge of a particular school type or sector in its title; and
- While recognizing the responsibility of the Department to ensure the viability of schools in each local area, where there is clear evidence of over-subscription, it should allow existing schools to expand, in a phased and careful manner, in order to meet the demand that exists among parents.

While the UTU supports recommendation 17 we would express some concerns that only the Department of Education will be having an input into viability of schools. It is important that all key stakeholders are allowed time to respond to any transformational process that has been suggested for schools.

NICIE currently offer the ‘Positive Partnerships for Integration’ model which includes all stakeholders in a carefully planned and supported transformation.

Academic Selection

18. The Northern Ireland Executive should, without delay, introduce the necessary legislation to prevent schools from selecting children on the basis of academic ability and require schools to develop admissions criteria that are truly inclusive and egalitarian in nature.

The Ulster Teachers’ Union fully support this recommendation and again call for an end to academic selection and any practice of un-regulated testing. The labelling of children at 11 as failures is wrong.

19. The Department of Education, through the area-based planning process should consider how best to plan for sustainable post-primary schools with all-ability intakes. In doing this, the Department should have regard for parental demand in each local area for schools with a different religious, philosophical or cultural ethos and make every effort to ensure diversity of provision to meet this demand where it is feasible.

The Ulster Teachers’ Union feel that the Department must produce clear and consistent guidelines on how sustainable post-primary schools will be provided and catered for. As there are many issues to consider stakeholders must be able to express opinions on meeting the needs of the local community. If shared education is to be successful the stakeholders must be able to agree long term solutions which are in the best interests for the pupils, parents and community.

20. The Department of Education should initiate a fundamental review of the use of selection *within* schools with all-ability intakes to explore the benefits and limitations of different models of banding and streaming. The review should be tasked with making recommendations regarding how best to take forward selection within schools so that all children and young people reach their full potential.

The Ulster Teachers' Union agree that models or banding and streaming should be explored by the Department of Education reviewing the many different models which are currently used by schools. However we believe that Principals, School Leaders and Boards of Governors should be able to form their own opinions and have in place a system of class placements which will benefit the students and ethos of every particular school.