

RCN response to the Education Committee call for evidence on the Shared Education Bill

Rural Community Network welcomes the opportunity to comment on the content of the Shared Education Bill. We welcome the introduction of the Bill as a signal of intent of a long term commitment to Shared Education in Northern Ireland.

RCN is concerned that the definition of shared education in the Bill is less definitive than many other definitions put forward by various organisations and the Department itself over the past number of years. We also believe that the definition should include reference to integrated education as the type of educational ethos which involves the deepest level of shared education. The report of the Ministerial Advisory Group on Shared Education which reported in 2013 defined of Shared Education was:

“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 all 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.”

In our view this is a more complete definition and should replace the definition currently set out at Clause 1 (2).

The power to encourage and facilitate shared education should state that:

“The bodies listed in subsection 2 should encourage and facilitate shared education in consultation with young people and their parents.”

We believe that the Bill should make explicit the link between shared education and the potential of the area planning process to plan education on an area basis and encourage shared solutions to develop where community support exists.

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