

Submission from NUS-USI to Inquiry into Building a United Community

(National Union of Students - Union of
Students in Ireland)

31 July 2014

Summary

NUS-USI welcomes the creation of this Inquiry as it is absolutely vital that a shared future can be created in Northern Ireland.

We see integrated education and having integrated services as essential to tackling all forms of societal division and being crucial in the delivery of a shared future.

NUS-USI does not wish to be considered to give oral evidence to the Inquiry and our written submission covers our thoughts on this subject.

NUS-USI objectives on a shared future:

- Children are educated together in integrated education
- Government ensures that all public space is shared space
- Government addresses segregated services and works to ensure all public services are delivered on an integrated basis
- Government must pro-actively work with communities and build good relations to enable the removal of all interface barriers as soon as possible
- The community and voluntary sectors could play a key role in delivering a shared future and government should re-instate the civic forum
- A sustainable deal on unresolved issues on a shared future like flags, parades and addressing the past must be delivered by the political parties as soon as possible

1. Shared space

1.1 NUS-USI believes that all public space should be shared space. This is essential to ensure that a united community can be created and to demonstrate that everyone is welcome everywhere around Northern Ireland.

1.2 It is essential that government creates a strategy and publicly demonstrates that all space should be shared space to ensure that a clear message is sent out that Northern Ireland is building a genuinely shared future.

1.3 Government should research and utilise international best practice on tackling societal division to ensure that a shared future can be delivered in the most effective way possible.

2. Integrated services

2.1 It is absolutely essential that government ensures that all public services are integrated so that any forms of division in relation to public services are addressed.

2.2 The cost of division in Northern Ireland is extremely significant and it is very important that government addresses this as quickly and effectively as possible.

2.3 Ensuring that services are integrated could help foster a sense of a united community and could help build good relations.

3. Benefits of a shared future

3.1 The benefits of a shared future could be extremely significant and could help boost our economy. Creating a shared future could help attract investment to Northern Ireland and potentially help create jobs.

3.2 To give Northern Ireland the best prospects for creating employment it is vital that it can be demonstrated that government is addressing societal division.

3.3 It is crucial that the strongest possible signal is sent out that Northern Ireland is open for business.

3.4 It is also essential that government pro-actively tackles all forms of discrimination to ensure that a clear message is sent out on this matter.

3.5 The societal benefits of a shared future could be extremely significant. To have a society where people live and work together could be key for Northern Ireland moving into the future. A key cornerstone of removing this division is ensuring that people are educated together.

4. Interface barriers

4.1 Government should put plans in place to create good relations to help facilitate the removal of interface barriers where they exist.

4.2 We need to see all interface barriers removed as soon as possible and it is extremely important that plans are created by government to deliver community support for the removal of these barriers.

4.3 Opening up the community and removing barriers could make access to services and employment opportunities even easier for people, and this could help create a more cohesive and shared society. Meaningful community building could be another significant benefit from them removal of interface barriers.

4.4 Government needs to be pro-active in doing the ground work around removing interface barriers as it is important that people can see the positive benefits that change could have.

4.5 It is also extremely important that funding for good relations work is focused to all of society and not just two sides of the community, because it is crucial that funding helps deliver racial equality, gender equality and equality for people who are LGBT and people who are disabled.

4.6 It is important that the community is in support of the removal of interface barriers before they are removed, and that is why government needs to invest and have clear and pro-active strategies to ensure community support for removing barriers.

4.7 Government must ensure that ambitious timetables and targets are set for the removal of all interface barriers and that the strategy is pro-active as well as being responsive to people's needs.

5. A shared future for all

5.1 Creating a shared future has to be about tackling racism, homophobia, sexism and sectarianism as well as other forms of prejudice. It must not simply be about tackling sectarianism.

5.2 A holistic approach to good relations must be taken and this must involve addressing all forms of inequality against everyone across society.

5.3 In terms of building a shared future, cross-border and international co-operation could deliver a significant and extremely positive impact for Northern Ireland. NUS-USI believes that Northern Ireland building further cross-border and international links and co-operation could be very beneficial for students and could increase student mobility and work placement options. This co-operation could also boost the economy through the potential for further business links which may deliver export opportunities, investment and create new jobs.

6. Integrated education

6.1 NUS-USI believes that in relation to education, the Together: Building a United Community strategy should focus on ensuring that children are educated together through integrated education.

6.2 Integrating education should be seen as the objective across our school system. The message that not delivering an integrated system might send out could be very damaging to Northern Ireland's future.

6.3 There could be significant negative ramifications for Northern Ireland's global profile if government continues to resource division through funding non-integrated public services or non-integrated education, and does not make plans and set targets for delivering integrated services and integrated education as the way forward in the future.

7. Civic society and a shared future

7.1 Civic society has a significant role to play delivering a shared future and government should listen to their views and utilise elements of best practice from their work. NUS-USI believes that re-instating the civic forum could have significant benefits as regards the community and voluntary sectors and their potential inputs, and this could help in work towards delivering a shared future.

7.2 NUS-USI has a proud history of working towards delivering a shared future and also cross-border and UK-wide co-operation.

7.3 NUS-USI works in partnership with the Union of Students in Ireland, which is based in in the Republic of Ireland, and with the National Union of Students across the rest of the UK and this partnership and collaboration can illustrate the benefits of UK-wide and cross-border co-operation.

8. Unresolved matters relating to a shared future

8.1 The political parties must deliver agreement on any outstanding issues in relation to a shared future as quickly as possible.

8.2 Party talks must re-commence as soon as possible and it could be extremely useful if the British and Irish governments as well as the international community play a role within the talks in relation to convening and chairing them.

8.3 Northern Ireland needs urgent agreement on parades, flags and addressing the past. Each of these issues, being unresolved, can pose very significant problems on a regular basis and can place the stability of the political institutions in jeopardy. It is incumbent on the parties in government to deliver consensus and sustainable solutions on these matters as swiftly as possible.

8.4 In addressing the legacy of the past it is extremely important that the needs of victims and survivors are met and that the process helps build and secure a shared future.