Northern Ireland Assembly

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST

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Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS)

...is a forum that encourages debate on a wide range of research findings, with the overall aim of promoting evidence-based policy and law-making within Northern Ireland

Blended contact for shared education

Professor Roger Austin, Ulster University

Professor Rhiannon Turner, QUB

Shared education

- **Official policy since 2016**

Seeks

(a)to deliver educational benefits to children and young persons;

(b)to promote the efficient and effective use of resources;

(c)to promote equality of opportunity;

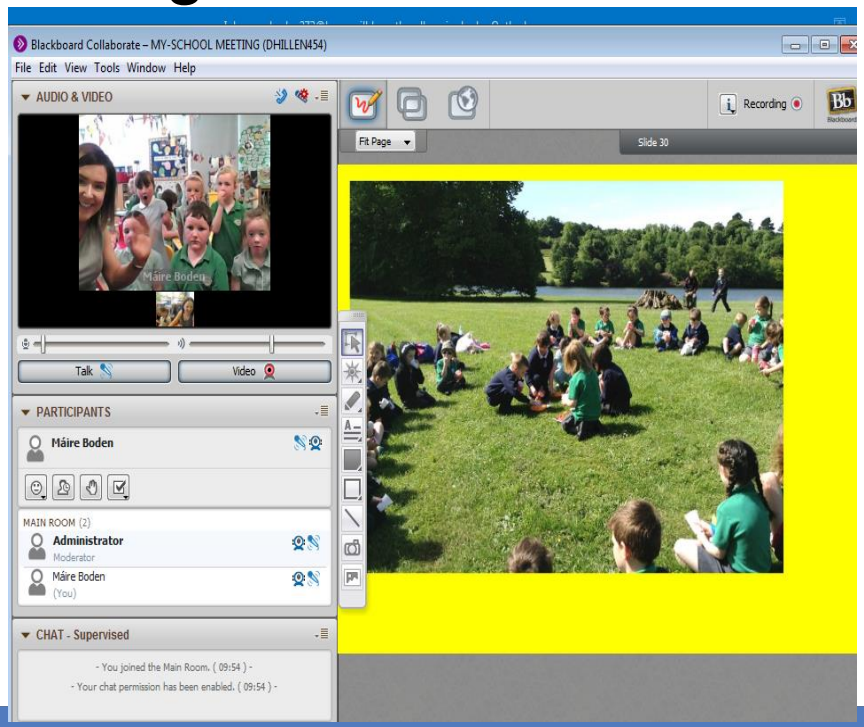
(d)to promote good relations; and

(e)to promote respect for identity, diversity and community cohesion.

- **As of June 2018, almost 50% of schools in NI involved through phase 1, the Shared Education Signature Project (SESP) or phase 2, 'Collaboration and Shared Education (CASE). CASE schools can spend 20% of their shared education time online**
- **The challenge; how to sustain these partnerships and involve the remaining 50% of schools in a cost-effective way?**

What is Blended contact?

Using online interaction



And face to face work

A practical example of blended contact at Key Stage 3

2 local High schools

*No previous history of using online work

•Attended training on how to use blended contact

•Set up 5 week project

•Used video-conferencing, the VLE (Fronter) and face to face

Teachers of English and Technology and Design

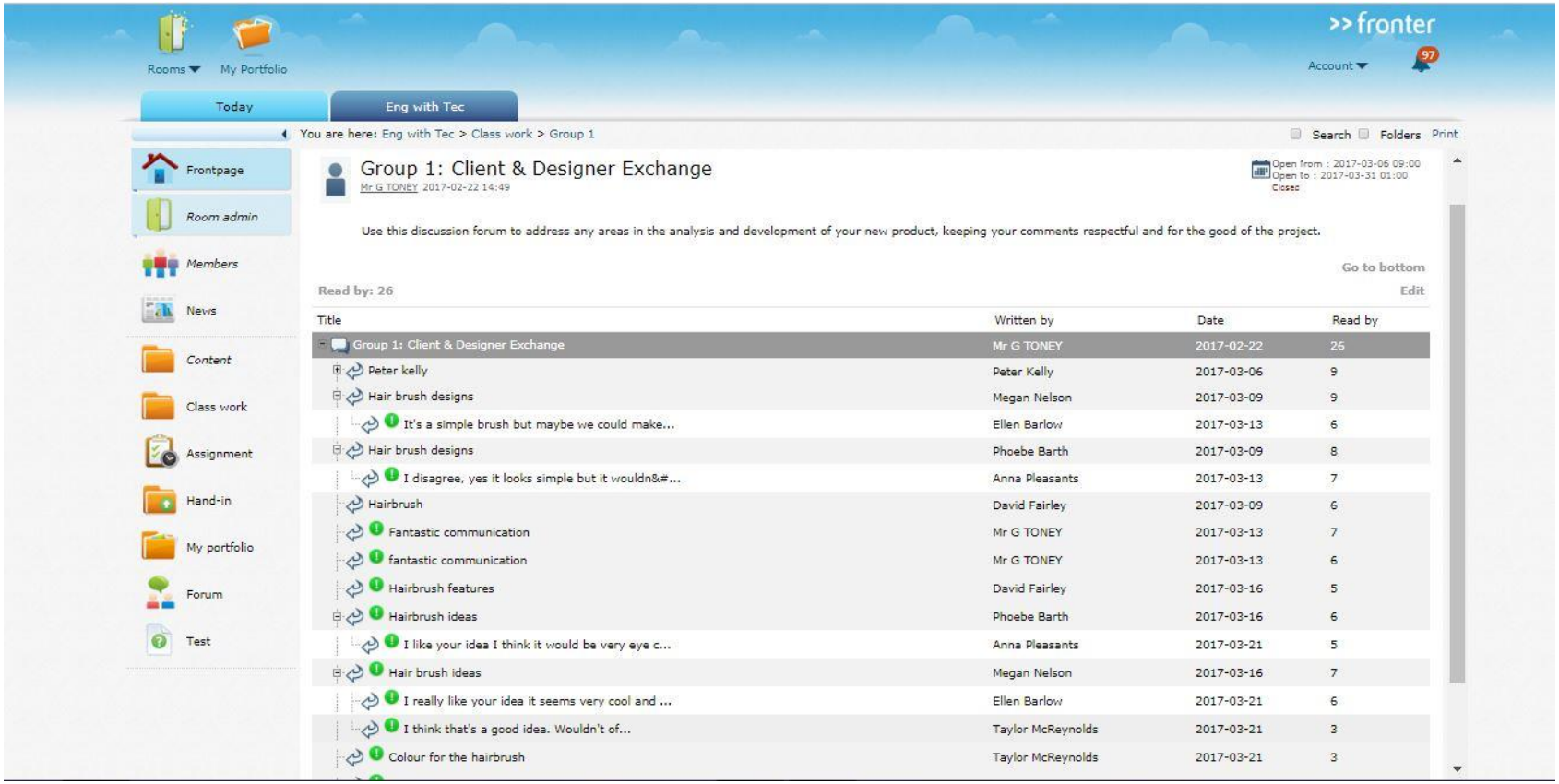
Pupils in English class acted as ‘clients’ wanting new design of hairbrush.

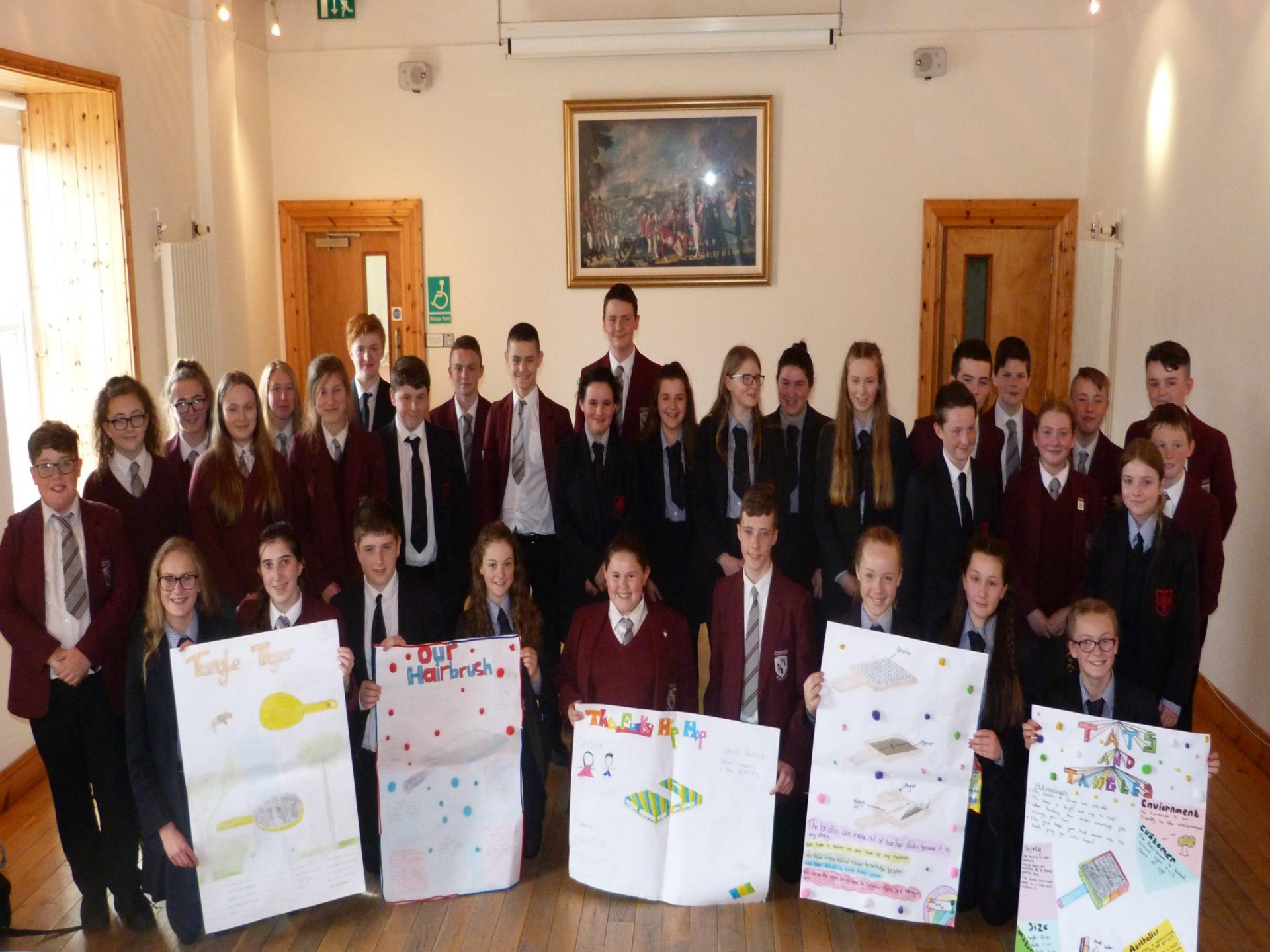
Pupils in T and D class acted as ‘customers’

Extended discussion in groups on product design

Ideas pitched at Dragon’s Den event

Frequency of contact through online work




Our Hairbrush
TATS AND TANGLES

Advantages of blended contact

Pupils

Pupils motivated by online work with distant audience

Are able to interact more often with partner schools

Develop a useful range of ICT skills

Teachers

ICT fits more easily into busy day

Have to assess pupils' work in ICT anyway (including use of ICT for 'exchange')

Have the hardware and software in school

Costs nothing

What evidence for impact of blended contact?

Consistent findings from data in Northern Ireland, on the island of Ireland, in Israel and Australia show strong impact on pupils and teachers

* Austin et al (2014) showed in the cross border Dissolving Boundaries programme that even a year after the end of the school link, pupils were more positive about cross-border links than matched children who had not been involved. Evidence for impact on children confirmed by NFER (2011) and ETI (2011)

* White & Abu-Rayya, (2012) showed similar long term effects between Christian and Muslim pupils

- Austin, Hunter and Holywood (2015) showed how this approach worked in 2 Grammar schools in NI
- Turner and Cameron (2016) show how ICT can increase frequency of contact

But could these findings be replicated in shared education?

Current data from CLOSER

Teachers can take a 3 day professional learning module called Collaborative Learning Online for Shared Education and Reconciliation (CLOSER)

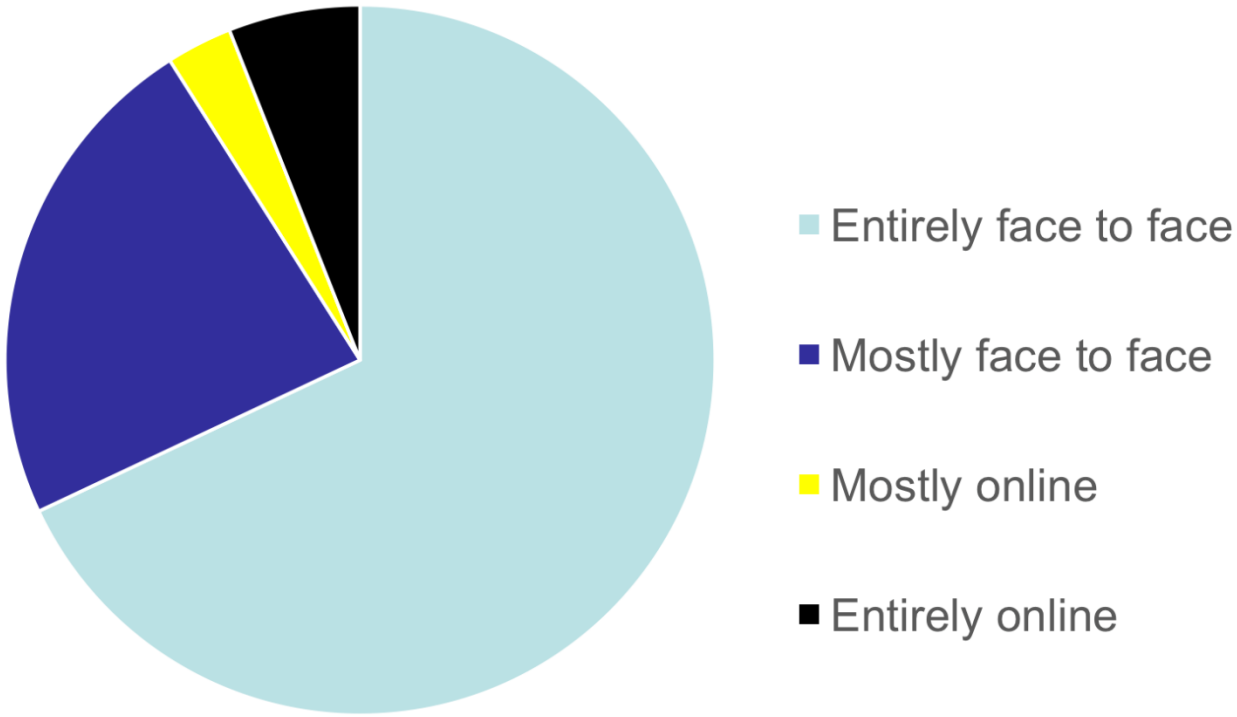
Course delivery

Taught 9 times since Feb 2017 by C2K and Ulster; based on 2 days training in use of Collaborate and Fronter, followed by 6 week implementation and final review day.

Background data on teachers

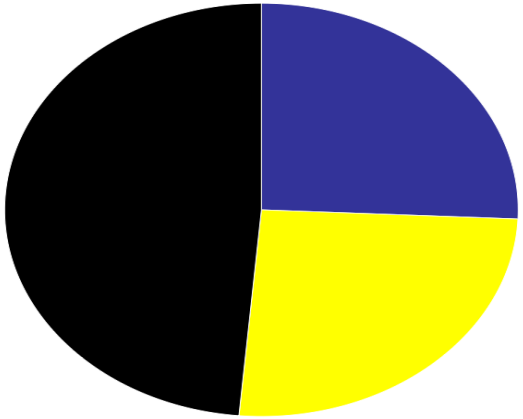
- 35 teachers: 28 females, 7 males; 21 Catholic and 14 Protestant
- 28 taught at primary schools, 6 from post-primary schools (age of children ranged from 4-13 years, with an average age of 9 years)
- Shared Education Partnerships ranged from 1 year to 25 years (with an average of 3 years)
- 9 school partnerships within walking distance, 24 involved public transport
- 95% involved in schools involved in Shared Education Signature Project

Use of ICT in Shared Education prior to CLOSER

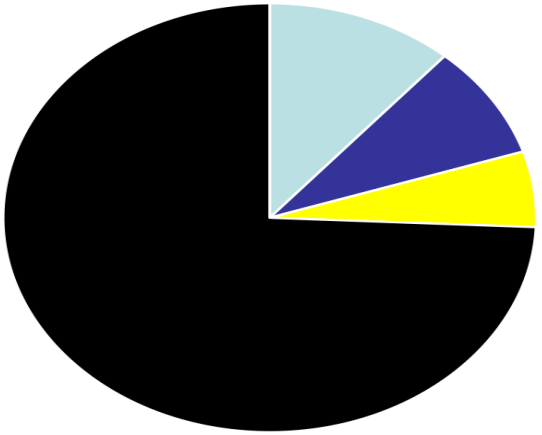


Proficiency in Fronter and Collaborate prior to CLOSER

Fronter

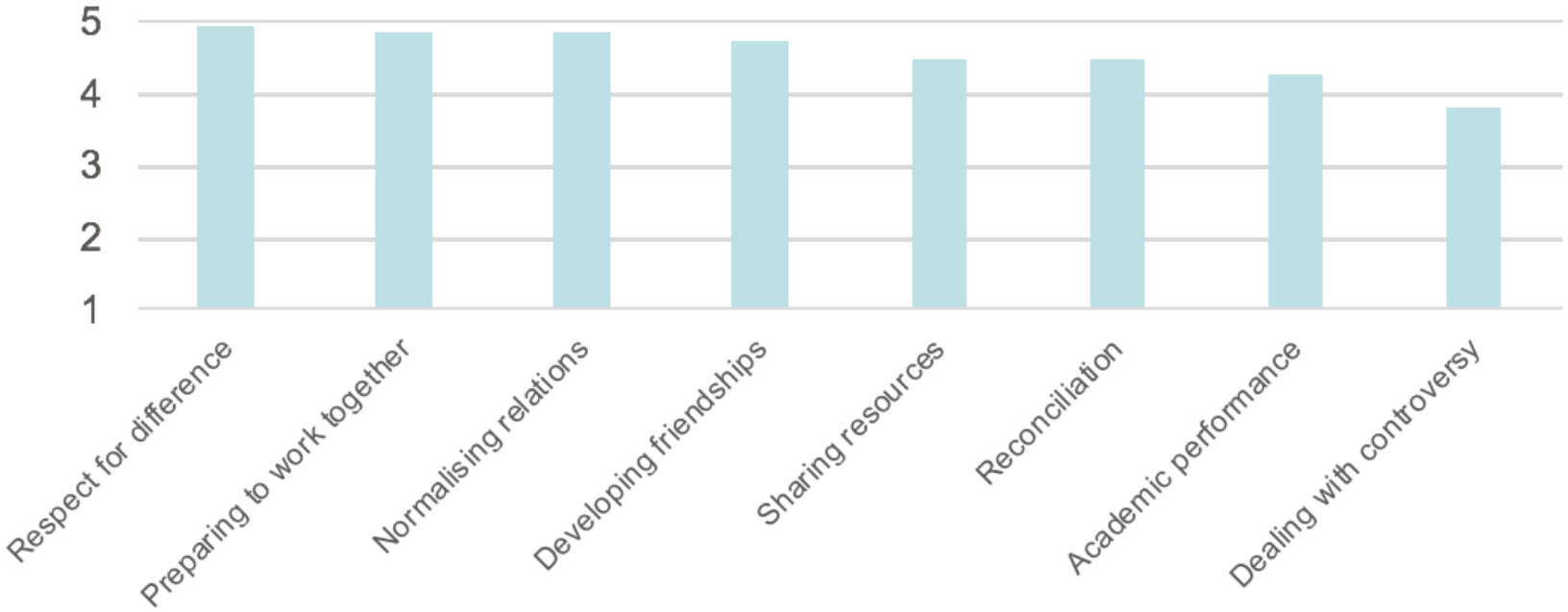


Collaborate



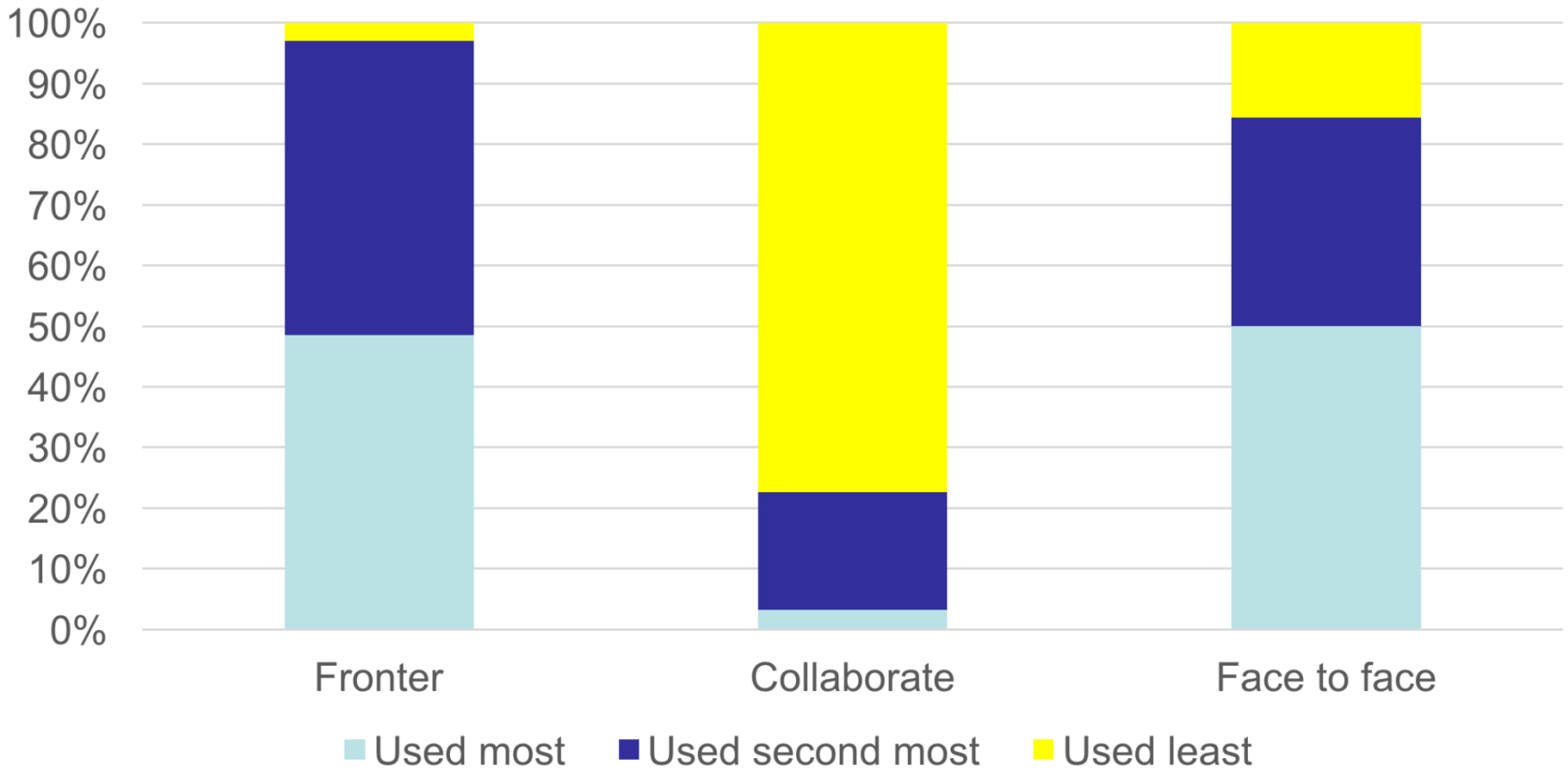
Goals of shared education

"How important are each of the following reasons for engaging in shared education?" (1 = not at all, 5 = very important)

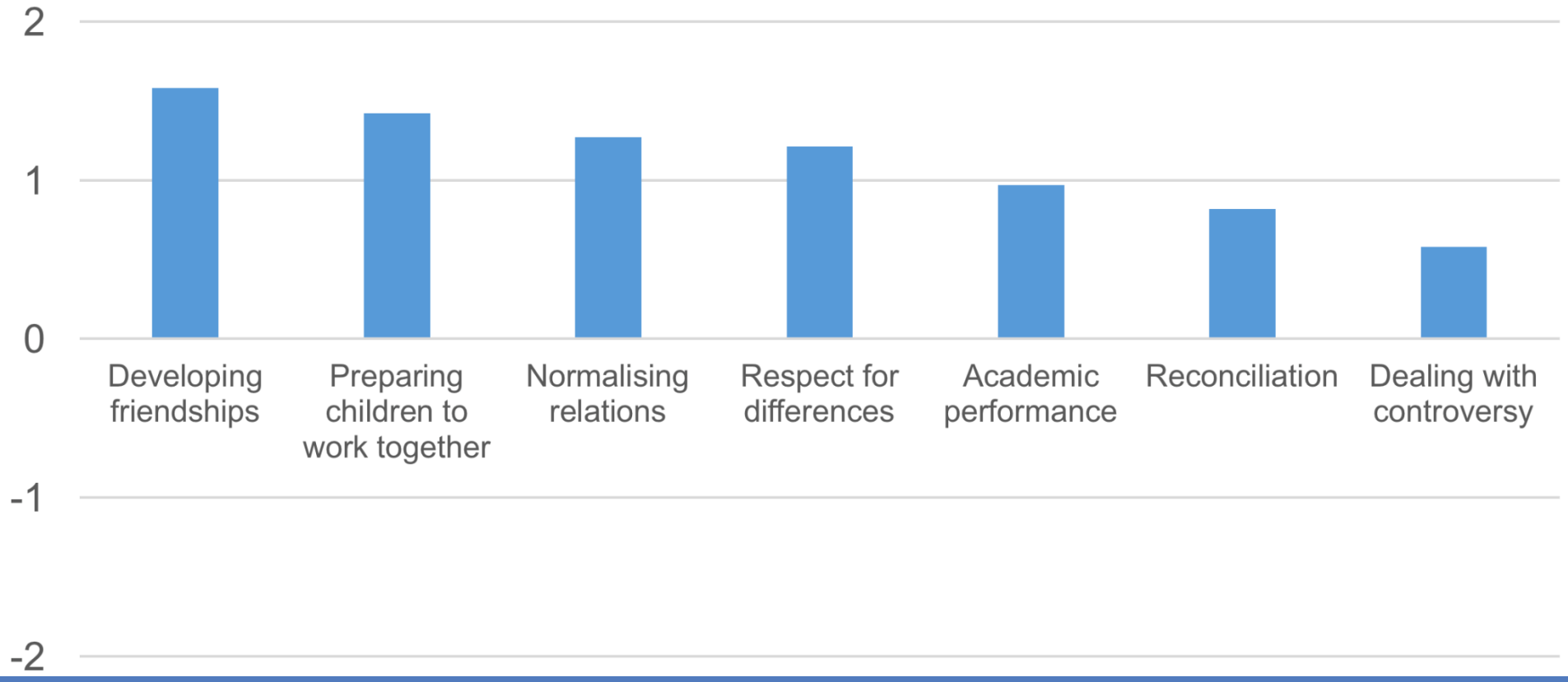


The perceived importance of these goals did not differ significantly between teachers from a Catholic and Protestant background

Use of methods during project



Observed impact of blended contact on goals of shared education among pupils



Observed impact of blended contact on goals of shared education among pupils

Developing friendships:

> “Friendships have been developed from the very beginning of the process. .. the children were grouped in all the initial face to face meetings, with the groups being different on each occasion. This enabled them to develop friendships with a wider range of pupils from other schools. This was reinforced through using Fronter, where the children found out more about each other and were able to leave comments and interact with other. This in turn was further reinforced through the 'real time' Collaborate session.”

Observed impact of blended contact on goals of shared education among pupils

Preparing children to work together

"group tasks have also encouraged working with others, which has supported children's skills in working with others and communication; these are vital in getting ready to work with others in the future"

Normalising cross-community relations

"Pupils are no longer out-of-sight out-of-mind. Use of Fronter has let us develop and extend lessons within own schools but pupils are still learning, sharing and responding to each other's work"

Observed impact of blended contact on goals of shared education among pupils

Respect for differences

"the children were able to ask questions about each other's hobbies such as Gaelic and football or Irish dancing or Scottish dancing'.

"pupils applied online safety protocols which naturally led to respect for difference. Pupils showed respect even in terms of the names they weren't familiar with. Comments made on Fronter demonstrated respect"

Observed impact of blended contact on goals of shared education among pupils

Academic performance

"children are more engaged with completing tasks online. They have improved ICT skills, they are more aware of their spelling and grammar, they self-edit and they have a wider audience for peer assessment"

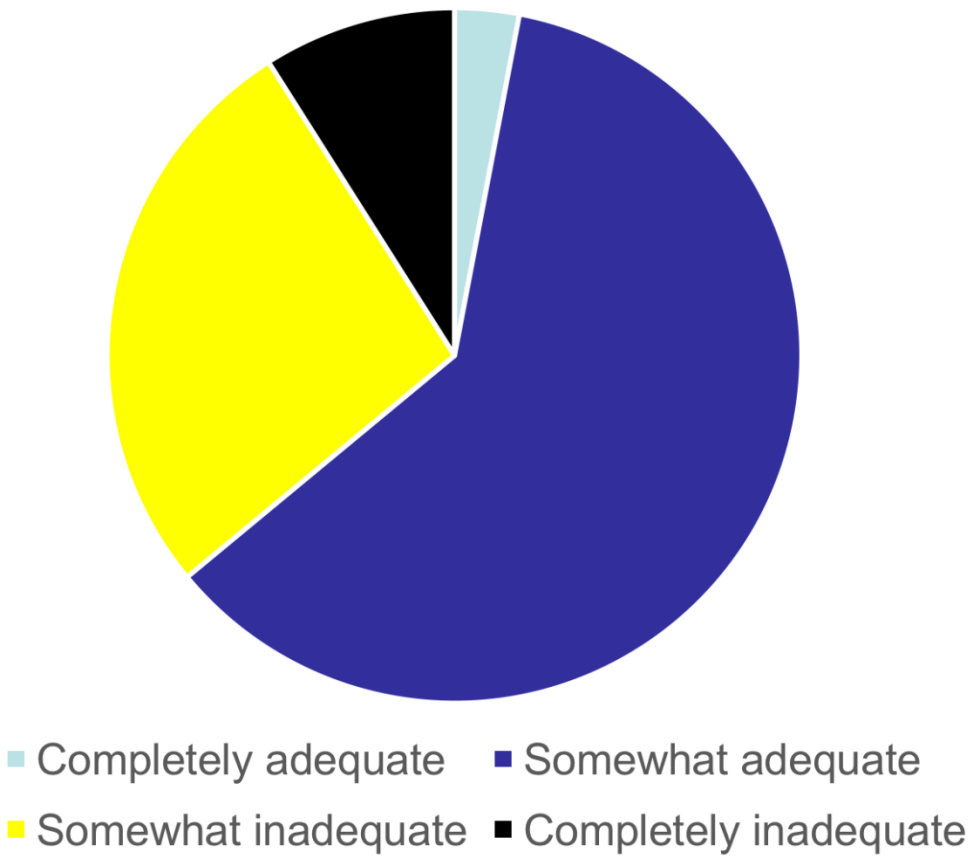
"It was fantastic to see 2 particular children in my class with learning difficulties writing their views in forums without hesitation, they didn't get hung up on spelling and felt confident to expand their thoughts"

Observed impact of blended contact on goals of shared education among pupils

Reconciliation

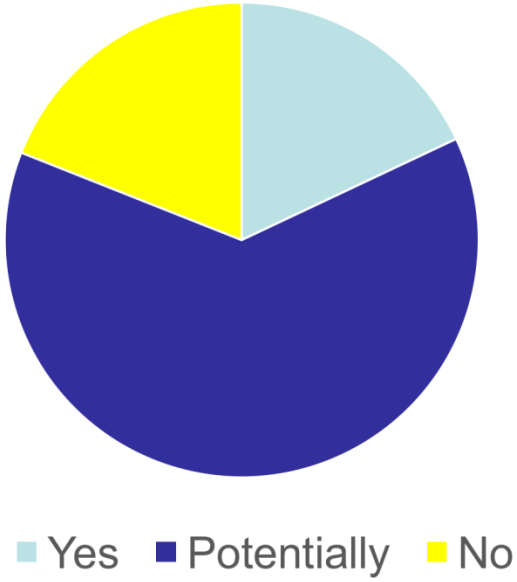
"I'm not sure how much the children appreciated that children from other schools may have been of a different religious background to themselves. They just saw each other as children. Therefore I don't know how much this process promoted reconciliation in our process - this may differ according to what area each of the schools is in geographically throughout N. Ireland"

Adequacy of ICT Resources

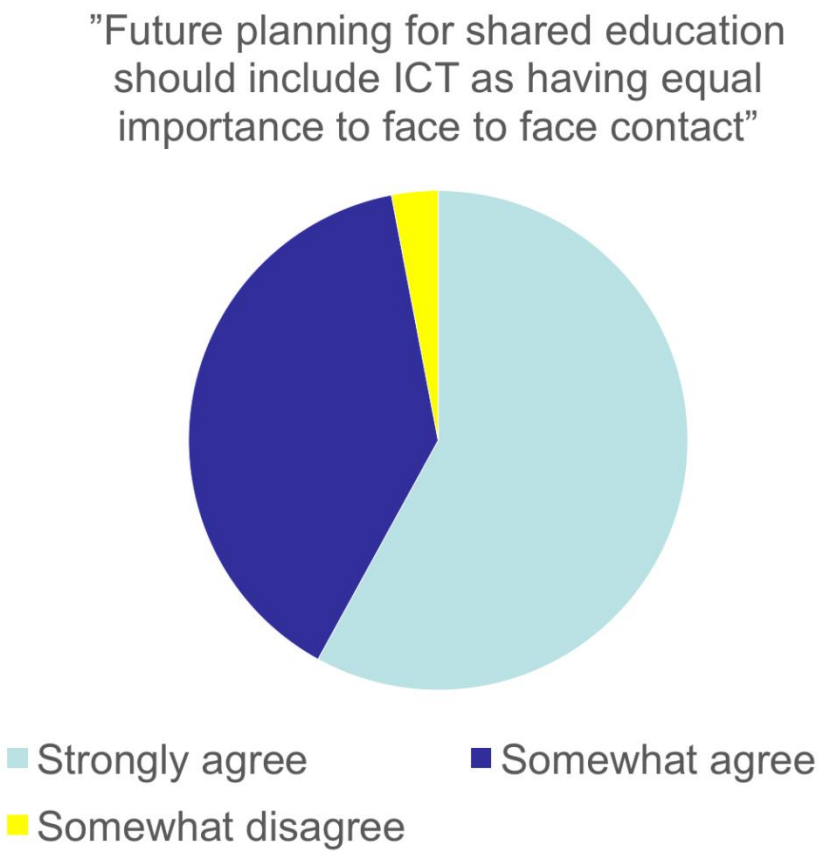


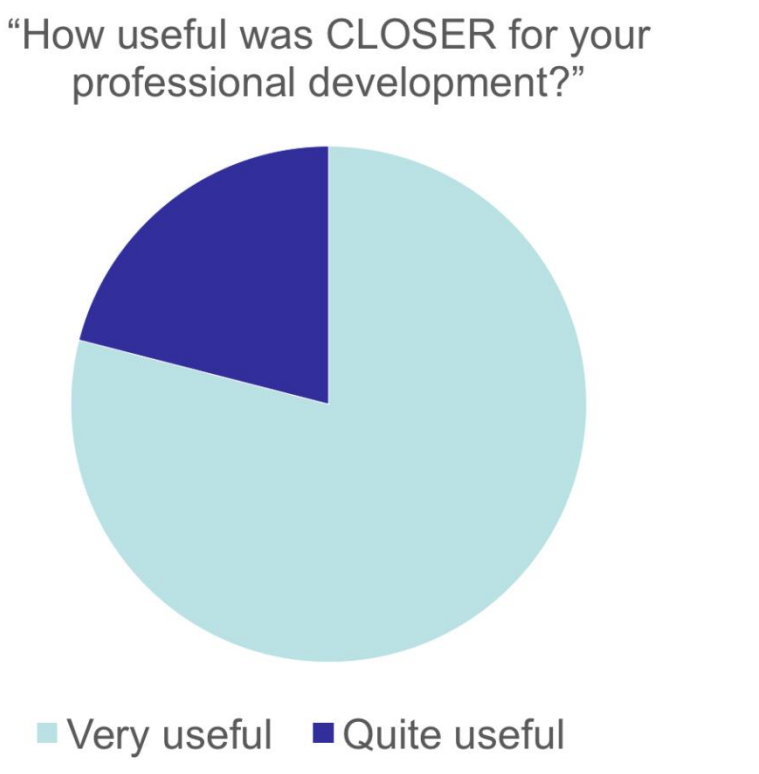
Assessment of ICT and shared education

"Do you connect your use of ICT in shared education with the requirement for you to assess pupils' use of ICT?"



Value of CLOSER and ICT in Shared Education





Possible questions for discussion

1. Should friendship be the priority in terms of goals for shared education?
2. What drives the convergence of perceived goals of Shared Education across communities?
3. Teacher CPL; should courses on blended contact be required?
4. How can ICT infrastructure be enhanced?