

Hello, my name is Adam and I'm here today on behalf of the Niccy Youth Panel. Now the obvious question here is why integration? In 1921 Northern Ireland's first Education Minister Lord Londonderry wanted an education system that educated all young people together. However, 100 years since the creation of Northern Ireland this aspiration has yet to be achieved. Today we have only 67 integrated schools in both primary and secondary education, this equates to only 7% of children within Northern Ireland. To me it's obvious this number is far too low, and this lack of integration is a detriment to our society. It is clear that within Northern Ireland this segregated lifestyle can lead to people having positive views about themselves and negative views about others. I believe promoting integrated education for all in Northern Ireland is a positive step for our society. We are a forward thinking country and segregation is an outdated system. Within the community there is a clear demand for integration, just look at recent surveys, the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (2020) found that 69% of parents would prefer their children to be in a mixed environment and NISRA in 2019 found that 76% of young people wanted religion to not be an issue. I myself only made Catholic friends after joining the Secondary Students Union of Northern Ireland which helped me develop views and aspire to a more integrated society. However, without integrated education distorted views of each other will continue.

Segregation is never good, and we all should do more to promote the integration of education and society in general. We should also remember that integration is so much more than religion with students from all backgrounds including race, gender, disability and sexuality all having an equal opportunity to learn. So I ask: do you want an integrated or segregated society, I know where I stand, what about you?