



# CONSULTATION ON THE INTEGRATED EDUCATION BILL

Response from Northern Ireland Humanists,  
October 2021



## ABOUT NORTHERN IRELAND HUMANISTS

Northern Ireland Humanists is part of Humanists UK. Humanists UK is the national charity working on behalf of non-religious people. Powered by 100,000 members and supporters, we advance free thinking and promote humanism to create a tolerant society where rational thinking and kindness prevail. We provide ceremonies, pastoral care, education, and support services benefitting over a million people every year and our campaigns advance humanist thinking on ethical issues, human rights, and equal treatment for all.

We have a long history of work in education, children's rights, and equality, with expertise in the 'religion or belief' strand. We have been involved in policy development around the school and the curriculum for over 60 years. We also provide materials and advice to parents, governors, students, teachers and academics, for example through our 'Understanding Humanism' website (<https://understandinghumanism.org.uk/>) and our school speakers programme. We have made detailed responses to all recent reviews of the school curriculum in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, and regularly submit memoranda of evidence to MPs, MLA's, civil servants, and parliamentary select committees on a range of education issues.

We are an active member of many organisations working in education in the UK, including the Religious Education Council for England and Wales (REC), of which we are a founding member; the Sex Education Forum; the PSHE Association; Rights of the Child UK (ROCK); and the Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE). We also participate in a range of dialogue activities with other religion and belief groups and are a member of the Interfaith Forum of Northern Ireland.

Our primary interests include Religious Education (RE), Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), citizenship, and science, collective worship/school assemblies, state-funded religious schools, and illegal religious schools.



## **RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS**

### **1. How would you like your response to be published?**

I would like my response to be published.

### **2. Are you content that any of your suggestions which have been published to the Committee or the Assembly may inspire the text of an amendment?**

Yes

### **3. What is your name?**

Boyd Sleator

### **4. What is your email address?**

[REDACTED]

### **5. Please indicate if you are providing a response:**

On behalf of an organisation or business

### **If on behalf of an organisation or business, please state its name:**

Northern Ireland Humanists

### **Policy Objectives of the Bill**

**The Bill makes provision about the promotion and provision of integrated education. It will also provide for the reform and the expansion of integrated education.**

### **6. Do you agree with the policy objectives of the Bill?**

Yes

### **Please elaborate.**

Northern Ireland Humanists advocates for schools which educate children from different religion and belief backgrounds together and has long campaigned for a single system of education in Northern Ireland. With this in mind, we firmly support the Bill's overarching intention to further expand integrated education and to introduce a presumption that all new schools should have integrated status.



## The case for integrated schools

At present, most children from Catholic and Protestant backgrounds are educated apart from one another. According to the Government's latest school enrolment data, just 672 pupils classified as 'Protestant' attend Catholic maintained primary schools, representing less than 1% of the 78,766 pupils who attend such schools. In the post-primary sector, this number has been suppressed. This is presumably because the number is so low that it would be possible to identify specific pupils if it were published. In the controlled sector, which, while nominally open to pupils from all backgrounds, primarily serves the Protestant community, just 8% of primary pupils are classified as 'Catholic'. In controlled non-grammar secondaries, this figure drops to 4%<sup>1</sup>.

By contrast, integrated schools work hard to balance the proportion of pupils from each community they serve. They aim at having 40% of pupils from Catholic backgrounds, 40% from Protestant backgrounds and 20% from other backgrounds (including the non-religious and minority faiths). However, according to school enrolment data published this year, at present, 29% of pupils attending integrated schools are from backgrounds other than Protestant and Catholic (which account for 36% and 35% of pupils respectively). This rises to 34% at primary level<sup>2</sup>.

Integrated education seeks to address the harms caused by segregation and there is a wealth of robust evidence to suggest that positive contact of the kind that happens in schools with diverse intakes is pivotal to community cohesion<sup>3</sup>. For example, research conducted by Professor Miles Hewstone and a team from the University of Oxford found that pupils in ethnically mixed schools are more trusting and have more positive views of children from different backgrounds than do pupils in segregated schools<sup>4</sup>. Elsewhere, the authors of the same study argue that 'faith schools, to the extent that they are segregated, deprive young people of the opportunity to mix across ethnic and religious lines' in a manner that thwarts positive attitudes to members of so-called 'outgroups'<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> NISRA Enrollments 2020-2021 <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/topics/statistics-and-research/school-enrolments> [accessed 9 October 2021]

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> For an overview see <http://accordcoalition.org.uk/research/> and <http://fairadmissions.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/2017-08-29-FINAL-Religious-Selection-Research-Survey.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> DfE Diversity and Social Cohesion in mixed and secondary schools in Oldham 2017 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/634118/Diversity\\_and\\_Social\\_Cohesion\\_in\\_Oldham\\_schools.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/634118/Diversity_and_Social_Cohesion_in_Oldham_schools.pdf) [accessed 9 October 2021]

<sup>5</sup> Theory and Research in Education: Influence of segregation versus mixing <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1477878518779879> [accessed 9 October 2021]



Perhaps because of the positive contribution they make to social cohesion, integrated schools are popular amongst parents. A 2018 poll showed that 67% of parents would support their child's school becoming integrated<sup>6</sup>. Previous research also suggests that 91% think these schools are 'important for promoting a shared and better future'<sup>7</sup>.

However, just 7% of schools are integrated (a figure that drops to less than 6% at primary level)<sup>8</sup>. The dearth of integrated schools therefore means that this option is not available to most parents who would prefer it for their children. Indeed, recent research from the UNESCO Centre at Ulster University established that 28% of households 'are located in areas of Northern Ireland where access to integrated primary schools is limited and a similar percentage (26%) are remote from integrated post-primaries'. And even in areas where there are integrated schools, high demand means that families can still find it difficult to secure a place. On this basis, the authors say that the choice of an integrated school is often 'illusory'<sup>9</sup>.

### **Christian ethos**

Evidence shows that the expansion of the integrated sector outlined by this Bill is a necessary and desirable solution to problems of integration, social cohesion, and inclusivity in Northern Ireland. However, we are nevertheless concerned that it is nowhere near sufficient. This is because it does nothing to address the extent to which the current system is biased towards Christianity and, therefore, fails to adequately include or respect the freedom of religion or belief of children and parents who are non-religious or identify with minority faiths. Indeed, Kellie Armstrong, who tabled the Bill, has explicitly stated that 'Nothing in the Bill takes away from the Christian basis of all schools in Northern Ireland'<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> The Irish News: Churches and politicians have stalled integrated school growth, poll finds <https://www.irishnews.com/news/2018/03/22/news/churches-and-politicians-have-stalled-integrated-school-growth-poll-finds-1284568/> [accessed 9 October 2021]

<sup>7</sup> Integrated education: a review of policy and research evidence 1999-2012 [https://www.ulster.ac.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/224572/Integrated-Ed-Full-report.pdf](https://www.ulster.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/224572/Integrated-Ed-Full-report.pdf) [accessed 9 October 2021]

<sup>8</sup> NISRA Annual enrolments at schools and in funded pre-school education in Northern Ireland 2020-2021 <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Revised%2028%20May%202021%20-%20Annual%20enrolments%20at%20schools%20and%20in%20funded%20prescho....pdf> [accessed 9 October 2021]

<sup>9</sup> Transforming education: Parental choice of primary and post-primary schools: myth or reality? <https://humanists.uk/wp-content/uploads/TEUU-Report-08-Parental-Choice.pdf> [accessed 9 October 2021]

<sup>10</sup> Integrated Education: second stage debate <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/ni/?id=2021-07-06.7.1#g7.171> [accessed 9 October 2021]



Section 1(2) of the Bill says that ‘an “integrated school” is a school which intentionally promotes, protects and improves an ethos of diversity, respect and understanding between those of different cultures and religious beliefs and of none, between those of different socio-economic backgrounds and between those of different abilities.’ However, to achieve that purpose, the Bill must further require integrated schools to promote the principles of equality, non-discrimination, and freedom of religion or belief laid out in Articles 9 and 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Articles 2 and 14 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)<sup>11</sup>.

### **Religious education**

At present, Article 21(1) of Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 requires every grant aided school to provide daily collective worship and religious education. According to Article 21(2) of the Order, in controlled schools (some of which have integrated status), RE is expected to be ‘based on the Holy Scriptures’, although it is not permitted to be ‘distinctive of any particular religious denomination’. In addition, the core RE syllabus, which is used by integrated schools, has been put together by the four main churches in Northern Ireland and is almost exclusively Christian, save for one unit on ‘world religions’ at Key Stage 3. Non-religious worldviews such as humanism are not covered at all.

Against this legislative backdrop, the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) has, at least to date, considered integrated education to be ‘essentially Christian in character,’ a fact confirmed in the definition of integrated education outlined in its most recent statement of principles<sup>12</sup>.

With all this in mind, the important aims of the Bill threaten to be seriously undermined if they are not accompanied by provisions that ensure that integrated schools have a fully inclusive ethos. In the absence of this, efforts to diversify pupil intake can never be fully inclusive because children from non-Christian backgrounds are being sent a clear message that their own beliefs are not as highly valued as those of Christianity. The exclusion of non-religious and minority faith viewpoints also pulls against the Toledo Guiding Principles on teaching about religion and belief in public schools, which explicitly state that this ‘should be sensitive to different local manifestations of religious and secular plurality found in schools and the communities they serve.’<sup>13</sup>

### **Collective worship**

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<sup>11</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child  
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx> [accessed 9 October 2021]

<sup>12</sup> NICIE Statement of Principles <https://www.nicie.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Statement-of-Principles.pdf> [accessed 9 October 2021]

<sup>13</sup> Toledo guiding principles on teaching about religion and belief in public schools  
<https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/c/e/29154.pdf> [accessed 9 October 2021]



The legal requirement for collective worship is also deeply problematic and should be scrapped in favour of inclusive assemblies in the context of integrated schools. In its last report on Great Britain and Northern Ireland – known as the Concluding Observations – the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that ‘legal provisions for compulsory attendance at collective worship in publicly funded schools’ should be repealed and the State Party should ‘ensure that children can independently exercise the right to withdraw from religious worship at school’<sup>14</sup>. This recommendation reflects an intention to protect the freedom of thought, conscience, religion, or belief outlined in Article 14 of the UNCRC. However, to date, the Northern Ireland Government has taken no action on this matter. Not even to permit older pupils to withdraw themselves from these sessions, something which has been permitted in England and Wales since 2008.

Interestingly, unlike in England and Wales, in Northern Ireland there is actually no legal requirement for school worship have a distinctly Christian character, but, owing to the ‘faith-informed’<sup>15</sup> nature of the overarching system, including the nature of RE and the faith-based composition of Boards of Governors, this is invariably how schools understand and deliver it.

Parents do have a legal right to withdraw their children from both collective worship and Religious Education. However, this ignores the fact that, under both the Human Rights Act 1998 and Article 14 of the UNCRC, children and young people also have the right to freedom of religion or belief; a right that is not respected when one faith perspective is imposed upon them via confessional religious instruction or enforced worship.

Furthermore, by treating Christian worship as the default, the current system illegitimately favours one faith perspective over other religious and non-religious beliefs, and presupposes that children will participate in religious activities unless their parents opt out. This not only risks the freedom of conscience of pupils and families who are not aware of the right to withdraw, but indirectly requires those who do exercise this option to reveal information about what they believe in a way that could risk the right to privacy outlined in Article 8 of the Human Rights Act.

By failing to give even those aged over 16 the option to opt out of collective worship, the law in Northern Ireland also entirely fails to enable children and young people to exercise their ‘Gillick

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<sup>14</sup> UNCRC Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

<http://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2FPPrICAqhKb7yhskH0j6VpDS%2F%2FJqg2Jxb9gncnUyUgbnuttBweOlylfyYPkBbwffitW2JurgBRuMMxZqnGgerUdpjxij3uZ0bjQBOLNTNvQ9fUIEOvA5Ltw0GL> [accessed 9 October 2021]

<sup>15</sup> Transforming education: Religion and Education

[https://www.ulster.ac.uk/\\_\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/476076/transforming-education-02-Religion-and-Education.pdf](https://www.ulster.ac.uk/___data/assets/pdf_file/0003/476076/transforming-education-02-Religion-and-Education.pdf) [accessed 9 October 2021]



competence<sup>16</sup> rights in a 'manner that is consistent with' their 'evolving capacities', as established in European case law and reflected in Articles 12 and 14 of the UNCRC. This view has been repeatedly endorsed by the UK Parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights (JCHR), for example in reports in 2006, 2008, and 2010. As previously noted, sixth-form pupils in England and Wales already have this legal right, although it is worth mentioning that the failure of either country to grant younger, sufficiently mature pupils the right to withdraw themselves from worship means that, even there, the provisions of the UNCRC and Gillick competence have not been properly realised.

What's more, even when parents request an exemption, the process of withdrawal is often difficult and children who have been withdrawn are rarely given a meaningful alternative of equal educational value during the time their peers are attending worship. Indeed, in 2019 two non-religious parents, Lee and Lizanne Harris (supported by Humanists UK), took a legal challenge against their children's school in England because it refused to provide just such an alternative<sup>17</sup>. When the Trust that runs the school eventually backed down after the HARRISES won permission to have their case heard at the High Court, the school agreed to provide an inclusive alternative to the Harris children and any other withdrawn children whose parents wished them to receive it.

However, most parents, including non-religious parents, who would like to see a meaningful alternative to collective worship in their child's school won't be in a position to mount expensive and time-consuming legal proceedings. What's more, such action may risk alienating the family from the school and is clearly not the most desirable means by which to ensure that children get the kind of non-discriminatory provision to which they are entitled. Instead, this aim would be far better met by a change to the law.

For all these reasons, we strongly believe that Christian collective worship must be replaced with fully inclusive assemblies, which do not discriminate and demonstrate respect for children and families from all religion and belief backgrounds. Indeed, we note that, in England, a Private Members Bill is currently going through the House of Lords proposing just such a change for schools without a religious character<sup>18</sup>. What's more, despite Kellie Armstrong's insistence that the Integrated Education Bill should not challenge the Christian ethos of integrated education – which is underpinned by the existence of the worship requirement – last year the Alliance Party Council adopted a policy in favour of replacing worship with inclusive assemblies in Northern Ireland.

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<sup>16</sup> See *Gillick v West Norfolk and Wisbech AHA* [1985] UKHL 7 17 October 1985

<sup>17</sup> Humanists UK report on collective worship legal case <https://humanism.org.uk/2019/11/20/school-concedes-in-collective-worship-legal-case-will-provide-alternative-assemblies/> [accessed 9 October 2021]

<sup>18</sup> Education (Assemblies) Bill <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2878> [accessed 9 October 2021]



Because of their underlying aims, integrated schools in particular need to be allowed to operate without the discriminatory burden of collective worship and Christian RE. They should instead introduce inclusive assemblies and pluralistic RE in order to fully support a fair and equal ethos in their schools.

Here it is worth highlighting that the number of non-Christians in Northern Ireland is rising rapidly. The Department of Education has already acknowledged that, whilst the current legislation pertaining to integrated schools 'refers only to reasonable numbers of Catholics and Protestants', there are an 'increasing number of pupils designating as "other" or "no religion"' and the concept of a 'reasonable balance' between different communities might be decided on this basis<sup>19</sup>. According to the most recent Life and Times Survey, 27% of people in Northern Ireland now regard themselves as belonging to no religion<sup>20</sup>. Amongst people aged 18-24 this is even higher, with 36% identifying as non-religious (compared to 30% Protestant and 34% Catholic). On the basis of this demographic data alone, the continued privilege afforded to Christianity in Northern Ireland's education system is hard to justify. In the context of a Bill designed to help integrate people from different communities, it is entirely indefensible.

## **7. Do you think the provisions of the Bill will be effective in achieving the policy objectives?**

No

### **Please elaborate.**

To achieve real integrated education, we believe that policy objective five – the development of an Integrated Education Strategy – must be prefaced on a fully inclusive model of integrated education that jettisons the current commitment to a Christian ethos in favour of an ethos that treats all religions and beliefs equally (see above).

Similarly, policy objective seven calls for 'standardised and accredited diversity and (an) all-inclusive module on how to teach in a truly inclusive and integrated classroom for primary and secondary schools' as well as in initial teacher training. However, this must be in line with equality law and respect the requirement that, in line with European Convention on Human Rights and Human Rights Act case law, the teaching is 'objective, critical, and pluralistic'.

As noted in our response to the previous question, allowing integrated schools to favour a Christian rather than secular approach threatens the freedom of thought, conscience, religion, or belief

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<sup>19</sup> DfE: Establishing an integrated school <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/establishing-integrated-school> [accessed 9 October 2021]

<sup>20</sup> NILT Survey results 2020 <https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2020/Background/RELIGION.html> [accessed 9 October 2021]



protected by Article 9 of the ECHR and Article 14 of the UNCRC. It also critically undermines the provisions against discrimination outlined in Article 14 of the ECHR and Article 2 of the UNCRC.

On this basis, if the overarching aims of the Bill are to be achieved, the legislative framework, policy, and curriculum of integrated schools must be reviewed to ensure all religions and beliefs are respected and included on an equal footing.

Although the situation in Northern Ireland is currently worse than the other nations of the UK, significant change is also required elsewhere. However, progress is being made in this regard. For example, in Wales, the Government has recently passed the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act<sup>21</sup> that will see non-religious philosophical convictions (like humanism) and non-religious representatives explicitly included in the RE curriculum and the bodies responsible for developing and overseeing it from 2022 onwards. The subject will be renamed 'Religion, Values, and Ethics' to acknowledge this broader scope.

In the Explanatory Memorandum relating to the Welsh Act, as well as a letter clarifying the provisions written by former Education Minister Kirsty Williams to the Senedd's Children, Young People, and Education Committee, the explicit rationale for the changes was to bring the subject into line with the Human Rights Act<sup>22</sup>.

Here it is also worth noting that the law pertaining to Christian RE and worship in Northern Ireland is about to come before the High Court, after a non-religious parent and child won permission to judicially review the Christian-centric nature of the law on the grounds that it violates their freedom of religion or belief<sup>23</sup>.

To reiterate, to achieve the purpose of integrated, inclusive schools that fully respect freedom of religion or belief of children and their families, the Bill must tackle the Christian bias that is inherent in the system and provide for integrated schools to have a secular ethos.

**8. Please note which (if any) of these objectives you consider to be ineffective. List the objectives you feel are ineffective and why.**

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<sup>21</sup> Curriculum and Assessment (Wales Act 2021 <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-04/curriculum-and-assessment-act-explanatory-memorandum.pdf> [accessed 9 October 2021])

<sup>22</sup> Letter from Welsh Minister for Education to Chair of Children, Young People and Education Committee 12 August 2020  
<https://business.senedd.wales/documents/s103995/Letter%20from%20the%20Minister%20for%20Education%20regarding%20the%20Bills%20provisions%20as%20they%20relate%20to%20Religion%20Va.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Northern Ireland Humanists report on legal challenge to RE and collective worship  
<https://humanists.uk/2021/06/11/family-wins-right-to-challenge-law-requiring-christian-re-and-worship-in-northern-ireland-schools/> [accessed 9 October 2021]



See previous answer.

**9. Do you foresee any unintended consequences of any of the policy objectives of the Bill?**

Yes

**Please elaborate.**

Policy objective nine calls for the Education and Training Inspectorate to inspect schools as part of the usual inspection programme to 'ensure they are upholding their integrated ethos'. If this is expected to be Christian in nature, this will effectively involve requiring the inspectorate to enforce an ethos which undermines the inclusive purpose of integrated education. This is similarly the case for policy objective eight which, by requiring the strengthening of an ethos which is prefaced on privileging one faith perspective, is likely to undercut the laudable aims of educating pupils from different backgrounds together.

**Clause 1: Meaning of "Integrated Education"**

**Clause 1: defines "integrated education" and "integrated school". In essence, integrated education is educating children and young persons in schools which promote an ethos of diversity, respect and understanding between those of different cultures and religious beliefs and of none in the same school on a daily basis.**

**10. The definition of "integrated education" comprises education together of pupils reflecting diversity in cultural and religious belief (including reasonable numbers of Protestant and Catholic pupils); socio-economic diversity; and diversity of ability. Do you feel this definition of "integrated education" is sufficient?**

Yes

**11. Please describe and explain any amendments you would propose to this definition of "integrated education".**

**Describe and explain any amendments you would propose.**

We largely agree with the definition, which covers the remit of integrated education quite well. However, it should use the language of human rights law and refer to 'religions or beliefs' rather than 'religious beliefs and none'.

**12. An "integrated school" is defined as a school which promotes, protects and improves an ethos of diversity, respect and understanding of culture, religious belief and non, socio-**



**economic experience and all abilities. Do you feel the definition of an “integrated school” is sufficient?**

Yes

**13. Please describe and explain any amendments you would propose to this definition of an “integrated school”.**

**List any amendments you think should be added to the definition.**

Again, we largely agree with the definition. However, for the reasons outlined in our previous answers, we are of the view that the purposes of the integrated school as defined would be undermined by any decision to retain the expectation that such schools have an exclusively Christian ethos. This is made particularly clear by the use of the phrase ‘an ethos of diversity, respect and understanding’ which is supposed to apply to all cultures, religions, and beliefs. This clearly cannot happen in circumstances where pupils learn purely Christian RE and are expected to participate in solely Christian worship. This is further evidenced by case law from England where, in a case pertaining to the inclusion of humanism on the RE curriculum, the High Court ruled that ‘the state must accord equal respect to different religious convictions, and to non-religious beliefs; it is not entitled to discriminate between religions and beliefs on a qualitative basis; its duties must be performed from a standpoint of neutrality and impartiality as regards the quality and validity of parents’ convictions.’<sup>24</sup> For this reason, the Court found that a failure to include non-religious perspectives on the Key Stage 4 curriculum was unlawful because it failed to accord such respect.

The judgment also noted that the existence of a right to withdraw from RE (similar to that which exists in Northern Ireland under the 1986 Order) was not sufficient to demonstrate that provision respected the philosophical convictions of parents and their children – ‘an opt-out is not an adequate substitute for the provision of an educational programme which accords the Parents their right to respect for their convictions. The need to withdraw a Child would be a manifestation of the lack of pluralism in question.’<sup>25</sup>

**14. Please provide any other comments in relation to Clause 1.**

See previous answer.

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<sup>24</sup> R (Fox) -v- Secretary of State for Education 2015 para. 39 <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/r-fox-v-ssfe.pdf> [accessed 9 October 2021]

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.* para. 79



**15. Would you amend this list of purposes?**

No

**16. Please describe and explain any amendments you would propose in the Clause 2 list of purposes.**

While we thoroughly agree with the purposes listed, particularly the need to promote good relations and to promote respect for identity, diversity, and community cohesion, we must once again highlight the manner in which they contradict the suggestion that integrated schools retain a Christian ethos.

Further, purpose (c), to promote equality of opportunity, must be considered in light of the issue of fair employment. At present, teacher employment is excluded from the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order (FETO) 1998 meaning that teachers can be recruited on religious grounds. The exemption means that both Catholic and Protestant teachers may lose out on jobs in schools on the other side of the community divide. But, because all the schools in Northern Ireland have some kind of Christian character, non-Christian teachers are likely to face discrimination whatever type of school they apply to. A recent report from the UNESCO Centre at Ulster University highlighted that integrated schools 'actively seek to achieve a balance in appointments' and therefore 'may call on the exception to justify the selection of one candidate over another in order to keep within a predefined community staffing ratio'. Because the desired ratio is generally 40% Catholic, 40% Protestant, 20% other, even at integrated schools, the vast majority of jobs are likely to be for Christian teachers.

With all this in mind, we think the requirement to promote equality of opportunity must extend to teaching staff and governors as much as pupils and as such the law on teacher employment should be addressed in association with the Bill.

Purpose (e) should be expanded to read 'to promote respect for identity, diversity, religious and non religious beliefs, and community cohesion' in order to ensure clarity of the purpose.

**17. Please provide any other comments in relation to Clause 2.**

See previous answer.

**Clause 3: Advisory Body**

**Clause 3: requires the Department of Education to consult with a recognised body which includes in its objectives the provision of support and advice to the Department in relation to**



**integrated education. The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education, a registered charity incorporated as a company limited by guarantee, would appear to qualify for recognition under this provision.**

**18. Do you consider this consultation to be a reasonable duty?**

Unsure

**19. Please describe and explain any amendments you would propose to this Clause 3 provision.**

**List any amendments and why.**

We are unsure about this provision because it fails to make clear the criteria according to which the Department will recognise such a body. In our view, such a clause must include a requirement for independence and impartiality, as well as commitment by recognised bodies to equality and diversity, including with respect to religion or belief.

**20. Please provide any other comments on Clause 3.**

See previous answer.

**Clause 4: Promotion etc of Integrated Education**

**Clause 4: amends the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 to include a duty to promote integrated education as well as encouraging and facilitating it, and amends the Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 so as to require the Education Authority to encourage, facilitate and promote integrated education.**

**21. Clause 4 extends the existing statutory requirements on the Department and the Education Authority to “encourage and facilitate integrated education”, to that to “encourage, facilitate and promote” it. Please give your comments on this and describe and explain any amendments on the proposed new requirements you would put forward.**

**List and describe any amendments to Clause 4 you propose.**

We firmly support the proposal that integrated education – conceived of as education that not only involves teaching pupils from different backgrounds together, but that does so in a fully inclusive way – should be actively promoted. Promoting the full meaning of integration and inclusive education will need to be supported by an updated curriculum where RE is taught in a critical, objective, and pluralistic manner and all religions and beliefs are treated equally. Promoting



integrated education will only succeed if the curriculum, employment, governor appointments, and admissions are fair and secular in approach.

There are sectors, such as Irish medium and special schools, where inclusive education may already be in place, but they are not covered by this bill. We would recommend that these sectors are fully engaged in the integrated education process and if their approach and ethos meet the requirements, they are given integrated status and equal access to the provisions of the bill.

**22. Please provide any other comments on Clause 4.**

See previous answer.

**Clause 5: Meaning of "Promotion"**

**Clause 5: defines promotion of integrated education. A reference to the promotion of integrated education is a reference to –**

**(a) identifying, assessing, monitoring and aiming to increase the demand for the provision of integrated education (including, in particular, monitoring the number and success of applications for integrated education), and**

**(b) providing sufficient places in integrated schools to meet the demand for integrated education (including expected future demand, and without treating the religious demographics of an area or spare places in existing schools as evidence of lack of demand for integrated education).**

**(2) In subsection (1)(a) "monitor" means monitor by reference to data collected in respect of relevant catchment and other areas.**

**23. As per Clause 5's definition of the term "promotion", do you consider the duty to promote to be a reasonable duty?**

No

**24. Please describe and explain any amendments you would propose to this Clause 5 provision.**

**List any amendments and why you propose them.**

The definition of promotion in clause 5 is too passive. It requires monitoring and provision of adequate places to meet the demand for integrated education but places no duty to actively



promote integrated schools. Whilst monitoring is essential, the act of promotion must include a duty on the Government to promote the benefits of integrated education and challenge existing controlled schools to consider becoming integrated. This should include (but not be limited to) training for head teachers and governing bodies on the process and support given for integrated education and actively engaging stakeholders such as the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, the Controlled Schools Support Council, and the organisations responsible for appointing transferor governors.

**25. Please provide any other comments on Clause 5.**

See previous answer.

**Clause 6: General Duty**

**Clause 6: requires a range of education bodies (defined in clause 14) to include provision for integrated education in their strategies, plans and policies.**

**6. Education bodies must include provision for integrated education when –**

**(a) developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans; and**

**(b) designing and delivering public services.**

**26. Do you consider this to be a reasonable requirement?**

Yes

**27. Please describe and explain any amendments you would propose to this Clause 6 requirement.**

**List any amendments and why you propose them.**

The requirement for education bodies as listed in clause 13 to include provision for integrated education in their strategies, plans, and policies is crucial to the success of this Bill but could be expanded further to include targets setting out the levels of integrated provision bodies should be aiming at. This requirement needs to be enforced and reported on. The duty to provide integrated education needs to be met by all education bodies and an independent inspection of their compliance should form part of the integrated education strategy.

**28. Please provide any other comments on Clause 6.**



See previous answer.

**Clause 7: New Schools**

**Clause 7: establishes a presumption that new schools which are proposed to be established should be integrated schools.**

**29. Do you consider this Clause 7 measure to be reasonable?**

Yes

**30. Please describe and explain any amendments you would propose to this Clause 7 measure.**

**In line with the language of human rights law, provision (2)(a) should read 'the religion or belief demographics of an area'**

**31. Please provide any other comments on Clause 7.**

See previous answer.

**Clause 8: Integrated Education Strategy**

**Clause 8: requires the Department of Education to publish a strategy for encouraging, facilitating, promoting and providing integrated education.**

**32. Do you consider this to be a reasonable measure in attaining the policy objectives of the Bill?**

No

**33. Please describe and explain any amendments you would propose to this Clause 8 measure.**

**List any amendments and why you propose them.**

The integrated education strategy is vital for ensuring the success of the Bill. However, a draft of this plan needs to be created prior to the passage of the Bill in order to make sure there is clear understanding of what is expected to be delivered.

Target numbers and timelines for integration are needed, along with commitment to equality for all religions and beliefs in the approach of all integrated schools.



Additional areas of integrated education which need to be included in the strategy are teacher training and qualifications and appointment of all staff and governors. The strategy also needs to cover an update to the curriculum to include equality of all religions and beliefs, and removal of any requirement for compulsory worship are all.

**34. Please provide any other comments on Clause 8.**

See previous answer.

**Clause 9: Biennial reporting**

**Clause 9: requires the Department of Education to publish a biennial report on integrated education.**

**35. Do you consider this to be a reasonable measure in monitoring implementation of the Bill?**

Yes

**36. Please elaborate regarding Clause 9.**

**Please tell us more about why you consider this to be a reasonable measure or not.**

This is a reasonable measure and timeframe. The reporting could specify inclusion of a summary of all Education and Training Inspectorate reports on integrated schools, monitoring of teaching staff and governors in terms of equality of appointments, as well as curriculum content meeting the standards set out above, ensuring equal treatment of religions and humanism.

**37. Please provide any other comments on Clause 9.**

See previous answer.

**Clause 10: Regulations**

**Clause 10: requires the Department of Education to make regulations supplementing the provisions of the Bill. Subsection (2) sets out a list of particular matters that may be covered by the regulations.**

**38. Do you agree with the power delegated to the Department to make regulations?**

Yes



**39. Do you consider that the subsection 2 list of matters in Clause 10, on which regulations can be made, is sufficient?**

No

**40. Do you consider that this level of Assembly control is appropriate for regulations about these matters?**

Yes

**41. Please describe and explain any amendments you would propose in these Clause 10 elements?**

**List any amendments to Clause 10 and why you propose them.**

Provisions need to be included for appropriate governing body appointments. There also need to be provisions for curriculum reform for teaching of religious education and provision for inclusive assemblies in place of collective worship

**42. Please provide any other comments on Clause 10.**

See previous answer.

**Clause 11: Guidance**

**Clause 11: allows the Department of Education to give guidance about the implementation or application of provisions of the Bill.**

**Clause 11: Guidance**

**43. Do you consider this Clause 11 provision to be reasonable in supporting the policy objectives of the bill?**

No

**44. Please describe and explain any amendments you would propose to this Clause 11 provision.**

**List any amendments to Clause 11 and why you propose them.**



All guidance must be produced and published by the Department of Education. Delegating authority for issuing guidance to education bodies where they have an interest in areas other than integrated education could lead to confusion. Guidance needs to be clear and follow the intended definition of integrated education in its fullest sense: appropriate for those of all backgrounds regardless of their religion or belief. As such, any guidance can only be published by and with the independence and commitment to equality from the Department of Education.

**45. Please provide any other comments on Clause 11.**

See previous answer.

**Clause 12: Consequential Amendments**

**46. Do you agree that this is a minor and technical provision?**

Yes

**47. Please describe and explain any amendments you would propose to this Clause 12 provision.**

**48. Please provide any other comments on Clause 12.**

See previous answer.

**Clause 13: Interpretation: General**

**49. Do you agree that this is a minor and technical provision?**

Yes

**50. Please describe and explain any amendments you would propose to this Clause 13 provision.**

**List any amendments to Clause 13 and why you propose them.**

**51. Please provide any other comments on Clause 13.**

See previous answer.

**Clauses 14: Commencement and 15: Short Title**

**Clause 15: gives the Bill its short title of Integrated Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2021.**



**52. Do you agree that six months is a reasonable period in which necessary regulations, guidance and other arrangements can be made to prepare for the provisions of the bill to be implemented?**

Yes

**53. Please describe and explain any amendments you would propose to this Clause 14 provision.**

**List any amendments to Clause 14 and why you propose them.**

**54. Please provide any other comments on Clause 14.**

See previous answer.

**55. Do you agree that this is a reasonable title for the subject matter of the bill?**

Yes

**56. Please describe and explain any amendments you would propose to, or about, the short title as per Clause 15.**

**List any amendments to Clause 15 and why you propose them.**

**57. Please provide any other comments on Clause 15.**

See previous answer.

**For more details, information, and evidence, contact Northern Ireland Humanists:**

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