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## Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS)

### Investigating Links in Achievement and Deprivation (ILiAD)

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#### Rationale for the study

Previous studies carried out within the UK and globally have concluded that there is a positive correlation between deprivation and educational underachievement (e.g. McNally & Blanden, 2006; Cassen & Kingdon, 2007; Raffo et al, 2007; Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009; Welsh Assembly, 2009; INTO, 2011). Many of these studies have utilized large-scale, quantitative methodologies which have produced overall, 'broad brush', macro results. Notwithstanding the above correlation, our preliminary analysis of Northern Ireland NINIS data (NISRA, 2010) suggests that the factors involved in educational achievement within deprived areas may be more complex than this. For instance, although 70% of the top 20 most deprived Wards<sup>1</sup> in N.Ireland are Catholic (20% are Protestant and 10% are mixed), the top 20 Wards for educational underachievement comprise 35% Catholic, 55% Protestant and 10% mixed. These patterns suggest that there are influences on educational performance that go beyond multiple deprivation alone, one of which appears to be religious identity. Whilst there is clearly an observable pattern of Protestant Wards doing less well educationally than Catholic Wards, there are also various, identifiable irregularities and exceptions,

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<sup>1</sup> Using the NINIS multiple deprivation measure, which is based on a synthesis of scores from seven different indices such as health, education, crime, employment etc.

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within both Catholic and within Protestant Wards, which require further exploration and analysis. Indeed, from scrutinizing the existing data, we have identified various counter-intuitive examples of significant anomalies and trends which challenge existing assumptions and beliefs. The ILiAD study focuses on seven specific electoral Ward areas where these anomalies are evident. The trends which are evident in these case examples suggest that there is not a straightforward, positive association/causal link between high levels of multiple deprivation and low levels of educational achievement, as asserted in previous studies such as those listed above.

## The ILiAD study

The ILiAD research has been funded by OFMDFM over a three-year period, due to end in March 2015. The study aims to combine statistical and in-depth, qualitative data. Seven geographical Ward areas in particular were selected for the study because these provide examples of anomalies regarding the common patterns of achievement. They also provide a mix of three predominantly Catholic Wards (shown in green), three predominantly Protestant Wards (shown in red) and also an area with an evenly-mixed population (shown in grey). The grid below provides details of the Wards included in the study, the District Council area they are located in and the percentage of school leavers who achieved five or more GCSE passes at grade C-A\*, over a fifteen year period<sup>2</sup>.

Ward	Council	Deprivation rank <sup>3</sup>	96/97	99/00	01/02	05/06	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12
<b>Duncairn</b>	Belfast	14	29%	21%	21%	30%	25%	56%	50%	45%
<b>Dunclug</b>	Ballymena	83	51%	39%	50%	50%	44%	46%	48%	48%
<b>Rosemount</b>	L/Derry	44	40%	44%	57%	72%	69%	67%	57%	63%
<b>The Diamond</b>	L/Derry	12	48%	49%	64%	67%	57%	68%	64%	64%
<b>Tullycarnet</b>	Castlereagh	109	24%	26%	16%	29%	30%	24%	31%	32%
<b>Whiterock</b>	Belfast	1	25%	23%	20%	36%	52%	56%	58%	59%
<b>Woodstock</b>	Belfast	39	25%	9%	24%	21%	26%	40%	50%	41%

From the above data, in terms of anomalies, it can be seen for instance that school-leavers in Whiterock (most deprived area in the study) outperform their counterparts in the least deprived Ward in the ILiAD

<sup>2</sup> These figures also include qualifications regarded by the Department of Education as equivalent to GCSE passes at grade C-A\*.

<sup>3</sup> In total there are 582 Wards in N.Ireland so Whiterock (1) is the most deprived

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study (Tullycarnet), particularly over the last five years. This example also contrasts a Catholic Ward with a Protestant one. However, a comparison of two Catholic areas (Rosemount and The Diamond) shows very similar achievement levels, even though there is a thirty-two point difference in their deprivation rank. Additionally, when Duncairn and Woodstock (two Protestant Wards) are compared, GCSE results in Duncairn are better, despite a significantly higher deprivation rank. An examination of achievement levels between a Protestant Ward (Duncairn) and a Catholic Ward (The Diamond), both of which have very similar deprivation ranks, shows much higher attainment in The Diamond. Perhaps the most obvious anomaly of all is that the Ward with the lowest deprivation rank in the study (Tullycarnet) is also the one with the lowest achievement.

As recognised by the OECD (2011), disadvantaged students can (and often do) defy the odds against them when given the opportunity to do so. In a recent Israeli study, Menahem (2011) found that social capital is related to positive educational outcomes, particularly in areas of low socio-economic status. Demie and Lewis (2011) identified a range of factors in low educational achievement, among which were poor community cohesion and parental low aspirations of their children's education. At the outset of the study, having carried out an extensive literature review, we concluded that family, school, individual, social/community and structural factors needed to be investigated through our data collection activity. The conceptual model shown below identifies a range of important themes and areas that we wished to explore with respondents.



## Research design/methodology

The study was conceptualised through a social capital perspective, which centralises the connections within and between individuals and social networks in a community as a valuable resource for educational achievement. The design is novel in the way it combines statistical interrogation of existing data sets with multi-level case study understanding at Ward level in order to 'drill down' to determine and map holistically what factors are causing the various identifiable (statistical) patterns of achievement in these neighbourhoods with a view to improvement. The study therefore is addressing various underdeveloped themes, identified through the recent ESNRIS evaluation, with its focus on neighbourhoods; in researching community capacity and dynamics; and exploring what works (in educational and social practices) in order to identify best practice and indirectly assessing various policy impacts (such as Every School A Good School; Neighbourhood Renewal etc). The research has been carefully designed to be fit-for-purpose and to take account of the ethics, complexities and challenges associated with researching in-depth in neighbourhoods.

A six-person research team is working on ILiAD and the approach we are adopting is community-centred and, as such, is bottom-up, iterative and developmental. Thus, data derived in the early stages informed subsequent data collection among community participants and stakeholders. Data have been collected both within schools and also at grass-roots community level, by means of individual interviews, focus groups, the use of an online pupil survey and visual ethnographic methods. One of the initial challenges associated with data collection was to establish and build relationships with key community gate-keepers for each neighbourhood area.

The study has accessed seven different sub-groups of potential respondents, from these Ward areas, viz:

- Children and young people attending school
- Teachers and school principals
- Young people attending informal or post-compulsory education (e.g. youth clubs; Alternative Education Programmes; Integrated Services programmes; Further Education etc.)
- Parents
- People in the local communities within the seven Ward areas (community representatives; residents' associations; community leaders etc.)
- Key informants from statutory bodies and voluntary sector organisations
- Exemplars of high achievement against the odds

The study has been exploring key issues associated with:

- individual aspirations, expectations, influences and how these are formed and perpetuated
- influences in the home (parental support; family stability)
- school factors (controlled/maintained; leadership; quality; extra-curricular; social capital within schools)

- wider family influences (attitudes; expectations; experiences of education; parent/school engagement)
- peer influences
- gender
- community influences and discourses (social capital; community cohesion; capacity; positive assets and resources; community safety)
- influence of informal education provision (youth clubs; AEPs; Integrated Services etc.)
- access to support services/organisations/affiliations, etc.

An Advisory Group comprising a broad range of representatives from political, community, statutory and voluntary sectors has been established and regular consultations with them have taken place since the inception of the study. Meetings of the Advisory Group have enabled team members to provide updates and have also given participants an opportunity to input ideas, responses, and suggestions etc to the study. Additionally, a Young People's Advisory Group was also established as an important resource, for instance, regarding the design of the online pupil survey.

### **Data collection and analysis**

Much of the qualitative data has already been transcribed and thematically analysed, primarily using a force-field analysis model to identify the main, recurring themes that emerge from the qualitative data. Specifically, themes are being classified either as drivers or inhibitors of educational achievement within and between Wards. However, there is further analysis (eg student on-line survey) to be undertaken in the coming months and the final findings will be reported to OFMDFM for consideration at the end of March 2015. At this stage some identifiable patterns that are emerging in terms of the following inhibitors/drivers of attainment:

- Alternative measures of success
- The legacy of the N.Ireland Troubles, not least in terms of inter-generational stress, substance abuse and mental health issues
- Inter-agency and intra-agency levels of collaboration and joined-up working
- School leadership, standards and expectations
- Parental capacity/lack of capacity to support their child's education and some of the underlying reasons for this
- Teachers' ability to 'connect' with pupils, especially non-academic students and/or those experiencing adversity in their lives.
- School ethos in terms of pupil-centredness and support
- Flexible curricula, teaching and learning methodologies

- The relationship between the home/school/community triad
- Individual pupil resilience, aspirations and self-efficacy (or otherwise)
- Attainment profiles for GCSE results when equivalents are included/excluded
- GCSE attainment profiles when English and Maths are included/excluded

At this stage, these themes can be conceptualised in terms of bonding social capital (or lack of it) within families, within schools, within each community, within agencies and also bridging social capital between the home/school/community, between different communities and between key statutory and voluntary organisations.

## Summary

As indicated above, we are speculating that there are additional factors and dynamics that contribute to differential educational achievement, besides the impact of multiple deprivation. These factors require careful investigation to understand and explain what is involved and this is what the ILiAD study is seeking to achieve. There is a clear policy and strategy value in understanding these factors within Wards of similar deprivation rank and also within Wards that are over-performing/under-performing in relative terms. This study is important to ensure targeted, policy interventions, strategies and support measures in the future. The study will provide greater understanding of why there are better outcomes for children and young people in some deprived Wards, as opposed to others. By the end of the study, we hope to produce research outcomes which have the potential to subsequently inform policy development and strategic planning regarding social inclusion and attainment, thereby reducing inequality and the gap between achievers and non-achievers in areas of multiple deprivation.

Government departments such as DE; DSD; DEL; DHSSPS etc will be interested in the outcomes of our study in terms of building a better future for children, young people, families and communities. Policies and strategies are currently evolving and these may be configured, in the coming period, to take account of the outcomes of this study. Specifically, this will be particularly valuable in the context of the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government, the Cohesion, Sharing and Integration strategy and the OFMDFM Ten-year strategy 'Our Children and Young People - Our Pledge' 2006-2016.

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