

The Good Relations Forum

Ensuring the Good Relations Work in our Schools Counts

- A strategy to meet our needs for the 21st Century

April 2010

Community Relations Council



Equality Commission

FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Note from the Chairs

The Good Relations Forum was established in 2005 and is co-chaired by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (the Commission) and the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council (the CRC). The Commission and the CRC consider that equality, good relations and community relations are inextricably linked, that progress is required in these areas and that a good relations and equality culture continues to need to be developed in Northern Ireland.

The Forum aims to develop a unified narrative, which can point the way towards a Northern Ireland that espouses equality and promotes good relations at one and the same time and engender policy initiatives and practice innovations. It recognises in so doing that good relations embraces not just the region's historic sectarian division and the legacy of the past, but also addresses broader questions of how its developing demographic diversity is best managed to facilitate a more inclusive, diverse and growing multi-cultural society.

An important role for the Good Relations Forum is to develop specific Challenge Papers that identify significant strategic areas for Government reform. For some time, the Forum has identified education in schools as an area where there is untapped potential for influencing real social change. While there are many examples of good practice in place where schools are actively promoting equality of opportunity and good relations, they are by no means universal. This Challenge Paper brings a different approach to the task of improving attainment in schools, within the context of addressing both equality of opportunity and good relations.

In light of developing public policy, the Forum will use the recommendations in the Challenge Paper to influence change through active engagement with government and other key stakeholders.

We wish to thank the members of the Good Relations Forum, the Education Sub-Group and the staff of both organisations, especially Gemma Attwood and Richard Cory-Wright, for their contributions to the production of this document which we hope will be both interesting and influential.

Bob Collins
Chair on behalf of the
Equality Commission
For Northern Ireland

Tony McCusker
Chair on behalf of the
Community Relations Council

Foreword

Our society remains deeply divided. More peace barriers exist now than at the height of the conflict and numerous housing estates and schools are still predominantly identified with a single community. This social segregation is costly: scarce human and financial resources are duplicated, contact between communities is hampered, and misunderstanding between them is engendered.

Government policies and practices have not yet done enough to encourage sharing and collaboration. The law cannot control people's thoughts and attitudes, but it can moderate their behaviour. Changing behaviours such as sectarianism and racism, when they are so clearly wrong and damaging, is highly beneficial to society. And when those behaviours are consistently and publicly challenged, then attitudes will also eventually change.

The education of children and young people in schools is one of the most important tasks of any society – a task that is about much more than obtaining academic qualifications. It also has an important role in shaping people's views and their relationships with others. In particular, schooling can help to counteract the negative views – hate, bigotry and prejudice – that exist in our society, and promote the healing of community divisions.

Not enough schools have addressed the difficult issues that confront our society. Too few young people have been encouraged at school to make sustained contact with children and young people from backgrounds and cultures different from their own. Indeed, many teachers are uncomfortable dealing with such controversial issues as racism and sectarianism. Their discomfort results partly from a lack of formal training, but also from a systemic reluctance to deal with difficult situations.

Something more must be done to encourage greater sharing and collaboration between communities and schools. Continuing with the present strategy will only perpetuate separation. Hence, the Good Relations Forum believes that we must fundamentally embed good relations in our schools.

If we are to help change our society from the path it has travelled on for too long, we need to empower not only our teachers but also our young people and our communities. We need to promote and

encourage real, meaningful and sustained contact with children and young people from diverse backgrounds and cultures.

In February this year, the two largest parties reached across the political divide at Hillsborough to agree a way forward to secure a better future for all. The timing of this Challenge Paper is therefore significant and, if acted upon, will play a significant role in helping us to be more socially cohesive.

In the spirit of the Hillsborough Agreement, this paper challenges the public sector and the community to take a new look at how schools and the communities they serve can be supported to reach out across the community divide to make good relations a reality, to collaborate more, to share resources, and to embed the teaching of good relations in schools.

The way ahead will be challenging, but we owe it to future generations to take our society forward in a spirit of partnership and mutual support and respect.

Sir George Bain

Contents

Introduction	Page 8
Background	Page 9
Outline of the Challenge Paper	Page 10
Why the focus on schools?	Page 11
Summary of recommendations	Page 12
Analysis of current context	Page 18
Economic considerations	Page 19
Educational planning implications as a result of diversity in inward migration	Page 21
Continued impact of the conflict on community relations and recent trends	Page 22
Present experience of schools in promoting good relations	Page 23
Duplication of services and parallel lives created by conflict	Page 24
Vision of Northern Ireland Executive and Programme for Government priorities	Page 24
The Review of Public Administration and Community Planning	Page 25
Education policy drivers	Page 26
Forum comments	Page 31
Suggested way forward	Page 36
Conclusion	Page 45

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Good Relations Forum was established in 2005 and is co-chaired by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (the Commission) and the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council (the CRC). The Forum membership is made up of a wide range of strategic decision makers and influencers, including the statutory, business, trade union, church, voluntary and community sectors, who are either personally involved in working towards greater cohesion in our society or who have the ability through their jobs to directly influence the good relations agenda. The Commission and the CRC consider that equality, good relations and community relations are inextricably linked, that progress is required in these areas and that a good relations and equality culture continues to need to be developed in Northern Ireland.
- 1.2. A key role for the Forum is to publish Challenge Papers that identify significant strategic areas for Government reform. This Challenge Paper:
 - a) examines current educational structures and reforms affecting the teaching and content of good relations in Northern Ireland schools. This includes the practice of good relations, to ensure a holistic approach to the practical delivery by heads, teachers, pupils, boards of governors, education boards, Department, etc.
 - b) recommends how schools, the Department of Education, and other key educational stakeholders can more effectively address, promote and develop good relations issues and approaches.
 - c) recommends how the range of existing public policy reforms and drivers can work better together to assist this process.
- 1.3. The Forum believes that actioning the recommendations of this Challenge Paper will contribute fundamentally to the successful fulfilment of the goals set out in the Programme for Government, particularly in regard to raising education attainment, promoting social cohesion and aiding economic recovery.

- 1.4. We also believe that the recommendations within this Challenge Paper will assist the designated educational public authorities to fulfil their obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, by ensuring that all schools comply with the public authorities' good relations policies, procedures and approaches.

2. Background

- 2.1. Our schools are challenged to meet a diverse, challenging and ever-evolving range of economic, social, and cultural needs for all our young people. In taking up this challenge, schools must also be mindful that society continues to deal with the aftermath of 30 years of conflict. Separate and duplicate structures and systems are prevalent throughout public policy. This division and duplication is particularly acute in terms of schools provision.
- 2.2. There is much to be proud of in our schools educational system. We have especially high levels of attainment at the top end. However, we also continue to have persistently high levels of underachievement, particularly by those young people from deprived neighbourhoods. Both the Executive and the Department of Education are undertaking quite considerable restructuring and reform programmes to tackle inequalities and to ensure that those involved in educational service delivery are working in an environment that is fit for purpose, and one that is achieving the maximum gains for children, families, communities and teachers. It is a complex web of needs requiring an equally complex web of support mechanisms.
- 2.3. The Forum believes that these drivers provide real opportunities to address the persistent inequalities of academic attainment and performance, and can also make a substantial contribution to improved social and community cohesion, both within and between the diverse social mix of our society.

3. Outline of the Challenge Paper

- 3.1. The Forum considers that many opportunities exist with the current climate of educational restructuring and reforms. While there has been considerable progress, we believe that a complementary but slightly different approach is required to encourage the schools sector to take on a greater role in promoting good relations across all communities. Specifically, the schools sector and its many stakeholders need greater leadership, encouragement and coordination, to mainstream much of the good practice that already exists. This work should be led particularly by the Department of Education, by utilising more effectively and efficiently the ongoing restructuring and reforms, to encourage stakeholders to collaborate more and to maximise the benefits of existing public spend.
- 3.2. In doing so, the schools sector also needs to work to minimise the duplication of provision and create educational environments that promote and encourage real, meaningful and sustained contact with children and young people from diverse backgrounds and cultures, and particularly to counteract sectarian attitudes.
- 3.3. This Challenge Paper therefore recommends to Government a way forward on how best to facilitate the improving of all young people's educational outcomes and aspirations, as well as promoting a schools sector that is more socially cohesive across its many boundaries. The Forum believes that a new approach is required, which allows the schools sector and its many stakeholders to explore how they can deliver education differently, allowing them to improve opportunities and outcomes for all our young people. New practices should be developed that enable greater choices and improve facilities, therefore developing a system fit for the future.
- 3.4. We are hopeful that this Challenge Paper can bring a new perspective to how the task of improvement and equality of opportunity and good relations can be delivered within the context of social gain and community cohesion, specifically in a society that is fragmented by social and sectarian segregation.

- 3.5. Currently, we await the publication of the Department's Community Relations Policy Review. We are hopeful that the issues raised in this Challenge Paper will contribute to any new policy, but we are aware that we may need to revisit this paper in the future. It must also be noted that at the time of writing, a draft Cohesion, Sharing and Integration strategy has been agreed by the two largest political parties and will shortly be released for consultation.¹
- 3.6. Furthermore, the Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education (NICCE) is currently undertaking a consultation on the Review of Catholic-managed post-primary education across Northern Ireland. The Review process has developed a range of proposals across 16 project areas including mergers, closures and new schools. The Review has been guided by a number of core principles, including the need to 'optimise high quality education provision and excellence in outcomes for all pupils' and to 'actively promote justice, reconciliation, mutual understanding, solidarity, inclusive communities and be part of a genuine pluralist provision'.² The Forum looks forward to discussing the recommendations in this Challenge Paper with NICCE in the context of developing opportunities for cross-community partnerships and collaboration.

4. Why the focus on schools?

- 4.1 Education is an area of critical interest for the Forum. Department of Education priorities and targets focus on improving educational attainment and performance in order to address educational inequalities and to improve life chances. Schools and teachers can also help to shape the lives and attitudes of our children in a positive way and to encourage them to participate fully and responsibly in society.
- 4.2 The Forum recognises the crucial role that schools have in contributing to the reconciliation of our society. This is not a job solely for schools, but schools do play a critical role.

¹ <http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/news/news-ofmdfm/news-ofmdfm-february-2010/news-ofmdfm-230210-programme-for-cohesion.htm>

² Catholic Education for All; NICCE, 2010, page 2, available at <http://www.pprce.org/filestore/documents/news/CatholicEducationForAll.pdf>

The Bain Review³ explored the contribution schools can make to educating and preparing children to live and work in a diverse community, and many of the recommendations in that report looked at partnership and collaboration as the preferred methods of improving performance and opportunities, as well as contributing to better relationship-building. We are therefore keen to explore further in this Challenge Paper the links between improved academic attainment, and how the promotion of good relations and equality of opportunity can help achieve the Programme for Government targets of promoting tolerance, inclusion, health and wellbeing:

‘Advancing social transformation and the inclusion of all of our people is essential if we are to deliver the peaceful, prosperous, fair and healthy society we all want. Doing so will help to create the conditions for economic growth and deliver real improvements in health and wellbeing.’⁴

- 4.3 Further, while schools are not designated public authorities⁵ in relation to Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the designated educational public authorities have a duty to ensure that all schools comply with the public authorities’ policies and procedures. The promotion of both equality of opportunity and good relations are therefore key to the work of a school.

5. Summary of recommendations

- 5.1 Some schools take a very proactive approach to addressing sectarianism and good relations in general. Unfortunately, this is not a universal approach across all Northern Ireland schools. Department of Education and Education and Training Inspectorate reports have indicated that some schools have not always fully supported the Department’s good relations programmes. Further, the Department has been criticised for not adequately funding

³ Schools for the Future: Funding, Strategy, Sharing. Report of the Independent Strategic Review of Education, December 2006, available at http://www.deni.gov.uk/review_of_education.pdf

⁴ Programme for Government 2008, page 11, available at <http://www.pfgbudgetni.gov.uk/finalpfg.pdf>

⁵ The Department of Education, Education and Library Boards, CCMS and successor bodies such as the Education and Skills Authority are obliged to comply with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, as they are designated public authorities. This imposes a statutory obligation on a designated public authority in carrying out its functions to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between persons across nine equality grounds. A designated public authority must also have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons across three good relations grounds.

their good relations programmes or providing sufficient strategic direction.

- 5.2 Northern Ireland is continuing to emerge from conflict and struggles to cope with the legacy of violence in our past. Our devolved Government is presented with the opportunity to shape policy to address this legacy and build a cohesive, shared and integrated society. Our young people need to be exposed to a full range of skills and experiences in our schools that are relevant to our society, especially where they provide protective factors against negative influences such as sectarianism and racism.
- 5.3 To achieve the Government's aims in the Programme for Government and to give maximum effect to new education strategies and reforms, the Forum considers that teaching and practising good relations in all schools is inescapable. The promotion and practice of good relations in schools can no longer be seen as a voluntary option.
- 5.4 A systematic approach is required to support the embedding and mainstreaming of good relations throughout schools' policies, practices, procedures and ethos. To achieve this key strategic objective, the various delivery structures that encourage greater sharing and collaboration across and between communities should be supported and promoted better.
- 5.5 We therefore propose the following actions by the Department of Education and key educational partners to support this key recommendation:

School and local level

- a) **Compulsory good relations programmes in schools** - the Department of Education to develop a School Circular and associated guidelines that state unequivocally the compulsory requirement for all schools to make good relations programmes a key component in curriculum Citizenship programmes and are mainstreamed across the school.
- b) **Good practice to be shared and publicised** - the Department to actively manage the sharing and

publicising of the work and experiences of all schools that have been successful in sharing and collaborating, particularly on a cross-community basis. These schools to act as champions, to outline the practical actions needed and how to avoid any pitfalls. Existing collaborative networks to be used to inform the entire schools sector of the benefits of working together. Consideration to be given to twinning schools, so pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds or with lower than expected attainment records could be paired with better-performing schools on a cross-sector or cross-community basis, where appropriate. The Department to provide and maintain links and resources on good practice on its website.

- c) **Capacity building programmes for existing school teaching staff** – the Department of Education and the Education and Skills Authority (ESA)⁶ to provide additional support to existing school teaching staff as part of their Continuing Professional Development, to deliver good relations programmes, within Citizenship programmes and across whole-school programmes. The Department and ESA to provide training to ensure all teaching staff are equipped with the essentials skills to deliver education in the new shared environment of collaboration between schools, as a result of implementing the Entitlement Framework.
- d) **Capacity building of parents and local communities** – the ESA and local schools to support parents and those in local communities to accept, value and respect the need for the teaching of good relations programmes in schools and the need for greater collaboration and cooperation between local clusters of schools, particularly on a cross-community basis. Parental and community partnerships may be necessary to enable and progress dialogue around difficult and sensitive issues. Tackling long-held opinions and beliefs will require support and should be addressed through tailored good relations programmes.

⁶ We note the delay in establishment of ESA and references to ESA should apply to transition bodies and arrangements

- e) **Keeping local communities fully informed of the opportunity for possible collaboration, where schools are at risk of being closed or new schools are planned** - the Department, ESA and local schools to keep parents fully informed of all the possibilities and options, particularly for cross-community collaboration, when local schools are being considered for closure or new schools are being planned. This could include some external work, such as deliberative polling or advocacy work, particularly where affected schools have already chosen to collaborate on a number of issues, such as area learning communities, or sharing sporting and academic facilities and resources.

Strategic level

- f) **Strategic leadership** - the Minister of Education and the Department of Education to give greater strategic direction to the schools sector to ensure that the teaching and practice of good relations is successfully mainstreamed across all schools. To support this work, the Department to promote more effectively the systematic sharing, collaboration and managing of resources by schools, particularly on a cross-community basis, as the preferred method of delivering and achieving educational targets and objectives.
- g) **Budget commitment to good relations programmes** - the Department of Education to identify and commit a long-term and appropriate budget to supporting all schools to provide good relations modules within Citizenship programmes, thereby guaranteeing the widespread re-prioritisation across the schools sector.
- h) **Targeted support and resources** - the Department and ESA to offer more targeted support and resources for those schools in areas that continue to experience considerable community conflict, segregation and disadvantage. This should include assistance with partnership working, where appropriate, and by sharing good practice from other educational sectors, such as the use of peer support, and attending other schools for particular classes. This should be particularly

encouraged by the Department on a cross-community basis.

i) **Greater focus on sharing and collaboration within service delivery** - the Department, ESA and other key educational stakeholders to focus on maximising value for money and avoiding duplication of educational provision, by placing a greater focus on existing drivers, policies and practices that encourage greater sharing and collaboration, particularly on a cross-community basis. These include:

- Every School a Good School – a Policy for School Improvement – with a focus on the best educational interests of all children, whatever the identity. This should particularly include the needs of those most at risk of not reaching their potential, such as the children of new residents and Travellers.
- Adding good relations conditions to budgetary allocations criteria, particularly in relation to capital builds and development plans, so there is a greater focus on cross-community relationship building.
- The Review of Public Administration and Community Planning – by encouraging greater local and regional clustering of services, particularly with respect to school and community resources, based on whole community need and not upon continued separate community provision. Good relations must be a direct underpinning principle within this planning process. Education should be seen in the broadest sense of the word - a holistic approach which takes account of external family and community life as well as the school environment.
- The Entitlement Framework – encouraging schools to see what actions they can take to collaborate on a cross-community basis to meet the Entitlement Framework requirements.
- Area Learning Communities – the Department of Education to add a cross-sectoral and cross-community element to the funding criteria for the Collaboration Element, and to support the roll out of ALCs to all areas.

- Extended Schools - ESA, schools and governors to implement ways to reduce community fears and to ensure local school facilities are welcoming to all, through the development of an outreach programme that welcomes everyone, whatever their community background or identity. Particular local circumstances may require tailored good relations approaches to be developed. Schools to be encouraged to apply for the additional 15% of funding that is available for collaboration, on the basis that collaboration is cross-community.
- j) **Developing tools that measure change** – the Department to develop a set of targets, as well as a monitoring and evaluation framework to measure the changes to the level of collaboration and cooperation between local schools. This should be published yearly and publicised widely.
 - k) **Teacher, head teacher and governor training** – the Department to ensure that amendments are made to the various training programmes by relevant regulatory and training bodies, making good relations modules compulsory components of study.
 - l) **Greater sharing and collaboration between teacher training colleges** – the Department and ESA to encourage stronger collaboration between the different teacher training institutions, to ensure all student teachers, whatever their community background, have the appropriate time and opportunity to experience other sectors and school ethos. All initial teacher training courses/programmes to encompass an element of teaching from different sectors on a cross-community basis.

5.6 The Forum believes that such actions will have a significant effect of providing consistency and certainty for educational policies, practices and procedures. These joined-up approaches will contribute significantly to the achievement of the Programme for Government's priorities. The recommendations in this paper will also contribute to the development of a strong Cohesion, Sharing and Integration

Strategy (CSI). The strategy is currently in a development phase with the various departments, the OFMDFM Committee and the Executive, and the Forum believes the approaches in this challenge paper could significantly contribute to educational targets and actions.⁷

6. Analysis of current context

Poverty, Conflict and Life Opportunities

- 6.1 Children and young people from socially and economically deprived areas⁸ are at greater risk of lower than expected educational achievement.⁹ Low educational attainment risks fewer employment opportunities, reduced income and poverty. These areas tend also to suffer most from the legacy of the past which, if not addressed by society and services including education, tend to perpetuate and can contribute to trans-generational poverty.¹⁰
- 6.2 The impact of low educational attainment also has a profound impact on future opportunities and choices. The ability to compete for better paid and better skilled jobs is severely limited and compounds poverty and disadvantage. Ultimately, this educational and poverty barrier risks perpetuating the patterns of the past for poorer communities and acts to sustain these inequalities.
- 6.3 The negative effect of poverty is compounded when one considers that the most economically-deprived communities not only suffered the greatest loss of life during the conflict, but to this day many of these communities remain deeply segregated, contain the greatest number of physical barriers designed to separate communities, and have largely failed to benefit from the peace dividend.¹¹

⁷ OFMDFM Committee heard evidence from officials on 24th March. CSI document is currently with Departments for inputs. Officials envisage a public consultation in summer 2010.

⁸ As measured by entitlement to free school meals

⁹ http://www.deni.gov.uk/literacy_and_numeracy_strategy_-_english.pdf Annex 2, Burns Report - http://www.deni.gov.uk/22-ppa-burns_chapter12.pdf paragraph 12.38

¹⁰ Addressing policy implications of transgenerational poverty, The Further & Higher Education Research Unit, University of Ulster, 2004 - Page viii <http://www.equality.nisra.gov.uk/transgenerational%20poverty.pdf>

¹¹ According to NISRA, 17 of the top 20 most deprived areas in Northern Ireland are located in North or West Belfast. North and West Belfast alone accounted for 1240 (or over one third) of the 3636 fatalities in total that took place over the course of the conflict (CAJ Submission to Eames/Bradley, Legacy of the Past), available at http://www.nisra.gov.uk/deprivation/archive/ConsultationResponses2009/Community_Relations_Council.pdf

6.4 There is also evidence that some predominantly Protestant urban communities, mainly clustered in Belfast, are not attaining educationally at well as predominantly Catholic communities with similar levels of poverty.¹² Many more school leavers in predominantly Catholic wards go on to further or higher education than do school leavers in predominantly Protestant wards.¹³ Further, recent research commissioned for the Equality Commission has noted that, while numerically similar, proportionately more Protestant than Catholic school leavers opted to attend university in Great Britain.¹⁴

6.5 The UK Government views accessing employment as the most effective way of reducing poverty and the predictive effects of poverty on health, life-expectancy, exposure to crime and anti-social behaviour.¹⁵ Schools play a key role in providing opportunities for social and economic mobility and improving young people's life chances. Raising educational attainment and addressing educational underachievement are therefore central to increasing young people's opportunities in the future. Furthermore, providing more opportunities for better social, economic and physical environment conditions for the most deprived areas will help raise aspirations and is likely to have a positive impact on young people in particular. These policy aims concur with those that the Northern Ireland Executive has set out in the Programme for Government.

7. Economic considerations

Changes in future Belfast labour market predicted

7.1 The need for disadvantaged communities to improve academic attainment and performance becomes even more urgent, given a recent report by Oxford Economics.¹⁶ This report predicts that the future Belfast economy will demand

¹² Department of Education, Literacy and Numeracy of Pupils in Northern Ireland, PricewaterhouseCoopers, No 49, (2008), available at http://www.deni.gov.uk/no_49-2.pdf

¹³ <http://www.poverty.org.uk/i32/index.shtml?2> Among wards in the most deprived fifth of all wards, Catholic wards saw 57% of school leavers going on to further or higher education in the three years to 2007/08, compared with 43% in Protestant wards. Among wards in the second most deprived fifth of all wards, Catholic wards saw 68% of school leavers going on to further or higher education, compared with 57% in Protestant wards

¹⁴ <http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/RKM06073EducMigratResearchUpdateFINAL010508.pdf>

¹⁵ No one written off: reforming welfare to reward responsibility DWP, 2008 available at

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/policy/welfare-reform/legislation-and-key-documents/no-one-written-off/>

¹⁶ Oxford Economics, Development Brief, The demand and supply of skills in Belfast, November 2008, Issue 13 Available at <http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/stateofthecity/docs/CurrentDevelopmentBrief/DevelopmentBrief13.pdf>

a much greater reliance on skilled and educated workers. It is predicted that over half of new jobs in Belfast over the next 10 years will require a graduate qualification, and less than one in seven jobs are expected to require no academic qualifications.

- 7.2 If communities that are currently educationally disadvantaged do not considerably improve their levels of academic attainment, they are highly unlikely to benefit from this predicted demand for high-skilled and educated workers. Consequently, the forecast for high numbers of Belfast residents who are economically inactive and those with few academic qualifications is set to continue.

Global competition for labour skills and experience

- 7.3 Being able to compete globally hinges on the ability to access skills and talent from diverse backgrounds. If Northern Ireland is to be internationally competitive, we need to attract and retain foreign investment and provide our own young people with the skills and experience to be attractive to a global audience. For example, for many years in our history, Northern Ireland people have significantly contributed to the workforce in a number of other regions, principally Great Britain and Ireland. Many study and/or work for a period of time and then return to Northern Ireland to live.
- 7.4 The many years of the conflict, however, acted as an obstacle against substantial inward migration to Northern Ireland. As a result, few people here needed to consider issues such as respect for ethnic diversity in the workplace. Nevertheless, over the past decade and more Northern Ireland and its economy has benefited from a substantial growth in its migrant worker population. While the recent economic recession has resulted in a number of migrant workers leaving Northern Ireland, many migrants have now settled here and are raising their families. This significant widening of the diversity of the Northern Ireland workforce compared to 10 years ago is a phenomenon that is likely to be permanent.

- 7.5 If our economy is to compete with other markets as we emerge from recession, by necessity we must continue to attract the right workforce talents and competencies. Some of these people are likely to come from outside Northern Ireland. This will necessarily result in an increase in the already wide diversity and experience of the Northern Ireland workforce.
- 7.6 Young people being schooled in Northern Ireland must therefore be given the skills and develop the experience, to live in and work within a diverse society and workforce both at home and abroad. This will require a dual process of raising educational attainment to generate greater competitiveness, as well as actions that welcome and encourages diversity. These actions will act as a deterrent against discrimination and prejudice,¹⁷ whilst providing our young people with the skills to compete at a global level.

8. Educational planning implications as a result of diversity in inward migration

- 8.1 This increase in diversity requires future planning of the educational estate and education policy development. Serious shortcomings have been identified in the provision of support for pupils with English as an Additional Language, as well as existing funding formulas.¹⁸ Much language support work is planned locally by individual schools and demand can sometimes outstrip the supply of EAL provision.

¹⁷ We note the recent publicity in the media on calls by some for local jobs for local workers - <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/sammy-wilson-give-uk-citizens-jobs-before-migrants-14156213.html>

¹⁸ New Migration, Equality and Integration, Issues and Challenges for Northern Ireland, Equality Commission, January 2009, available at <http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/ICRMigrantworkersJanuary2009.pdf> pp 20-21

9. Continued impact of the conflict on community relations and recent trends

9.1 The conflict has had enormous societal consequences. Communities were pulled apart and became more polarised. For many, difference in community background or identity was seen as a threat, rather than being something to cherish and value. Even today, despite a 12 year peace process, many children and young people continue to regularly exhibit and experience the realities of sectarianism and racism.¹⁹

9.2 Nonetheless, within particular thematic areas, community attitudes to traditional sectarian difference are showing signs of improvement. The Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey reports consistently that many people prefer mixed communities, workplaces and schools.²⁰ However, this is yet to be reflected in action on the ground, with most schools and public housing estates remaining predominantly single identity and only a slow growth in the integrated education sector. Additionally, a recent Equality Commission survey found that attitudes to other areas of difference remain stubbornly intolerant.²¹

Positive role of good relations education in schools to contribute to a successful, vibrant, respectful and welcoming society

9.3 Schools have a key role to play in developing young minds, to enable young people to contribute purposefully to the development of a successful, vibrant and welcoming society and especially one emerging from years of conflict. Schools' Citizenship and whole-school programmes can positively shape children and young people's attitudes and even protect against negative influences, such as racism and sectarianism. This role remains crucial, given the largely divided nature of our society that persists as we

¹⁹ Paul Connolly, Alan Smith and Berni Kelly, 'Too Young to Notice? The Cultural and Political Awareness of 3-6 Year Olds in Northern Ireland'. Available at http://www.paulconnolly.net/publications/pdf_files/too_young_to_notice.pdf.

This research counteracts the widely-held belief that young children have no sense of cultural differences and showed for the first time the significant affect that cultural and political influence has on the awareness and behaviour of 3-6 year-olds in Northern Ireland. The report also revealed the increased likelihood of children to identify with a particular community as they grow older and significantly, to make sectarian statements or take actions accordingly

²⁰ The Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey 2008 revealed that 80% of respondents, if they had the choice, would prefer to live in a mixed religion neighbourhood; 92% would prefer to work in a mixed religion workplace; and 70% would prefer a mixed religion school. See <http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/results/comrel.html>

²¹ http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/EC_Summary.pdf

emerge out of conflict, coupled with the increasing diversity of our population over the past decade.

10. Present experience of schools in promoting good relations

Integrated Sector

10.1 The Integrated sector has made a positive contribution to enabling and promoting continued engagement with children from different backgrounds. This approach has been largely driven by parents and teachers and public demand is liable to remain high. It is important to acknowledge the work of this sector as a vehicle for encouraging contact. A recent study examined how -

‘...social isolation impacted on the opportunities and aspirations of young people as well as their attitudes and feelings towards others. Limited exposure to those outside their community, and strong beliefs within communities, consolidated negative attitudes about ‘the other’ that were passed down through the generations.’²²

10.2 This research also found that piecemeal interaction achieved little lasting effect and that sustained contact was required.

Non-integrated Sector

10.3 Outside of the formal Integrated sector, it is largely up to individual schools to decide how they promote good relations issues and interaction. There are some examples of good practice, where schools share resources on a cross-community basis, but these partnerships are largely led by excellent working relationships and the foresight of neighbouring school principals.²³ At times, sharing

²² Childhood in Transition: Experiencing Marginalisation and Conflict in Northern Ireland; Siobhán McAlister, available at <http://www.statewatch.org/news/2009/nov/ni-children-in-transition.pdf>

Phil Scraton, Deena Haydon. 2009. Page 97, available at <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/children/docs/mcalister09.pdf>

²³ In the Roe Valley Learning Community in Limavady, secondary and grammar schools, including both Maintained and Controlled schools, have pooled resources to allow students to take a wide range of subjects. Similar examples exist in Ballycastle. The new shared campus proposed for the Lissanelly site also reveals a new vision of education provision in Co Tyrone.

resources on a cross-community basis may provide significant challenges, but there is evidence of good practice where teachers have not been afraid to confront sectarian attitudes and behaviours.²⁴

11. Duplication of services and parallel lives created by conflict

11.1 In many ways, the accepted approach for service delivery across the region has been to manage and maintain parallel lives between the two communities. This comes at considerable cost for the taxpayer, as services continue to be duplicated and opportunities for collaboration between communities are lost.²⁵

12. Vision of the Northern Ireland Executive and Programme for Government priorities

12.1 As we emerge from years of conflict, there is now an opportunity and moreover a greater willingness by Government to embrace and promote a more constructive approach to diversity and good relations, particularly where there are clear economic and educational benefits in doing so. This is evidenced in terms of the Executive's Programme for Government²⁶ and Public Service Agreement targets,²⁷ recent education policy and the plans to establish the Education and Skills Authority.²⁸ It is also evidenced by recent Department of Education policy

²⁴ In September 2009, teachers from both St Cecilia's College and Lisneal College in Derry worked hard to address sectarian abuse and to ensure the continuation of cross-community classes – see http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/foyle_and_west/8268325.stm

²⁵ Deloitte 2007 Research into the financial cost of the Northern Ireland divide, available at <http://www.allianceparty.org/resources/sites/82.165.40.25-42fa41bb0bef84.24243647/External/Research+into+the+financial+cost+of+the+Northern+Ireland+divide.pdf>

²⁶ The overarching vision of the Northern Ireland Executive is 'to build a peaceful, fair and prosperous society in Northern Ireland, with respect for the rule of law and where everyone can enjoy a better quality of life.' Programme for Government 2008, page 5, available at <http://www.pfgbudgetni.gov.uk/index/about-priorities-budget.htm>

²⁷ PSA 10 Helping our children and young people to achieve through education. Aim: Encourage all our children to realise their potential by improving access to formal and non formal education and provision tailored to the needs of disadvantaged children and young people.

PSA 16 Investing in the health and education estates. Aim: Take forward a programme of investment to provide a modern fit-for purpose health and education estate in line with best practice and ensuring value for money.

PSA 19 Raising standards in our schools. Aim: Educate and develop our young people to the highest possible standards to deliver improved outcomes for all young people, including measurable reductions in the gap in educational outcomes between highest and lowest attainers

²⁸ The creation of ESA provides an enormous opportunity for the development of coherent strategic priorities and a clear sense of direction for the entire sector, including the potential to address both inequalities of opportunity and to promote good relations. ESA, will act as a key enabler for other education reforms such as:

- raising standards for all pupils and tackling underperformance in schools and the system as a whole
- setting targets for the reduction of the unacceptable inequalities in educational attainment
- responding to the challenges posed by the Bain Review

documents and the draft circular on the education of Traveller children.²⁹ The Executive recognises that achieving economic growth ‘requires a healthy, well educated population, high quality public services, a commitment to use prosperity to tackle disadvantage and a tolerant, inclusive and stable society if we are to attract the investment and skills needed to promote growth.’³⁰

- 12.2 The Programme for Government makes a clear link between the importance of good relations and economic prosperity:

‘Advancing social transformation and the inclusion of all of our people is essential if we are to deliver the peaceful, prosperous, fair and healthy society we all want. Doing so will help to create the conditions for economic growth and deliver real improvements in health and wellbeing.’³¹

- 12.3 The Forum considers that a logical and cost-effective way to achieve the peaceful society described in the Executive’s vision, will be greater and sustained sharing and partnership by schools and their stakeholders, on a cross-community basis, to build greater trust between communities. The key priority of building a strong economy cannot be delivered in isolation from other considerations, such as good relations.

13. The Review of Public Administration and Community Planning

- 13.1 The role of Community Planning under the Review of Public Administration offers huge potential for better collaboration and partnership planning on a cross-community basis. The Recommendations Paper from the Local Government Taskforce’s Community Planning Sub-Group stated that:

‘The planning for, and the process of, Community Planning and the power of Well Being should be brought forward with full regard to “A Shared Future”

²⁹ Every School a Good School – a Policy for School Improvement and the draft circular on Traveller education - http://www.deni.gov.uk/traveller_circular_-_consultation_-_circular_-_version_3_-_pdf.pdf

³⁰ Programme for Government 2008, page 6

³¹ Programme for Government 2008 <http://www.pfgbudgetni.gov.uk/finalpfg.pdf> page 11

and all the challenges and opportunities that that presents'.³²

- 13.2 When implemented, Community Planning will play an important role in deciding on the allocation of resources and the provision of services, as well as in decision-making processes, regarding other policies at the local level.
- 13.3 It would therefore be worthwhile examining how the work of schools and community organisations can maximise outcomes for a particular area, especially if there is an opportunity to develop good relations between communities. Community Planning will present an opportunity to encourage greater local and regional clustering of services, based on whole community need and not upon continued separate community provision. The Forum recommends that good relations should therefore be a direct underpinning principle within this planning process.

14. Education policy drivers

- 14.1 There are a number of key government policies and strategies that facilitate the promotion of equal opportunity and good relations in education:

Every School a Good School – a Policy for School Improvement

- 14.2 The leading strategic Department of Education policy, *Every School a Good School – a Policy for School Improvement*,³³ focuses on the needs of all pupils and aims to assist all children to reach their learning potential. How a school promotes equality of opportunity and diversity issues³⁴ will be a key part of the Education and Training Inspectorate's assessment of the school. The Education and Skills Authority will subsequently use this evaluation in determining how best to provide support services to the school. The *Policy for School Improvement* is also very clear that a school should be connected to its local community.

³² Local Government Taskforce, Community Planning Sub-group *Recommendation Paper*, (available at: http://www.doeni.gov.uk/index/local_government/local_government_reform/taskforce/community_planning.htm

³³ http://www.deni.gov.uk/esags_policy_for_school_improvement_-_final_version_05-05-2009.pdf

³⁴ It is important that actions and targets that address 'diversity' issues are more than language support and welcome packs, and that specific actions are designed to address the difficult issues of racism and sectarianism.

Area-based planning

- 14.3 Area-based planning provides an ideal opportunity to promote good relations, if schools, governing bodies and local communities are actively encouraged to consider how educational services can be sustained within their particular locality, by working in partnership with other providers. It should not merely result in the streamlining of the individual sectors, but rather encourage new ways of aligning the current services on a cross-sectoral and cross-community basis.
- 14.4 The Institute of Directors stated the importance of a holistic approach to area-based planning:
- ‘...a big picture view will be incorporated into local area-based plans. A totally coherent plan would take into account views not just of parents, pupils and educationalists, but also the wider community including business interests.’³⁵
- 14.5 This factor will have the further advantage that the planning of education will be more likely to be positively aligned with the future needs of the local economy and increasing opportunities to attract foreign investment.

Area Learning Communities

- 14.6 Area Learning Communities (ALCs) have been established across all education and library board areas, to assist local schools to plan collaboratively the 14-19 provision in a co-ordinated way with a specific focus on delivering the Entitlement Framework. The Departmental circular providing guidance for schools on ALCs states:

‘In planning their curricular offer the focus of schools and ALCs must not be on the needs of institutions or on what individual schools have traditionally offered. Rather, the focus must be on the needs and aspirations of all the pupils in an area and on

³⁵ Response to Area-Based Planning, Institute of Directors, October 2008, available at http://www.iod.com/intershoproot/eCS/Store/en/pdfs/ni_news_planning_response.pdf

*identifying the courses and pathways that meet them.*³⁶

- 14.7 Many ALCs have taken up this opportunity and are collaborating both between secondary and grammar and on a cross-community basis, but this approach is not universal.³⁷ The ongoing challenges for schools are to plan to widen and mainstream this collaboration, and to set future targets with these factors in mind.
- 14.8 In 2009/10 a Collaboration Element of up to £10,000 was established to provide an incentive for schools to collaborate.³⁸ However, the existing funding criteria do not require ALCs to work on a cross-sectoral or cross-community basis.

The Entitlement Framework

- 14.9 The Forum considers it a logical step that sustained cross-community sharing and partnership will be necessary to build greater trust between communities and achieve the peace described in the Executive's vision. The delivery of the Entitlement Framework³⁹ offers huge potential for schools to collaborate both across sectors and among communities, as most schools will not be able to offer the full range of subjects required. There are many ways, at both neighbourhood and regional levels, in which the Entitlement Framework requirements can be met, including: sharing classes, teachers, and schools' facilities.

Draft Department of Education school circular on the education of children and young people from the Traveller community

- 14.10 In 2009, the Department issued a draft school circular on the education of children and young people from the Traveller community. This document developed a roadmap for schools to support and promote the diversity and respect for different cultures.⁴⁰ It proposed the following:

³⁶ http://www.deni.gov.uk/ef_guidance_2009-08.pdf

³⁷ <http://www.schoolsworkingtogether.co.uk/webpages/news/School-Collaboration-in-NI.pdf>

³⁸ http://www.deni.gov.uk/ef_guidance_2009-08.pdf

³⁹ Entitlement Framework Department of Education. <http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/80-curriculum-and-assessment/108-entitlement-framework.htm>

⁴⁰ http://www.deni.gov.uk/traveller_circular_-_consultation_-_circular_-_version_3_-_pdf.pdf

'A diverse and inclusive environment is an invaluable way to teach all of our children how to participate in the increasingly globalised society of which we are part. All schools should celebrate diversity and seek to include different cultures in each child's experience. Schools should aim to be culturally affirmative through taking a whole-school approach to intercultural education, establishing basic principles of interculturalism that will inform every area of school life.'

- 14.11 The Draft Circular goes to the very heart of giving effect to the *Every School a Good School – a Policy for School Improvement* strategy,⁴¹ which focuses on the needs of all pupils and aims to allow children to reach their potential.

Integrated Education sector

- 14.12 Whilst Integrated Education is a small educational sector, demand is liable to remain high in the future. The public's desire to educate children through integrated approaches is consistently reflected in the yearly Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey⁴² and a deliberative poll in Omagh conducted by three major universities in January 2007, clearly indicated that people want more sharing with 71% specifically stating that they would support integrated education.⁴³

Irish Medium sector

- 14.13 Whilst Irish Medium education is small in relation to other sectors, it is nevertheless a growing one, and very important in terms of those who choose it and what it contributes to society in terms of cultural richness and diversity. It is worthy of note that most schools in this sector are non-denominational and invite pupils from all religions and none.

⁴¹ http://www.deni.gov.uk/esags_policy_for_school_improvement_-_final_version_05-05-2009.pdf

⁴² <http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/results/comrel.html>.

⁴³ <http://cdd.stanford.edu/polls/nireland/2007/omagh-report.pdf>

Extended Schools

14.14 The Extended Schools scheme facilitates participating schools to act as hubs for their communities, providing a range of services and activities, during or beyond the school day, to help meet the needs of children, their families and the wider community. The Department of Education has stated that Extended Schools should positively and actively engage in collaboration and partnership with neighbouring schools and statutory, voluntary and community sector organisations operating in the community, to ensure that all efforts are concentrated on meeting the needs of the pupils in the school and the wider community. An additional 15% of funding is available for collaboration.⁴⁴

Identified need for teachers to have the training, skills and professional support to challenge negative attitudes and discrimination

14.15 It is crucial that all pupils, regardless of their school, feel that their experience of schooling is within an inclusive, nurturing and welcoming learning environment. This can only happen if those who engage with children have the confidence to deal with difficult issues appropriately as they arise. Teachers therefore need the training, skills and professional support to challenge negative attitudes and discrimination, both inside and outside of the classroom.

14.16 However, while all teacher training colleges and the Regional Training Unit programme (for the training of head teachers) have diversity programmes, they do not always make all their good relations modules compulsory. Further, not all teacher training colleges give their students work experience in an alternative sector. These factors may affect the capacity and willingness of teachers and heads to deal with good relations issues in schools, should they arise.

14.17 Moreover, feedback from the Equality Commission following a series of seminars held with teachers and key education stakeholders in June 2008, consistently identified

⁴⁴ <http://www.neelb.org.uk/schools/extended-schools/cass-general/#q31>

the fact that many school teachers had concerns with addressing good relations issues at school, either on the basis of lack of training or fear of the consequences of addressing the issue. Attendees noted that often during the years of the conflict, schools were seen as an 'oasis of calm', where controversial Northern Ireland political issues were directly avoided. Independent academic research also acknowledged that there has continued to be a reluctance by many schools to deal with difficult issues.⁴⁵

14.18 While the Forum is aware of considerable initial investment by the Department in the earlier half of the 2000s to build the capacity of school teachers, with an aim to support the rolling out of the Citizenship programmes (Personal Development and Mutual Understanding and Learning for Life and Work), we understand that this work has not had the same investment for a number of years.⁴⁶ As a result, due to factors such as retirements and changing of roles, we understand that present teacher capacity in this area is not always optimal.

15. Forum comments

General comments

15.1 The schools sector, its structures, policies, practices and procedures must continue to contribute to creating a welcoming and accessible society. However, this must be set in the context of a region emerging from conflict with a legacy of segregation between the two main communities.

Young people remain at risk of being influenced by sectarian attitudes

15.2 While the peace process has been a political reality since 1998, many children and young people continue to experience regularly the realities of sectarian and racial abuse.⁴⁷ 'Recreational rioting' as it is euphemistically

⁴⁵ <http://www.ccruni.gov.uk/research/csc/mutual.htm>

⁴⁶ CASS coordinator's comments in June 2008 Londonderry/Derry seminar held by the Equality Commission

⁴⁷ E.g. the sectarian-motivated murder of 15 year old Michael McIlveen

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/4752571.stm, attacks by Belfast youths on Roma families in June 2009

<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/roma-families-return-to-belfast-14444160.html>

termed is a marker of how little things have moved on for some sections of our community.

- 15.3 A recent report by UNESCO and the University of Ulster⁴⁸ on the conflict in Northern Ireland identified real risks if our schools fail to teach young people effectively about the causes of the conflict. There continues to be a risk of sectarian attitudes being perpetuated if schools do not challenge them and provide education on promoting diversity and good relations. While paramilitary groups remain largely marginalised by society, a small number of members are active and disaffected and disengaged young people remain at risk of becoming involved.

Heads, Governors and Teachers have clear responsibilities to promote good relations and equality of opportunity issues in schools

- 15.4 All Heads, Governors and Teachers have explicit responsibilities to promote good relations and equality of opportunity issues in schools. These responsibilities exist and have been strengthened as a result of Department of Education policy, other education regulatory authorities' requirements and education legislation.
- 15.5 The recently finalised Department of Education strategy *Every School a Good School – a Policy for School Improvement*⁴⁹ is unequivocal on the status of these responsibilities. How a school promotes equality of opportunity and diversity issues will be a key part of the Education and Training Inspectorate's assessment. The Education and Skills Authority will subsequently use this evaluation to determine how best to provide support services to a school.
- 15.6 Further, a number of other measures provide support to schools, helping them to address equality of opportunity and good relations issues. These include:

⁴⁸ Education in Reconciliation: The Perspectives of Children and Young People in Northern Ireland and Bosnia and Herzegovina, available at http://unesco.ulster.ac.uk/research/research_comp.html

⁴⁹ http://www.deni.gov.uk/esags_policy_for_school_improvement_-_final_version_05-05-2009.pdf, pages 13-14

- The Teachers' Negotiating Committee's Equal Opportunities Policy for Teachers in Schools.⁵⁰
- Education and Training Inspectorate school self-inspection regimes.⁵¹
- Regional Training Unit education modules for Heads and Professional Qualification for Headship Northern Ireland trainees.
- General Teaching Council teacher standards.⁵²
- Department of Education governor training.⁵³

Lack of a Department of Education coherent policy framework on good relations has meant that the educational support systems lack consistency

15.7 While there are clear responsibilities for Heads, Governors and Teachers, the many excellent practices by schools in promoting good relations are, unfortunately, by no means universal across Northern Ireland. Good relations programmes in schools remain voluntary and academic research⁵⁴ and ETI⁵⁵ reports have indicated that some schools have not always fully supported the Department's good relations programmes over the years and the Department has been criticised for not adequately funding them or providing adequate strategic direction.

15.8 The recent Education and Training Inspectorate report⁵⁶ found that:

"...there is no coherent policy framework which outlines clearly what is required of the education system at the various key stages in terms of its contribution to the improvement of [community relations]."

⁵⁰ http://www.deni.gov.uk/microsoft_word_-_tnc_2009-2_teachers_equal_opportunities_policy.pdf

⁵¹ Together Towards Improvement – available at

http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/documents_published_by_the_inspectorate/support-materials/improvement-tti-document.htm. Many ETI indicators reflect the main aims underpinning s.75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, including addressing ethos, equality, respect, mutual understanding, and tolerance issues, and by evaluating how schools develop links with minority and ethnic groups to promote good relationships

⁵² Teaching – the Reflective Profession – available at

http://www.gtcni.org.uk/uploads/docs/GTCNI_Comp_Bmrk%20%20Aug%2007.pdf. The General Teaching Council also includes in its core values equality, inclusion, trust and respect

⁵³ School Governors Handbook, DENI - presently in draft format

⁵⁴ Education for Mutual Understanding: The Initial Statutory Years, by Alan Smith and Alan Robinson, Centre for the Study of Conflict, University of Ulster, 1996, available at <http://www.ccruni.gov.uk/research/csc/mutual.htm>

⁵⁵ <http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/news/news-de/news-de-june-2009/news-de-090609-education-inspectors-find.htm>

⁵⁶ ETI, An Evaluation of the Quality Assurance of Community Relations Funding in a range of Formal and Non-formal Education Settings, June 2009, available at http://www.etini.gov.uk/community_relations_survey_report-4.pdf

- 15.9 The report went further, and commented directly on the efficacy of existing good relations practice -

“Those involved in [community relations] have carried out much good work since the inception of this programme. The investment in this area has yielded benefits, yet current structures do not ensure appropriate levels of progression and quality outcomes for all. As Northern Ireland emerges from conflict and works towards the common purpose of building a ‘peaceful, fair and prosperous society’, it is essential that [community relations] work is maintained and developed to provide the best possible outcomes for all of its children and young people and for the benefit of society as a whole.”⁵⁷

- 15.10 The lack of this coherent policy framework on good relations, as identified by the ETI, is likely to have contributed to an inconsistency in the way that key educational stakeholders support schools and teachers on good relations and equality of opportunity issues.

The role of schools to encourage students to value and be respectful of diversity and difference means that the voluntary approach to good relations programmes in schools cannot continue

- 15.11 The teaching of good relations in many respects has remained a voluntary option, relying on the leadership, goodwill and partnership between neighbouring schools and communities.
- 15.12 However, the Forum believes that understanding diversity and the promotion of good relations should be a crucial and inescapable part of everyone’s school education in Northern Ireland. It is particularly important to address negative public opinion and a worryingly growing intolerance to difference.⁵⁸ This approach will help to counteract the negative media stories over a number of

⁵⁷ http://www.etini.gov.uk/community_relations_survey_report-5.pdf p 12

⁵⁸ Equality Commission Equality Survey, 2008, available at http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/EC_Summary.pdf.

We also note the recent publicity in the media on calls by some for local jobs for local workers - <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/sammy-wilson-give-uk-citizens-jobs-before-migrants-14156213.html>

years of Northern Ireland being labelled the 'race hate capital of Europe' and particularly the summer of 2009 attacks on Roma families in Belfast.⁵⁹

- 15.13 The Forum believes that creating a harmonious school environment where all young people are respected and valued, whatever their identity or community background, will not only put students in an excellent position to learn and develop, but will likely contribute to shaping their attitudes and behaviours in a positive way, once they leave school.
- 15.14 There may well also be a relationship between achieving a harmonious school environment and driving up academic attainment, as students are more confident in themselves and at ease with a diverse world. For instance, Equality Commission research has shown that Traveller young people who are bullied or treated differently by their school peers have a higher risk of poorer academic attainment and attend school less.⁶⁰

Conclusion of comments

- 15.15 The Forum concludes that the teaching and practice of good relations in schools can no longer be optional and needs to be mainstreamed across all schools.

⁵⁹ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/3390249.stm, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-392630/Ulster-Europes-race-hate-capital.html>, http://www.nicem.org.uk/publications_view/item/the-next-stephen-lawrence

⁶⁰ <http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/TravellerChildreninSchools1208.pdf>

16. Suggested way forward

Summary of proposals

- 16.1 The Forum suggests adopting a two-pronged approach: supporting the mainstreaming of good relations in schools, and encouraging educational stakeholders to collaborate more, particularly on a cross-sectoral and cross-community basis.

Suggested mechanism for ensuring the teaching of good relations is mainstreamed in Northern Ireland schools

- 16.2 The Minister of Education and the Department of Education have the authority to give strategic direction to the schools sector on issues of educational policy.⁶¹ This is often done via public consultation, policy documents, press events and statements, and written guidance in the form of school circulars.
- 16.3 The Department's recently issued draft school circular on the education of children and young people from the Traveller community⁶² is a case in point. The Forum considers it to be an extremely positive policy development that significantly takes forward the promotion of good relations in schools for Traveller young people. The draft school circular outlines how schools can support and promote diversity and respect for Travellers, but also goes further in supporting respect for different cultures. It aims to promote inclusion and participation, increase understanding of different traditions and cultures, and to ensure all children feel safe and able to access education. It also promotes leadership from teachers in terms of tackling discrimination and racism and building relationships with parents and communities. Furthermore, it sets a benchmark for pursuing the diversity conversation across the education sector for children and young people, whatever their identity or background. It could therefore very usefully be used as a starting point for supporting the mainstreaming of good relations in schools.

⁶¹ Article 101 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986

⁶² http://www.deni.gov.uk/traveller_circular_-_consultation_-_circular_-_version_3_-_pdf.pdf

- 16.4 The draft Traveller circular also links in the work of other educational regulatory bodies, such as the General Teaching Council. There is specific reference to the General Teaching Council's teacher competencies,⁶³ and in particular to teachers' need to develop both knowledge and understanding of the pupils' cultures, languages and faiths and to address the implications for learning arising from these.
- 16.5 The Forum calls on the Department of Education to draw up a School Circular with the purpose of unequivocally stating the compulsory requirement for all schools to make good relations programmes a key component in curriculum Citizenship programmes. This should be supported by ESA and other supporting bodies in its implementation.

Sharing and publicising good practice to promote good relations

- 16.6 The Forum recommends that the Department share and publicise the work and experiences of schools that have been successful in sharing and collaborating, particularly on a cross-community basis. The working practices of schools, particularly in the Integrated sector, should be examined and good practice models developed to overcome the challenges of bringing children together from different backgrounds. These schools could also act as champions, to outline the practical actions needed to be successful and lessons learnt for future practice.
- 16.7 School collaboration partnerships and locally-based collaborative networks, from the informal integrated sector, also have an important contribution to play in the promotion of community reconciliation. The Forum considers that existing collaborative networks should be used to inform the entire schools sector of the benefits of working together.
- 16.8 This sharing of good practice could also be achieved by twinning schools, so pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds or with lower than expected attainment records could be paired with better-performing schools on a cross-sector or cross-community basis, where appropriate.

⁶³ General Teaching Council, Teaching – the Reflective Profession, available at http://www.gtcni.org.uk/uploads/docs/GTCNI_Comp_Bmrk%20%20Aug%2007.pdf

- 16.9 The Forum further recommends that links and resources for all this good practice should be maintained on the Department of Education website.

Capacity building programmes for existing school teaching staff

- 16.10 To support the mainstreaming of good relations programmes in schools and the suggested collaborative work at a schools level, the Forum suggests that the Department and the Education and Skills Authority will need to ensure all teaching staff are equipped with the skills to deliver education on good relations issues in this new shared environment. This will be crucial in terms of the likely continued rationalisation of the schools estate, whereby pupils may join a school with a different ethos to which they have been accustomed. It is essential that all new students feel included and supported by their new school.
- 16.11 With respect to curriculum Citizenship programmes, as well as across whole-school programmes, the Forum suggests that the Department of Education and ESA provide additional support to existing school teaching staff as part of their Continuing Professional Development. This could include appropriate training and professional support programmes. The Department and ESA should also provide training to ensure all teaching staff are equipped with the essentials skills to deliver education in the new shared environment of collaboration between schools, as a result of implementing the Entitlement Framework.

Capacity building with parents and local communities

- 16.12 Schools need a majority of school parents and local communities to accept, value and respect the need for good relations programmes in schools and to address entrenched community difference in a constructive manner. Failing to do so will ultimately stifle the development and growth of productive learning partnerships, thereby limiting progress and continuing the patterns of inequalities and poor community relations.

- 16.13 In order to effectively mainstream good relations in schools and to promote greater cross-community cooperation and collaboration, the pivotal role of community engagement must also be considered. Schools and communities may require some capacity building to develop their confidence and skills to trust more, break down barriers and to work in partnership with others. The success of, for example, the Extended Schools programme may hinge on how well a school and their existing participants welcome those from different backgrounds and communities into their facilities. The vision of creating 'open community' schools and facilities must take account of potential chill factors. Schools must be promoted as open and shared spaces in order to encourage participation from all sections of the community.
- 16.14 An inclusive approach with the participation of representatives from all the various local communities should therefore be pursued. This may have implications for community planning and require capacity building for those involved in local democracy and service delivery.
- 16.15 The Forum therefore suggests that the Department develop a strategy to build capacity with school parents and local communities, to support them to explore, value and respect the need for the teaching of good relations programmes in schools, as well as the need for greater collaboration and cooperation between local clusters of schools, particularly on a cross-community basis. Parental and community partnerships are necessary to enable and progress dialogue around difficult and sensitive issues. Tackling long-held opinions and beliefs will require support and tailored good relations programmes will be required.

Keeping local communities fully informed of the opportunity for possible collaboration, where school are at risk of being closed or new schools are planned

- 16.16 The Forum respects the rights of parents to decide the schooling environment where their children will be educated. However, it is important that parents are fully informed of all relevant information when making these

decisions. The Forum is aware of a model whereby parents in large numbers preferred to opt for a cross-community collaborative model of schooling, rather than risk the closure of local schools.⁶⁴ This approach reveals the benefit of exploring all possible options.

- 16.17 The Forum therefore suggests that the Department, ESA and local schools should always keep parents fully informed of all the possibilities and options for collaboration, particularly on a cross-community basis, when local schools are being considered for closure or new schools are being planned. This could require some external work, such as deliberative polling or advocacy work, particularly where affected schools that have already chosen to collaborate on a number of issues, such as area learning communities, or sharing sporting and academic facilities and resources.

Strategic leadership

- 16.18 A number of Department of Education and Education and Training Inspectorate reports have identified weaknesses with how good relations programmes in schools have been managed in Northern Ireland. They have indicated that some schools have not always fully supported the Department's good relations programmes and the Department has been criticised for not adequately funding them or providing sufficient strategic direction.
- 16.19 The Forum recommends that to ensure the teaching of good relations in the school curriculum is successfully mainstreamed as an underpinning value across all schools, the Minister of Education and the Department of Education give greater strategic direction to the schools sector. To support this work, the Department should promote more effectively the systematic sharing, collaboration and managing of resources by schools, particularly on a cross-community basis, as the preferred method of delivering and achieving educational targets and objectives. This recommendation should also be included in the

⁶⁴ In a Fermanagh education newsletter, 59% of parents indicated they would prefer all school types to be retained as they are. However, if both a controlled and a maintained primary school in a local community were faced with closure, 85% of parents indicated they would favour either the merging of both schools into one viable school or the sharing of a campus between them, rather than having to close both schools and the pupils having to travel significant distance to continue their education. Fermanagh Shared Education Trust Newsletter, December 2009, available at <http://www.fermanaghtrust.org/cms/uploads/1/newsletter.pdf>

Governments forthcoming Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy.

Long-term and appropriate budget to supporting all schools to provide good relations programmes

16.20 The Forum considers that to support the mainstreaming of good relations in schools, the Department of Education needs to identify and commit a long-term and appropriate budget to supporting all schools to provide good relations programmes and practice, thereby guaranteeing widespread re-prioritisation across the schools sector. This concurs with findings from the recent ETI report, cited above.

Targeted Departmental budget priorities to promote collaboration and partnerships, particularly in those areas most in need, and where possible on a cross-community basis

16.21 The Forum is extremely concerned that large sections of our society have not sufficiently benefited from the peace dividend and for many people, their future economic and social prospects remain poor. The Forum wishes to see a significant reduction in the academic achievement and attainment gap between high-attaining students and those with poor attainment records. However, we are mindful that one of the biggest challenges and catalysts for change is to bring forward workable proposals within a climate of reduced government budgets and calls by Ministers for efficiency savings.⁶⁵

16.22 In areas that continue to experience considerable community conflict, segregation and disadvantage, the Forum recommends that the Department and ESA should offer more systemic and targeted support and resources. This should include assistance in partnership working and by sharing good practice from other educational sectors, such as the use of peer support, and attending other schools for particular classes. This should be particularly

⁶⁵ Finance Minister Sammy Wilson, recently told CIPFA's conference delegates that 'public bodies must learn to achieve more for less', and that a priority for government spending would be the expansion of the private sector. He went on to say that 'it might be necessary to close schools as part of the administration's cost saving'.
<http://www.publicfinance.co.uk/news/2009/10/wilson-urges-more-services-for-less/>

encouraged by the Department on a cross-community basis.

Greater focus on maximising value for money and minimising duplication of services

16.23 The Forum recommends that the Department, ESA and other key educational stakeholders put a greater emphasis on maximising value for money and avoiding duplication of educational provision, by placing a greater focus on existing drivers, policies, practices, and procedures that encourage greater sharing and collaboration, particularly on a cross-community basis. These include:

- Every School a Good School – a Policy for School Improvement – with a focus on the best educational interests of all children, whatever the identity. This should particularly include the needs of those most at risk of not reaching their potential, such as the children of new residents and Travellers.
- Adding good relations conditions to budgetary allocations criteria - the Forum advises the Department to put a greater emphasis on encouraging schools to take on a greater commitment to collaboration and partnerships on a cross-community basis. This should be reflected in budgetary allocations criteria, particularly in relation to capital builds and development plans that focus on relationship building.
- The Review of Public Administration and Community Planning – by encouraging greater local and regional clustering of services, particularly with respect to school and community resources, based on whole community need, rather than continued separate community provision. Good relations must be a direct underpinning principle within this planning process. Education should be seen in the broadest sense of the word - a holistic approach which takes account of external family and community life as well as the school environment.

- The Entitlement Framework – sustained cross-community sharing and partnership will be necessary to build greater trust between communities. The delivery of the Entitlement Framework offers huge potential for schools to collaborate both across sectors and among communities, as most schools will not be able to offer the full range of subjects required. The Forum therefore recommends that the Department of Education and ESA encourage schools to see what collaboration they can engage in on a cross-community basis to meet the Entitlement Framework requirements, such as sharing classes, teachers, and schools' facilities.

- Area Learning Communities – the ongoing challenges for schools are to plan to widen and mainstream existing collaboration at a local level and to set future targets with these factors in mind. To encourage collaboration further, the Forum recommends that the Department add a cross-sectoral and cross-community element to the funding criteria for the Collaboration Element, and to further support the roll out of ALCs to all areas.

- Extended Schools – crucial to the success of the Extended Schools programme may be how well a school and their existing participants welcome those from different backgrounds and communities into the school's facilities and then successfully engage with them. How potential chill factors are dealt with will also be important. Schools must be promoted as open and shared spaces in order to encourage participation from all sections of the community. An inclusive approach with the participation of representatives from all the various local communities should therefore be pursued. This may have implications for community planning and require capacity building for those involved in local democracy and service delivery. The Forum therefore recommends that the Education and Skills Authority, schools and governors implement ways to reduce community fears and to ensure local school

facilities are welcoming to all, through the development of an outreach programme that welcomes everyone, whatever their community background or identity and particularly those who may see themselves as being members of a minority community. We acknowledge that particular local circumstances may require tailored good relations approaches to be developed. Schools should be encouraged to apply for the additional 15% of funding that is available for collaboration, on the basis that collaboration is cross community.

Developing tools that measure change

- 16.24 The Department of Education and ESA must be better able to measure the extent to which their investment in education is contributing to greater sharing and community cohesion. The Forum recommends that the Department develop a set of targets, as well as a monitoring and evaluation framework to measure the changes to the level of collaboration and cooperation between local schools. This should be published yearly and publicised widely.

Teacher, head teacher and governor training

- 16.25 Heads, Governors and Teachers have clear responsibilities to promote both good relations and equality of opportunity issues in schools. These responsibilities have been explicitly outlined and strengthened as a result of Department of Education policy, other education regulatory authorities' requirements and education legislation. To support the mainstreaming of good relations in schools, the Forum calls upon the Department to work with the various teacher training colleges, Regional Training Unit and ESA (in relation to governor training), to ensure that amendments are made to their various training programmes, making good relations modules compulsory components of study.

Greater sharing and collaboration between teacher training colleges

16.26 The Forum suggests that there needs to be stronger sharing and collaboration between the various teacher training institutions in Northern Ireland and that this should be encouraged by the Department and ESA. The intention would be to ensure that all student teachers, whatever their community background, have the opportunity to experience the different educational sectors and school ethos, enabling positive engagement that could dispel any myths or chill factors. We consider that all student teachers should be given an appropriate amount of time and opportunity to exchange learning opportunities between the various sectors. We also consider that all new teacher training courses/programmes should encompass an element of teaching in another sector.

17. Conclusion

17.1 The Forum believes that a combination of the recommendations outlined in this Challenge Paper will provide greater consistency and certainty for good relations policies, practices and procedures in Northern Ireland schools. These joined-up approaches will also contribute significantly to taking forward in concrete actions, the Programme for Government's priority of promoting tolerance, inclusion and health and well-being.

17.2 The Forum's approach is to advocate social change through existing educational structures. However, we wish to see the Government, schools and other key educational stakeholders take a sharper focus and demonstrate a long-term commitment to how equality of opportunity and good relations are delivered, within a well-structured, resourced and monitored framework. The Department of Education and ESA must be better able to measure the extent to which their investment in education is contributing to greater sharing and community cohesion.

17.3 Many opportunities exist within the current climate and while there has been considerable progress, more work is

needed to be done. Good relations needs to be mainstreamed within the policies and strategies of the Department and other educational stakeholders to provide a consistent and coherent approach in relation to addressing the legacy of the past and building a shared and better future. We believe that doing so will have a very real positive impact on the Government's priorities, in relation to educational attainment and lifetime opportunities, as well as significantly contributing to a more stable and peaceful society.

- 17.4 For instance, policy initiatives such as the Entitlement Framework, area-based planning, area learning communities and the Extended Schools programme⁶⁶ offer schools an excellent opportunity to initiate and develop collaboration, particularly across communities. In order to maximise cross-community usage of school facilities, it will be necessary to examine existing and potential barriers that may reduce access or cause fear.
- 17.5 There remain huge ongoing challenges for our school system. It is undergoing a considerable process of reform to tackle the persistent underachievement and underperformance of many children. It is hoped that the proposed changes will lead to a more open and accessible education system.
- 17.6 Whilst the Forum's remit is to promote good relations, we do have a keen interest in educational attainment, given the links between poverty and poor educational performance and the future ramifications for those children currently living in poverty. The Forum considers that the best way to promote good relations in the current climate of education uncertainty and financial restrictions, is to use existing planning and policy developments to tackle both educational barriers and social exclusion via the promotion of partnership, collaboration and sharing.
- 17.7 The reality is that our schools system must be more than just about achieving good academic grades and creating the opportunities for getting a good job. Education in our schools continues to be delivered in the context of a divided society, and this division must be taken into account.

⁶⁶ Particularly with the incentivised criteria of clustering

Raising educational attainment is key, but schools and teachers must make a greater contribution to social cohesion and reconciliation, thereby preparing children to be comfortable and confident in a diverse society. It is not enough to talk about difference in the classroom; discussions on the promotion and respect for diversity must be actively promoted and sought out through a whole-school approach.

17.8 The Education and Skills Authority and the Department of Education have a real opportunity to work with schools, teachers, the training institutions and the Education and Training Inspectorate to devise tools that can measure progress in the areas of partnership and sharing and how these approaches are impacting on performance and social cohesion.

17.9 This Challenge Paper has made a number of recommendations which we believe will make a real impact on the delivery of Government targets and objectives. We hope that this will stimulate debate and discussion, leading to concrete actions which improve the educational experience and outcomes for all our children.

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