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Mainstreaming Shared Education: A Summary Review of Evidence

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Introduction

The Social Change Initiative (SCI) is an international, not-for-profit organization based in Belfast and its mission is to improve the effectiveness of activism for social change, particularly in divided societies. SCI is responsible for managing the interests of grants made by the Atlantic Philanthropies through the AP/DSC partnership with the Northern Ireland Executive. This includes representing Atlantic on the DSC Shared Education Signature Programme board. Atlantic's interests in shared education date back to 2006 and over that period it has invested over £30m in shared education. Its support spanned developing and growing shared education in hundreds of schools across Northern Ireland, commissioning research and analysis and helping to support advocacy.

Background

Shared Education, at its most basic, involves 'the provision of opportunities for children and young people from different community backgrounds to learn together' (Department of Education NI, 2015: 10). Its history can be located in early curriculum based education interventions in the 1980s such as Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) which sought to encourage contact between pupils attending controlled and maintained schools. Early contact schemes funded under EMU were light-touch and fairly superficial but a movement towards wider education reforms in 2001 recommended that Northern Ireland's post primary schools were grouped into collegiates (Burns Report). Although this idea was rejected, the Costello Report (2004) recommended a broad obligatory entitlement curriculum which necessitated schools having to collaborate to deliver improved educational outcomes for pupils. The Bain Report (2006) endorsed the move towards school collaboration to make more effective use of resources, provide fairer access to the curriculum, and promote reconciliation. The entitlement curriculum was given statutory effect in the same year guaranteeing all pupils access to a minimum number of courses at Key Stage 4 and Post-16, of which at least one third must be general and one third applied. Collaboration became an integral part of delivering mainstream education in Northern Ireland.

The momentum for collaboration provided an opportunity for schools do this on a cross-community basis, offering not only educational but also reconciliation benefits. Queen's University, with the support of Atlantic Philanthropies and the International Fund for Ireland, conducted pilot work (Shared Education Programme) involving 65 schools and 12 collaborative partnerships (2007-2010) in a sustained contact initiative. Such was the success of this work that a second phase was commissioned and its results began to influence the education policy agenda. The 2011-15 NI Executive Programme for Government contained commitments to shared education, and the Department of Education launched a new Community Relations, Equality and Diversity (CRED) policy in 2011 aimed at providing opportunities for children and young people to build relationships with those of different backgrounds and traditions, through formal and non-formal education.

By 2012 the (then) Education Minister had established an independent ministerial advisory group on advancing shared education which recommended a further extension of this provision. This came in the form of the Shared Education Signature Project (SESP) established jointly in 2014 by Atlantic Philanthropies, Office of the First and Deputy First Minister (now the Executive Office), and Department of Education. The Department of Education followed with a shared education policy entitled: *Sharing Works: A Policy for Shared Education* (2015) and the *Shared Education Act (Northern Ireland)* 2016 which provided the legislative framework for enacting shared education, placing a duty on both the Department of Education and the Education Authority to "encourage, facilitate and promote shared education". The SESP is focused on raising educational standards and promoting reconciliation through shared learning and collaborative working¹.

¹The paper entitled *Shared Education – Core Components* defines the purposes of shared education in the following way:

- Deliver educational benefits.
- Share and make effective and efficient use of resources within the whole partnership.
- Provide opportunities for all children in each setting to engage in shared education.
- Within both education settings and the wider community, promote good relations and respect for identity, diversity and community cohesion.

In addition, Peace IV is also providing funding (€29m: 2017-2022) under its Shared Education Programme entitled Collaborating Through Sharing in Education (CASE) to schools in the six Border Counties of Ireland and schools in Northern Ireland which are **not** currently involved in SESP (those with limited or no prior experience of sharing). Through working in partnership, the participating schools will promote community cohesion, enhance educational outcomes for all pupils, and provide shared professional development.

At the time of writing (January 2020) some 657 schools from Northern Ireland are working in 274 shared education partnerships. In addition, there are currently 13 cross-border partnerships and 34 partnerships in the Republic of Ireland². Shared education is therefore a key component of the overall education system.

Moving beyond the SESP, the Department of Education is committed to mainstreaming shared education and has funded a number of partnerships (cohort 1 partnerships initially, and then all involved in SESP) to participate in a 2-year pilot funding model 2018-2020. The results of the pilot are being used to inform the mainstreaming of shared education partnerships from then onwards.

With the return of devolution in January 2020, the British and Irish Government launched the *New Decade, New Approach* document which includes the following commitments to shared education:

- Programme for Government 2019/20 - an enhanced strategic focus and supporting actions on educating our children and young people together in the classroom, in order to build a shared and integrated society (page 40).
- PfG Strategic Priority, 2020 and beyond - The education system has a diversity of school types, each with its own distinctive ethos and values. However, it is not sustainable. The parties acknowledge the progress made in developing new models of sharing, cooperation and integration...The parties agree that the Executive will commission and oversee an independent fundamental review with a focus on quality and sustainability (page 43).

This short paper aims to review the existing evidence on shared education.

²Source: Duffy, G., Gallagher, T. and Robinson, G. (October 2019) *Shared Education and School-Community: Benefits and Challenges*. Queen's University Belfast.

Review of Existing Evidence and Contribution to Mainstreaming

The academic and policy research evidence contained in table 1 below indicates several clear findings:

- (a) **Contact:** Sustained high quality contact between pupils from different religions in shared education settings results in positive reconciliation effects demonstrated through increased outgroup trust (trusting Catholics or Protestants to treat you well) and reduced intergroup anxiety (feeling nervous around Catholics or Protestants). Qualitative research on reconciliation impacts of shared education offers strong evidence of the richness of relationships forged through consistent, high quality contact between pupils and the potential for spillover effects in to the wider community. In short, relationships between Catholic and Protestant pupils have become normalized. It is common in shared education schools to see pupils wearing different school uniforms as a regular part of the education experience. There is some evidence from the research that indicates reconciliation and education effects of shared education are indivisible.

- b) **Curriculum:** Shared education contributes significantly to the overall school improvement agenda. This should be viewed in holistic terms beyond the important attainment of Key Stage results to a skills set which prepares pupils for the world of work: communication, collaboration, creativity and critical thinking. Shared education as an integral part of the curriculum enhances core values of respect and self-esteem. It broadens the range of opportunities through greater curriculum choice and offers students a richer experience when schools combine their teacher expertise and facilities. Broader curriculum choice has improved pupil attainment by offering subjects in which students can excel that were previously inaccessible to them.

- (c) **Collaboration:** Collaboration between cross-sectoral schools creates a system of professional self-improvement and, as a by-product, breaks down traditional sectoral cleavages. Effective collaboration can help improve student performance and engagement. Collaboration between schools enhances social capital through Principal and Teacher networks and strengthens distributed leadership. Teachers benefit from collaborative practice which can deepen and extend their own professional learning through shared resources, common policies, and the enhanced use of technology in teaching and school planning. In short, the research suggests collaboration is leading to the re-engineering of some school systems and processes which provide a milieu that enhances the learning environment.

So, how does this corpus of research and policy evidence contribute to the ongoing debate on mainstreaming?

- In the first instance, it should provide reassurance to policy makers that the weight of evidence is such that mainstreaming is a sensible and feasible way forward, not only in terms of fulfilling the duty under the Shared Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 to ‘encourage, facilitate and promote shared education’, but also, as a contribution to wider Programme for Government goals. Specifically, PFG goals include: improved educational outcomes for children and young people; schools and pupils participate in shared education; children and young people and adults feel at ease in each other’s schools and communities; and, children and young people contribute positively to community and society.

Evidence and research from key stakeholders in shared education identified several enablers to mainstream shared education, outlined here in no order of importance:

- There is a greater need to anchor shared education in the wider education policy landscape including, but not limited to: youth services, area planning and professional development. This would result in greater coordination and spillover across these functions but also remove the perception that shared education is a standalone programme.
- The dual goals of achieving reconciliation and educational outcomes, with the former less well specified in the existing SESP, could be better achieved if greater linkages were forged between shared education and other initiatives focusing on Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) and school improvement. This could be done by implementing strategies that provide professional development *through* and *for* shared education as in the Network for Shared School Improvement initiative and partnership-based TPL for shared education. The new Pupil Pathway will also help to bridge the disconnect between these two key pillars of shared education.
- The nature of shared education (schools collaborating) can be in conflict with systemic features of the wider education system where schools operate as individual units competing for students, often based on how they perform as a discrete centres of learning. The pilot funding model delegated the shared education budget to the lead school in the partnership. This was not without problems according to the evaluation of the pilot funding project, some of which were reported as being linked to the Education Authority's new finance system. The follow-on 2019-20 pilot funding model addresses this by funding individual schools rather than the partnership. At its most radical, shared education and shared school improvement initiatives demand an overhaul of how schools are financed with greater creativity in moving from individual schools being treated as a single unit of financial analysis.
- Schools are highly incentivized by the work of the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) and often use their reports as a key marketing tool. To enable and embed shared education, participation in shared education should become a necessary criterion for the highest grade of inspection. In addition, at recruitment, candidates for positions of Principals and Vice Principals should have experience of cross-sectoral collaboration. For the purposes of professional development, newly qualified teachers should also accumulate experience of working in shared education settings.
- There is a fundamental need to move from an inputs-based model of shared education, typified by the pilot funding scheme, to an outcomes-based approach consistent with the OBA model currently operating across other parts of the Northern Ireland public sector.

We set out in table 1 a summary of the evidence categorized under 3 headings: contact, curriculum and collaboration.

Table 1: Mainstreaming Shared Education: The Evidence³

The aim of SESP is to improve the educational and reconciliation outcomes through schools working collaboratively

Contact	Curriculum	Collaboration
Research Evidence		
<p>Knox, C (2010): Qualitative data collected from first cohort of SEP projects (comprising 12 partnerships, 60 schools and 5,000 pupils). First hand accounts from teachers and senior staff delivering shared education indicates porous school boundaries and positive reconciliation effects through sustained pupil contact.</p> <p>Hughes et al (2012): Quasi-experimental design which gathered data from 577 pupils in 14 schools (162 participating in shared education and 415 not involved). Those involved reported more positive tendencies to outgroup, an increased number of outgroup friends, and reduced inter-group anxiety. Research findings confirm the value of contact as a mechanism for promoting more harmonious relationships, and affirm the Sharing Education Programme as an initiative that can help promote social cohesion in a society that remains deeply divided.</p> <p>Hughes et al (2013): Data were collected through a survey of more than 3,500 pupils and analyses show that, irrespective of school type, intergroup contact is strongly associated with more positive orientations to the ethno-religious outgroup.</p> <p>Boroovah and Knox (2015): This is a research monograph (208 pages, 8 chapters) which examined, inter alia, through four case study schools, the economics (costs/benefits) of shared education and financial returns to education. The authors also conduct an analysis of survey data (n = 575 participants) to assess if there were significant reconciliation effects associated with schools involved in the programme. The economic analysis finds a total net education benefit for schools involved in shared education. In terms of reconciliation, the results show that shared education interventions resulted in participants being 'more favourably disposed towards the other community' (as measured quantitatively) in areas where sectarian hostility and suspicion of 'the other' were likely to be highest.</p>	<p>Boroovah and Knox (2013): This research quantifies the educational returns for pupils participating in four SEP partnerships. The authors analyse the benefits from shared education in the context of individual returns to education, defined as the wage premium of someone who holds a qualification over someone who does not, keeping all the other educational achievements and control variables constant. They show the net benefits of participating in shared education defined through increased future earnings of pupils.</p> <p>Boroovah and Knox (2017): Study uses schools leavers' data from 22,764 pupils to identify characteristics of pupils, and therefore schools, who have most to offer or gain in terms of educational improvement. Paper argues that the configuration of SE partnerships could be informed by these findings: optimal education improvement will result from SE schools which are geographically and educationally proximate.</p> <p>Gallagher, Duffy and Robinson (2018): Qualitative and quantitative study on impact of shared education on school improvement. Six partnerships involving 14 principals and 31 teachers participated in interviews or focus group discussions. On-line survey with 134 responses from primary and post primary involved in SESP. Teachers and school principals concluded that school collaboration has enhanced opportunities for pupils, improved pupil learning and broadened curriculum choice.</p> <p>Education and Training Inspectorate (2018): From April 2015, the ETI completed evaluations of 125 of the 159 SESP partnerships. Of these 125 baseline evaluations, 107 partnerships were monitored on at least one occasion. The ETI concluded: 'SESP contributed to improving the learning experiences provided for, and the outcomes attained by pupils across all phases'.</p>	<p>Range of studies which span quantitative, qualitative and mix methods design, all of which have a specific focus on school collaboration as a means of school improvement. Research evidence demonstrates that effective collaboration can help schools: improve student performance and engagement (<i>Chapman and Muijs 2014; Chapman et al. 2009, 2011; CUREE 2005; Hadfield and Chapman 2009; Hadfield et al. 2006</i>); positively impact school leadership (<i>Chapman 2008; Hadfield and Jopling 2012; Hargreaves 2010; Kubiak and Bertram 2010; Harris 2008</i>); and positively impact teacher development, performance and motivation (<i>Ainscow et al. 2006; Chapman 2008; Chapman et al. 2009; Hadfield and Jopling 2012; Hadfield et al. 2006; Harris and Jones 2010; Muijs et al. 2010</i>).</p> <p>Education and Training Inspectorate (2014): Outlined a framework for school partnerships to self-evaluate 'the extent and quality of their shared education provision and offers targets for development'.</p> <p>Gallagher (2016): Overview research article which outlines the genesis of collaborative networks in SESP and the research which helped to inform shared education as a concept. Provides evidence of the importance of regular, sustained contact through collaborative partnerships in shared education. Collaboration is also a conduit to achieve wider economic, education and social goals.</p> <p>Duffy and Gallagher (2017): Three-year ethnographic study of Foyle Contested Space Education Partnership involving ethnographic observation of school classrooms, semi-structured interviews with school leaders, teachers partnership co-ordinators, pupils and parents. Provides evidence of the transformative potential of cross-sectoral collaboration: schools have developed bridging mechanisms, and their connections are increasingly elaborate, innovative and robust. These connections address educational outcomes, but also reflect community priorities.</p>

³This list does not claim to be exhaustive but rather extracts the key research and policy papers offering evidence for mainstreaming shared education

Table 1: Mainstreaming Shared Education: The Evidence *continued*

Contact	Curriculum	Collaboration
Research Evidence		
<p><i>Education and Training Inspectorate (2016):</i> Interim report on SESP in which ETI carried out 122 evaluations of 93 shared education partnerships. Inspectors concluded that ‘SESP is progressing well particularly in the area of leadership...although impact cannot yet be measured, it is clear that within partnerships, schools are creating inclusive learning communities’.</p> <p><i>Oxford University and Queen’s University Centre for Shared Education (2019):</i> The Centre has been conducting an on-line survey of pupils involved in shared education in an effort to track attitudinal changes over 5 years. Data were collected from 6,177 pupils in 69 schools through 5 surveys of pupils in year 8 – 12 of which 54% of pupils experience shared education. The research tested main differences across 4 broad outcome categories (outgroup attitudes; outgroup trust; intergroup anxiety; and future contact) between pupils who participated in shared education and those who did not.</p> <p>The results were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participating in shared education had a positive effect on outgroup trust and intergroup anxiety • Participating in shared education has a stronger, more positive effect on outgroup trust for participants with higher past positive OR past negative contact experiences • Effects sizes in each case were small which is in line with other studies involving large-scale intervention and prevention programmes • Small effects can accumulate into more significant changes over time, especially when they involve (as in SESP) many hundreds of thousands of students in many schools. <p><i>Loader, R. and Hughes, J. (2019):</i> This comprehensive study explores ‘how key stakeholders envisage the future of shared education on order to inform the mainstreaming agenda’. The fieldwork was conducted between February and April 2019 with 28 key stakeholders to include: civil servants and education officials; school sectoral bodies; academics; and principals/vice principals from schools with significant involvement in shared education. Key findings include: the need for greater clarification regarding the nature of reconciliation outcomes; and, examples in the Revised Curriculum (listening skills and collaborative competencies) which are necessary for reconciliation, suggesting ‘reconciliation outcomes and educational outcomes are indivisible’.</p>	<p><i>Loader, R. and Hughes, J. (2019) Queen’s University Centre for Shared Education:</i> (see study details under adjoining ‘Contact’ column). Key finding of this study is that the current Northern Ireland Curriculum is ‘appropriate to, and supportive of, the delivery of shared education and its aims across all school contexts’.</p> <p>Opinion was divided however between stakeholders who felt that bringing pupils together afforded the opportunity to explore issues of identity and difference through the curriculum and those that ‘valorised the exploration of difference above other forms of engagement’ such as collaborative education activities in the natural learning environment.</p> <p>Study also considered the impact of shared education at the levels of the school, community and local area. It concluded ‘when compared with previous initiatives to enhance social cohesion through schools...shared education had the greatest potential for impact. This was due both to its provision of regular, sustained opportunities for contact and its involvement of schools for all sectors’.</p> <p><i>Loader, Hughes and Turner (2019):</i> Research considers what practitioners’ understanding of the long-term vision for shared education and how this influenced the delivery of shared education at school level. Data gathered from school principals and shared education coordinators from 16 school partnerships. Participants reported that ‘teachers’ practice had benefitted from opportunities to exchange ideas and resources and to learn from others’. Interviewees also ‘acknowledged the difficulty of isolating the impact of shared education and attributing positive outcomes to shared provision....While hard data was absent, participants could nonetheless point to demonstrable impact on the delivery of education’.</p>	<p><i>Education Authority (2019):</i> This report evaluated the impact of the different models used to deliver Shared Education Teacher Professional Learning (TPL). The models included: partnership TPL; shared education TPL modules; post-primary bespoke shared education TPL; and, shared education middle leadership programme. The evaluation gathered data through: a survey of teachers (n=440 respondents); module facilitators (n=2); one-to-one interviews with 4 partnerships; 6 partnership reports; and 6 practitioner focus groups. One key finding was that partnership TPL (by far the largest TPL model) ‘was highly effective in developing relationships among teachers and leaders, as well as contributing to whole school improvement in particular, the sharing and development of learning and teaching strategies’.</p> <p><i>Duffy et al, (2019a):</i> This research report provides a baseline of attitudes and perceptions of teachers in schools involved in the Network for Shared School Improvement (NSSI) within the DSC Shared Education Signature Project. Data were gathered via a survey of teachers (n=637 responses) from 17 partnerships. Key finding is that ‘teachers who had been involved in NSSI and school collaboration generally perceived it to have had positive impacts on their schools’...and ‘that collaboration with teachers from other schools had enhanced their opportunities to learn how to address issues related to diversity and difference’</p>

Table 1: Mainstreaming Shared Education: The Evidence *continued*

Contact	Curriculum	Collaboration
Research Evidence		
<p><i>Duffy et al (2019b):</i> This study explored ways in which schools involved in shared education partnerships made connections with their respective communities. Data were collected from 5 school partnerships involved in SESP. The study found that shared education ‘helped many schools to make better connections with parents in their own schools but also parents from other schools’. In addition, schools felt that ‘shared education helped connect parents across communities’.</p>		
Policy Evidence		
<p><i>Ministerial Advisory Group (2013):</i> Finds evidence, for the majority engaged in shared education that ‘such experiences are encouraging more positive attitudes and relationships between children and young people from different backgrounds’.</p> <p><i>Together Building a United Community (2013):</i> Commits Government to ‘enhance the quality and extent of shared education provision, thus ensuring that sharing in education becomes a central part of every child’s educational experience’</p> <p><i>Department of Education (2015):</i> ‘Against the background of an education system which reflects traditional divides in society Shared Education is a crucial way to break down barriers, nurture and improve community relations’.</p> <p><i>Education and Training Inspectorate (2018):</i> Finds evidence that ‘through learning with others, the pupils developed positive attitudes, including empathy, respect and inclusion’</p>	<p><i>Department of Education (2015):</i> Concludes that shared education offers significant educational benefits: ‘The education case – improving access for learners to a wider choice of subjects encompassing the full range of the curriculum; increasing access to specialist teaching and to modern facilities; and facilitating the sharing of ideas and good practice between education providers.’</p> <p><i>Shared Education Learning Forum (SELF, 2017):</i> Concludes that one of the key objectives of SESP is to deliver improved educational outcomes for participating schools and ‘the evidence gathered to date suggests that this is being achieved already, even though the signature project is only now reaching its mid- point’.</p> <p><i>2018/19 Pilot Funding Model Evaluation Report (2019):</i> Conducted by the Department of Education, this report evaluates the impact that the 2018/19 pilot funding model had on the quality and scale (including curriculum and pupil experiences) of shared education delivery when compared to previous DSC SESP funded delivery. Data were collected through: Education Authority financial and monitoring returns; surveys of pupils (n=96 school visits), school leaders (n=51); and, a consultation event.</p> <p>Key finding: ‘almost all survey respondents indicated...the positive impact that shared education had on community relations and educational outcomes’. The evaluation recommended continued support through funding and resources to deliver shared education through a range of curricular areas.</p>	<p><i>Northern Ireland Assembly, Education Committee (2015):</i> The Committee recommended that Shared Education be defined as curriculum-based interactions that always foreground educational improvement and involve children and young people in sustained whole school/organisation activities across all educational phases.</p> <p><i>Department of Education (2016):</i> Promotes building capacity through collaborative practice and supporting a self-sustaining system of professional learning amongst teachers. The Education Authority subsequently developed collaborative models for shared education Teacher Professional Learning within the SESP.</p> <p><i>Shared Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2016:</i> Provides the legislative framework for enacting shared education, placing a duty on both the Department of Education and the Education Authority to ‘encourage, facilitate and promote shared education’.</p> <p>The purpose of shared education in the Act is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to deliver educational benefits to children and young persons; • to promote the efficient and effective use of resources; • to promote equality of opportunity; • to promote good relations; and • to promote respect for identity, diversity and community cohesion. <p><i>Shared Education – Core Components (2019):</i> Basic information guide which defined from the Shared Education Act 2016:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what shared education means • the purpose of the Act • core components of shared education: education together; working together; and the purpose of shared education. <p>The document also lists other forms of collaboration (Entitlement Framework and Extended Schools).</p>

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The A T L A N T I C *Philanthropies*

Atlantic Philanthropies is a global philanthropic foundation that aims to advance opportunity and tackle the root causes of inequity. Over its lifetime it awarded grants of more than 8\$bn in 8 countries. Atlantic operated in Northern Ireland for 25 years, investing 570\$m of grants to cement peace, improve public services, and protect and promote human rights. Among its final investments in Northern Ireland was a collaborative initiative with the NI Executive that aimed to improve services and outcomes for citizens – focusing on shared education and services for children, young people and families, and people with dementia - and develop more collaborative, effective and outcome focused ways of working.

Social Change Initiative collaborates internationally with activists, policy makers and funders to deliver lasting social change. Established in 2015, it took on responsibility for Atlantic Philanthropies' remaining commitments in Northern Ireland and has a particular interest in extracting and sharing the lessons from its partnership with government. This report is one of a series exploring how this experience can support broader social change efforts.



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