

**Response from NUS-USI to  
consultation on Sharing Works: A  
Policy for Shared Education**

(National Union of Students - Union of  
Students in Ireland)

## Introduction

NUS-USI welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation on shared education.

We believe that it is essential that the division within society is removed to help deliver the shared future that Northern Ireland needs and deserves. NUS-USI believes that integrated education is the best way forward to deliver this change, rather than shared education.

NUS-USI wants to ensure young people are educated together and we want the primary and secondary education system to be transformed to ensure that integrated education is the system that Northern Ireland moves forward with.

## Shared Education Bill

Rather than creating a shared education bill, NUS-USI believes that government should create a bill on integrated education to deliver progress towards ensuring children here are educated together.

Genuine integration and the full removal of all division must be the aim of government. Government must make integrated education its vision and its priority to help transform our education system.

It should be government's stated aim to remove division from our society and they must be legally requirement to deliver and promote integrated education.

With regard to providing co-ordinated support for practitioners with boards or an education authority, NUS-USI believes that this should be delivered for education practitioners to help move schools towards integrated education rather than shared.

In terms of key action three within the consultation, NUS-USI wants government to pro-actively promote and deliver integrated education across the primary and secondary sectors.

Key action four discusses providing funding support for shared education. We believe that this money should instead be spent on integrated education as we see it as the best means by which to remove division within the education system. We believe that the government must be as ambitious as possible and they should aim to go further and deliver integrated rather than shared schooling. As regards key action five in the consultation, it is essential that sustainable long term delivery arrangements are in place to increase the number of integrated education places in Northern Ireland.

Shared schooling might be seen as a step along the road to integration, however we believe that government should instead

plan and set targets on delivering integrated education as it will help deliver the transformation Northern Ireland needs.

We also believe that government should work with the European Commission to see how best Peace IV funding can be used to deliver integrated education.

Government needs to review and refocus its priorities and plans to ensure that integrated education is delivered as a priority. If government is prepared to administer the changes needed to deliver shared education, it should be able to adapt its focus and work towards integrated education, rather than shared. It may also make much better financial sense, and may make better sense for society, for government to invest in integrated education rather than shared, as it could deliver significantly better returns on building good relations and also addressing the cost of division.

As regards key action nine on developing the workforce, government must ensure that strategy equips teachers with the skills to develop integrated education.

NUS-USI would also wish to see government working to support special schools and learning support centres to become integrated education organisations.

A survey commissioned by the Integrated Education Fund, the results of which were

published in 2011, found that 91% of respondents thought that integrated education is important in promoting a shared and better future for Northern Ireland.

## **Tackling division is essential to deliver a shared future**

If division exists it is difficult to build good relations. Division can also have a negative impact upon the economy as the lack of a shared future could make it extremely difficult to attract new jobs because Northern Ireland has not moved forward to remove the barriers which exist within society.

Division within our society is a very significant problem. It could hinder Northern Ireland from moving towards a better future and could prevent economic development.

A report from Deloitte into the cost of division in Northern Ireland which was published in 2007 estimated that division could cost around £1.5bn per year.

## **Conclusions**

It is absolutely essential that all forms of division within society in Northern Ireland are addressed as swiftly and effectively as possible. That means ensuring that public

services, like health, leisure services are not provided on a divided basis. It also means pro-actively creating the circumstances in the community to enable the dismantling of peace walls. Central to this is ensuring that young people are educated together and we believe that integrated education is the best way to deliver this. Future generations should be able to be free from the problems that a divided society creates, and therefore should be educated, and live and work together as part of one united community.

Integrated education is central to tackling the devastating problem of a divided society, but we do not however believe that shared education goes far enough. Government must be ambitious and focus on integrated education, rather than shared, and we believe that this bill should be refined or re-drafted to reflect this.

NUS-USI strongly believes that all unresolved matters relating to a shared future must be addressed as soon as possible. We believe that a society free from division is essential to enable Northern Ireland to build a better future and to enable the region to reach its social, cultural and economic potential.

