



Building for a Better Future by Learning the Past

Recommendations for discussion

January 2023

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Executive Summary

This paper sets out a number of draft recommendations to Government and other decision-makers, supported by an evidence base. They are drawn from our existing policy and research work, including our 2022 response to the Department of Education's Independent Review of Education. We want them to form the basis of a conversation with key stakeholders around how to build a better future by learning from the past.

It is clear that the legacy of the past is tangible in many communities, with on-going segregation, separation and for some, the threat of paramilitarism. Our recommendations for building a better future by learning from the past span formal education and broader societal and political issues. They aim to stimulate discussion about how we understand our past in order to progress reconciliation, and work with others to deliver it, in the interests of victims and survivors of the Troubles.

We recommend that

- 1) The Northern Ireland education system should enable children and young people to understand the legacy of the past, and contribute to building a shared, reconciled and multicultural society.
- 2) Victims and survivors' issues should be mainstreamed across Government, building them into the design of legislation, policy and service delivery. Appointment of victims and survivors' champions across public bodies could assist in this process.
- 3) Political leadership is essential to demonstrate commitment to peace and reconciliation, dispel myths that serve to glorify violence and deliver interventions to benefit victims and survivors.
- 4) Families and wider communities should be equipped and supported to help children and young people understand and talk about the past and its impacts.
- 5) Concerted action by Government and education management bodies is required to break the links between poverty, educational underachievement, and the legacy of the Troubles.
- 6) Opportunities within the curriculum, and more broadly, should be taken to increase understanding of the Troubles and its impact.
- 7) The teaching and broader education workforce should be equipped and supported to facilitate education on Northern Ireland's past and its legacy.
- 8) Appropriate metrics should be put in place to ensure progress can be tracked, and remedial actions put in place as required.

We want to share these draft recommendations as widely as possible across the community, and to refine them for maximum positive impact. Once finalised, we will press for action from Government and other decision-makers.

Introduction

It is incumbent on us all to contribute to building a better future. The Commission for Victims and Survivors' vision is that victims and survivors are remembered and empowered to shape a future where their voices are heard, and needs met within a reconciled society. Understanding our history, through the formal education system, and more broadly is key to this. It requires political leadership, resourcing and commitment to a shared vision of Northern Ireland that does not seek to sanitise the past or hold onto the trappings of paramilitarism.

In developing these draft recommendations, we are cognisant that with the passage of time, we now live in a society where a generation of young people have no lived experience of the Troubles. This provides an opportunity for greater detachment and an ability to talk about the past in a balanced manner. It also creates the risk of embedding partial, biased narratives of our shared past that will hold back progress on achieving a reconciled society.

This paper sets out a number of draft recommendations to Government and other decision-makers, supported by an evidence base. They are drawn from our existing policy and research work, including our 2022 response to the Department of Education's Independent Review of Education. Our definition of education is broad – covering the formal education system for children, young people and adults, and the informal education system. Our interpretation of the latter, in the context of legacy, means how history is shared in families and communities, forms the basis of understanding the past and how it shapes our present and future. It is clear that the legacy of the past is tangible in many communities, with on-going segregation, separation and for some, the threat of paramilitarism. The draft recommendations therefore include broader societal and political issues.

Our draft recommendations aim to stimulate discussion about how we understand our past in order to progress reconciliation, and work with others to deliver it, in the interests of victims and survivors of the Troubles.

We want to share these draft recommendations as widely as possible across the community, and to refine them for maximum positive impact. Once finalised, we will press for action from Government and other decision-makers.

Recommendations

1. The Northern Ireland education system should enable children and young people to understand the legacy of the past, and contribute to building a shared, reconciled and multicultural society.

The Commission recognises that while many excellent conflict legacy and peace-building programmes have and are being delivered within the Northern Ireland education system, there remains scope for greater consistency and impact to be realised.

Opportunities should be provided for genuine dialogue between children and young people, enabling them to define solutions to issues impacting their lives, including the provision of shared space. Within the formal education system, shared education programmes provide such opportunities, and should be enhanced across education sectors. The 2022 *Mainstreaming Shared Education*¹ Strategy has the potential to facilitate this. It provides opportunities for shared spaces for open and constructive discussions of the past and its implications for children and young people. While recognising the barriers the COVID pandemic placed upon delivery, it has enhanced the use of hybrid models to overcome them. The Integrated Education Act² increases the Department's duties to support and meet demand for integrated education. **The Independent Review of Education should consider the impact of the current model of selective post primary education upon the ability to build a shared, reconciled and multicultural society.**

The informal education system of families and communities play a significant role in developing the knowledge and attitudes of children and young people. The formal education system can support the informal in a variety of ways, such as through youth work and family / community engagement.

Evidence base

CVS commissioned research³, published in 2021, examining the impacts of conflict across generations noted that:

... learning in school could be selective, partial, lacking in depth or absent. The analysis demonstrates that despite long standing concerns related to avoidance of teaching of the Conflict, the neglect to address political history in primary schools and a focus on historic societies elsewhere ..., children's opportunities to discuss and make sense of 'the Troubles' are limited...⁴.

Surveys and academic research consistently evidence considerable support for increasing the opportunities for sharing within the education system. These preferences reveal the aspiration of many parents/guardians to educate their children in a mixed and shared

¹ DENI (2022) [Mainstreaming Shared Education Strategy](#)

² [Integrated Education Act \(NI\) 2022](#)

³ QUB, commissioned by CVS (2021) '[It Didn't End in 1998' Examining the Impacts of Conflict Legacy Across Generations](#)<https://www.cvsni.org/media/2142/cvs-final-full-report-final-version-1021.pdf>

⁴ QUB, commissioned by CVS (2021) '[It Didn't End in 1998' Examining the Impacts of Conflict Legacy Across Generations](#), page 138

environment. The Commission's research Towards a Better Future⁵ recommended that *'The role of segregated education in the transmission of prejudice should be examined and the effects of alternative education systems on the transmission of transgenerational trauma should be the subject of investigation.'*

The Integrated Education Act (NI) 2022⁶ defines the purpose of integrated education, including to promote good relations and respect for identity, diversity and community cohesion. It places a duty on the Department of Education to encourage, facilitate and support integrated education, including aiming to meet demand for integrated education, subject to area planning and sustainability. The Department must also publish and maintain a strategy for the encouragement, facilitation and support for the provision of integrated education.

Hughes and Loader⁷ (2022) noted that 'the dynamic of a selective system, mapped also on Catholic and Protestant lines, works against children and young people from different socio-economic backgrounds learning together, within and between communities'. They also highlight that 'the highest levels of underachievement are concentrated in more (and by definition, religiously segregated) communities where grammar school attendance is low'.

The Report of the Consultative Group of the Past⁸ 2009, highlighted the need for much more debate on dealing with the past in Northern Ireland and has an important role to play, alongside families and communities. The Report made the point that *'Clear leadership is needed in promoting the debate on this issue across the various agencies and ensuring that any actions identified are implemented.'* The education system can make an important contribution to providing the leadership and support required to deal with the past effectively.

2. Victims and survivors' issues should be mainstreamed across Government, building them into the design of legislation, policy and service delivery. Appointment of Victims and Survivors' champions across public bodies could assist in this process.

The Commission and others have provided extensive evidence of both the legacy and ongoing Conflict related issues that impact on adults, children and young people. 24% of respondents to our 2021 population survey stated that they met the legal definition of a Victim / Survivor⁹. This includes transgenerational trauma, suicide, segregation, sectarianism, paramilitarism, social and economic deprivation, disengagement from the political process, the role of women and girls in peacebuilding and low educational attainment. These issues are not the domain of a single public body or Department.

⁵ Ulster University, commissioned by CVS (2015) [Towards a Better Future: the Transgenerational Impact of the Troubles on Mental Health](#) (p21)

⁶ [Integrated Education Act \(NI\) 2022](#)

⁷ Hughes and Loader (2022) [Is academic selection in Northern Ireland a barrier to social cohesion? \(tandfonline.com\)](#)

⁸ UK Parliament (2009) [Report of the Consultative Group on the Past in Northern Ireland](#) (p81)

⁹ Lucid Talk, commissioned by CVSNI (2021) [Population Survey 2021 Main Report](#)

Building victims and survivors' issues into the design of legislation, policy and service delivery is key to ensuring lasting, positive change. To achieve it, a concerted, multi-agency and partnership-approach is required. Mainstreaming has the potential to benefit Victims and Survivors, and society as a whole by contributing to reconciliation. The approach advocated is similar to that required as regards the Section 75 equality duty, whereby the particular needs or experiences of groups within society are analysed with interventions designed to meet them. Public bodies should review how they do or could assist in the delivery of a shared, reconciled and multi-cultural society, and explore how they can work more collaboratively to achieve shared goals.

Champions already exist in Departments and their role seeks to maintain a focus on key issues affecting championed groups. **Appointing dedicated Victims and Survivors' champions, could help to ensure that relevant issues are mainstreamed within policy making and service delivery throughout the public sector.**

Evidence base

Our 2021 Population Survey was based on over 2000 responses representative of the Northern Ireland population. Key findings included that 88% agreed that it was important to address the legacy of the Troubles / Conflict¹⁰.

While victim and survivor policy responsibility rests with the Executive Office, relevant issues also link with other Departments such as:

- The Department for Communities, responsible for matters ranging from the voluntary and community sector through to housing and the anti-poverty and other social strategies.
- The Department of Justice, responsible for youth justice, policing and community safety.
- The Department of Health, with responsibility across health issues, including the Regional Trauma Network, which is specifically focusing on Troubles-related Cases.

Racial Equality Champions are already working within Departments¹¹. The key focus of Victims and Survivors' Champions would be to ensure that relevant issues are mainstreamed within policy-making and service delivery throughout the public sector by:

- Developing and delivering the effective implementation of an action plan to improve the quality of life for victims and survivors including raising staff and board awareness of issues relevant to the body's remit.
- Encouraging public authorities to demonstrate the measurable positive impact of actions implemented.
- Engaging in a Champions Hub where knowledge and learning is shared, good practice is acknowledged and replicated, and areas for improvement explored.

¹⁰ Lucid Talk, commissioned by CVSNI (2021) [Population Survey 2021 Main Report](#)

¹¹ [Profiles of the Racial Equality Champions | The Executive Office \(executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

- Assisting the implementation of the Strategy for Victims and Survivors¹² including its commitment ‘to provide the outline of a coherent and comprehensive approach for taking forward work on a range of issues relating to victims and survivors.’ This includes via government strategies, including the Programme for Government and Together: Building a United Community.

3. Political leadership is essential to demonstrate commitment to peace and reconciliation, dispel myths that serve to glorify violence and deliver interventions to benefit victims and survivors.

Politics in Northern Ireland has been marked by sustained periods of Assembly suspension due to the failure by parties to form an Executive. The lack of a functioning and stable Northern Ireland government has wide-ranging negative impacts across the community, including as regards the promotion of reconciliation in this post conflict society. Specifically for victims and survivors, the current suspension has stalled the publication of a new Strategy for Victims and Survivors, and has resulted in legacy legislation being progressed at Westminster without the consent of the Assembly to do so.

Political leaders play an important role in ensuring that the conditions that could prompt a return to conflict are avoided. **Actions required include a vocal commitment to peace and reconciliation, good community relations and to dispel myths that might seek to glorify violence.** A single incident can have a range of conflicting narratives. Support is required from political leaders to promote understanding the past to build a better future. This reinforces the importance of understanding history and providing the resources required to facilitate learning and remembering across Northern Ireland.

Evidence base

Since its establishment, the Northern Ireland Assembly has been suspended five times, with no functioning Executive for 37.8% of its existence¹³. There has been no finalised Programme for Government since the 2011-2015 document. The current Strategy for Victims and Survivors was due to last from 2009-2019¹⁴, and while a new Strategy is under development by the Executive Office, a draft strategy has not been concluded and regardless, it cannot be approved or implemented without Ministers.

¹² TEO (OFMDFM) (2009) [Strategy for Victims and Survivors](#)

¹³ FactCheck NI (8 November 2022) [Has the Executive been in a state of collapse for 40% of its existence? - Fact Check NI](#)

¹⁴ TEO (OFMDFM) (2009) [Strategy for Victims and Survivors - November 2009 \(executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

88% of respondents to our 2021 Population Survey¹⁵ agreed that it was important to address the legacy of the Troubles / Conflict in Northern Ireland. 70% of respondents were against the granting of amnesties. The Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill¹⁶ is currently progressing through Parliament. The Commission has made its concerns about the legislation clear¹⁷.

Research has demonstrated support for devolution, for example a 2022 report on *Political Attitudes After Brexit and Under the Protocol*¹⁸ noted, drawing on the 2021 Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) Survey, that ‘a clear majority of respondents (65%) expressed support for the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement, believing that it remains the best basis for governing in Northern Ireland. The 2021 NILT Survey found that 36% of respondents felt that relations between Protestants and Catholics were better than five years ago, with 47% stating they were about the same¹⁹. A lower figure believed they would be better in five years’ time (32%) with 44% stating that relations would be about the same²⁰.

4. Families and wider communities should be equipped and supported to help children and young people understand and talk about the past and its impacts.

Schools and the formal education system cannot on their own ensure an understanding of the history and legacy of the Troubles. Families and communities play a key role, but a range of barriers exist. These include the impact of Troubles-related trauma upon families that can hinder communication; the on-going threat to young people presented by continued paramilitarism; and longstanding segregation and sectarianism.

Opportunities exist to overcome barriers through Victims and Survivors Service funded organisations and programmes, the Regional Trauma Network, the Tackling Paramilitarism programme, and broader government actions to decrease segregation such as shared housing and integrated and shared education. While these actions are welcome, the pace of progress has been slow.

Schools can involve families in their children’s education by sharing and explaining the curriculum, encouraging at home discussion and provision of resources to share at home.

The Northern Ireland Troubles (Reconciliation and Legacy) Bill, while fundamentally flawed in how it deals with legacy, provides an opportunity to share narratives of the Troubles, providing balance and avoiding the glorification of violence. The creation and preservation of oral history records, a Memorialisation strategy and academic research have the potential to deliver resources that can be used within communities to widen understanding

¹⁵ Lucid Talk, commissioned by CVS (2021) [Population Survey 2021 Main Report](#)

¹⁶ [Northern Ireland Troubles \(Legacy and Reconciliation\) Bill publications - Parliamentary Bills - UK Parliament](#)

¹⁷ CVS (2022) [Northern Ireland Troubles \(Legacy and Reconciliation\) Bill Policy Recommendations](#)

¹⁸ Ark, Hayward, Komrova and Rosher (May 2022) [Political Attitudes in Northern Ireland after Brexit and under the Protocol](#)

¹⁹ Ark (2021) [Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey: 2021 \(ark.ac.uk\)](#)

²⁰ Ark (2021) [Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey: 2021 \(ark.ac.uk\)](#)

and talk about Northern Ireland's past. Political leadership, adequate resourcing, and steps to build and maintain confidence in the process across communities is necessary for this potential to be realised.

Evidence base

Research (2021) prepared by Queen's University, Belfast (QUB) for the Commission²¹ noted that *following learning in school, young people most commonly talked about learning about the Conflict from family members, particularly parents, grandparents and other extended family who had lived experience of the Conflict.*

The same research²² found that *It can also be argued that there are socio-economic and structural transgenerational legacies, in that children growing up in some communities (i.e. interface areas, and other socio-economically deprived areas where violence has been frequent and widespread) are negatively affected by residual sectarianism, continued segregation and chronic under-investment in their communities.*

The Commission's Towards a Better Future report²³, which explored trans-generational impact across themes such as parental mental health, the relationship between the Troubles' Legacy and suicide, the development of children in their early years and a review of existing service provision addressing the trans-generational impact on mental health and wellbeing. It highlighted the importance of examining the role of early years education in supporting families and addressing sectarianism. It responds to 2012 QUB research produced for the Commission, Young People's Transgenerational Issues in Northern Ireland Report²⁴ which concluded that *transgenerational trauma is a real phenomenon affecting young people in Northern Ireland* and highlighted the need to rigorously examine the impact of psychological trauma transmission and other factors, including social deprivation and parenting styles likely to explain a transgenerational impact.

The Victims and Survivors Service²⁵ delivers support and services to improve the health and well-being of victims and survivors by delivering funding and support.

The Regional Trauma Network²⁶ is a trauma-focused and co-ordinated network led by the Department of Health and the Executive Office. Its aims, among other things, include to: comprehensively address the legacy of the Troubles/Conflict and address unmet mental health needs; improve individual, family, and community experience of mental health trauma care; and increase the overall capacity of mental health services in the region.

The Tackling Paramilitarism Programme²⁷ *supports people and communities across Northern Ireland who are vulnerable to paramilitary influence. It focuses on stopping harm in the here*

²¹ QUB, commissioned by CVS (2021) ['It Didn't End in 1998' Examining the Impacts of Conflict Legacy Across Generations](#) (p116)

²² QUB, commissioned by CVS (2021) ['It Didn't End in 1998' Examining the Impacts of Conflict Legacy Across Generations](#) (p5-6)

²³ Ulster University, commissioned by CVS (2015) [Towards a Better Future: the Transgenerational Impact of the Troubles on Mental Health](#)

²⁴ QUB, commissioned by CVS (2012) [Young People's Transgenerational Issues in NI](#) (p77)

²⁵ [Victims & Survivors Services | Troubles & Conflict | Historical Institutional Abuse \(victimsservice.org\)](#)

²⁶ [Regional Trauma Network - HSCB \(hscni.net\)](#)

²⁷ [Executive programme for tackling paramilitary activity and organised crime | Northern Ireland Executive](#)

and now as well as putting in place early interventions to ensure future generations are not exploited or traumatised through paramilitary coercion, control and violence.

5. Concerted action by Government and education management bodies is required to break the links between poverty, educational underachievement, and the legacy of the Troubles.

Free school meals entitlement is an indicator of poverty and highly correlated with low educational attainment. One of the earliest studies of the impact of the Troubles, the Cost of the Troubles (COTT) found that *areas of high levels of violence were associated with higher levels of deprivation*.²⁸ Within these areas, paramilitary organisations continue to operate, exerting a negative influence on educational achievement.

We recommend that the implementation of the Fair Start report on Educational Underachievement, and programmes more broadly, include targeted interventions to tackle the continuing legacy of the Troubles, both in school and youth work-based activities. The Independent Reporting Commission (IRC)²⁹ has noted the potential of the implementation of the Fair Start Report and awaited Independent Review of Education to *lead to tangible actions on the ground, ensuring the sustained tackling of educational underachievement as a key underlying factor in the persistence of paramilitarism*. In its most recent report, the IRC called for implementation of the Fair Start action plan, and provision of adequate resourcing³⁰.

Evidence base

Research commissioned by CVS³¹ *demonstrated how young people's right to access education (UNCRC, Art 28) can be impacted if they are under paramilitary threat, as they can be excluded from college on the basis that their presence is a threat to the safety of others.*

CVS research noted that: *longitudinal research with 378 adolescent boys (Harland and McCready, 2012) highlighted the extent to which violence, including paramilitarism, was the backdrop to the lives of many. While not drawing a direct correlation between conflict legacy and educational underachievement, the issue was certainly acknowledged as an influencing factor*³².

A 2021 report by the Centre for Research on Educational Underachievement³³ analysed the links between disadvantage and paramilitarism, drawing on Independent Reporting

²⁸ Ulster University, commissioned by CVS (2011) [Troubled consequences: A report on the mental health impact of the civil conflict in Northern Ireland](#), at page 51

²⁹ Independent Reporting Commission (2021) [Fourth Report, HC 916](#), page 16

³⁰ Independent Reporting Commission (2021) [Fifth Report – HC 893](#), page 26

³¹ QUB, commissioned by CVS (2021) ['It Didn't End in 1998' Examining the Impacts of Conflict Legacy Across Generations](#)

³² Ulster University, commissioned by CVS (2011) [Troubled consequences: A report on the mental health impact of the civil conflict in Northern Ireland](#) at page 51 and page 73

³³ Centre for Research on Educational Underachievement (2021) [Loyalist and Republican perspectives in educational underachievement](#)

Commission and other reports. It noted that: *While other factors also exist, the IRC claims that “many of the communities where the paramilitaries exert greatest control have long suffered from deprivation and disadvantage, much of which was exacerbated by the Troubles” (IRC, 2020, p.21). ... High violence areas also exhibit certain demographic differences, typically having larger populations and higher levels of deprivation. (Ferguson and Michaelsen, 2015, p.134) The most recent (third) Report of the Independent Reporting Commission (IRC) goes further and notes that the continued existence of paramilitarism in Northern Ireland represents a “clear and present danger” (IRC, 2020, p.8) for communities, and clearly identifies socio-economic deprivation as its “fuel” and “driver” (p.21). The IRC is clear that there is a need to tackle afresh the “residual, stubbornly difficult” (p.29) issue of ending paramilitarism which continues to have a negative impact on life in Northern Ireland.*

The same small study noted similarities and differences of experiences between the Loyalist and Republican participants. For examples, it cites that most grew up in families where education was valued and had a shared sense of the education system being exclusionary based on wealth. The differences have been well-rehearsed, relating to the availability of heavy industry jobs within Loyalist areas, contrasted with the value placed on education as a ‘transformative political power’ in Republican areas.

Similarly the Identifying Links in Achievement and Deprivation report³⁴ highlighted that ‘in some communities, legacies of the recent conflict continue to have a negative impact on attainment levels and some young people’s attitudes to school and education³⁵’. It stated that: ‘These communities require patient, proactive and on-going support to help them mediate their post conflict transitions³⁶’.

The Fair Start report³⁷ was produced by the Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement and endorsed by the Executive. It recommended increased investment in youth work provision, citing *the Communities in Transition Field Work Reports by Cooperation Ireland on Protestant working class areas which consistently highlight the need to engage disaffected young people, to develop more youth clubs and programmes, and to engage with children and young people at a younger age, to help raise educational aspiration, promote positive engagement and lawfulness, and avoid involvement in anti-social behaviour, drug addiction, gangs, organised criminality and paramilitarism.*

6. Opportunities within the curriculum, and more broadly, should be taken to increase understanding of the Troubles and its impact.

The formal education system remains central to the provision of information and learning and can provide a safe space to explore new ideas about respect and inclusion. It can challenge myths about the legacy of the past and provide the skills needed to build a vibrant, multicultural society. The curriculum can provide opportunities for children and

³⁴ [Investigating Links in Achievement and Deprivation \(ILiAD\) \(executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/Investigating-Links-in-Achievement-and-Deprivation-ILiAD)

³⁵ [Investigating Links in Achievement and Deprivation \(ILiAD\) \(executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/Investigating-Links-in-Achievement-and-Deprivation-ILiAD), page 14

³⁶ [Investigating Links in Achievement and Deprivation \(ILiAD\) \(executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/Investigating-Links-in-Achievement-and-Deprivation-ILiAD), page 17

³⁷ DENI (2021) [A Fair Start \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/A-Fair-Start) at page 59 citing Cooperation Ireland (2018) [Phase 1 Fieldwork Reports](https://www.cooperationireland.org.uk/Phase-1-Fieldwork-Reports)

young people to be educated together, including via shared education programmes, or in an integrated education setting. Such contact needs to be sustained and meaningful.

The Northern Ireland curriculum, which applies from pre-school to post 16 aged children and young people, aims to *empower young people to achieve their potential and to make informed and responsible decisions throughout their lives*³⁸. It sets out areas of learning, which provide teachers with flexibility around what is taught. While this allows the syllabus to be tailored to student interest, it also risks more contentious issues being avoided. While study of the Troubles is available as a module in GCSE history, it is not compulsory. Around one third of all year 12 GCSE pupils study history³⁹. There is also scope across the curriculum for learning about the Troubles, including Learning for Life and Work and Citizenship. **Schools should be encouraged and facilitated to use opportunities within the curriculum to learn about the Troubles and its on-going impact.**

The non-prescriptive nature of the curriculum is welcome, but steps must be taken to ensure that it provides all children and young people with an understanding of Northern Ireland's past, including the conflict, segregation and separation.

A wide range of resources which seek to support the promotion of trust, equality and reconciliation are available. The Commission recommends that this body of work is reviewed and catalogued so it is accessible to formal and informal education providers.

Evidence base

Ulster University's Transforming Education briefing paper on Citizenship Education quoted a survey of 16-year-olds finding that *24% reported they had not had any classes or assemblies, done projects or had class discussions on the Northern Ireland conflict*. It also noted an emphasis on less contentious global, rather than local issues⁴⁰.

Education, Equality and the Economy, produced in 2019 by Tony Gallagher⁴¹, highlighted that *the lowest voting cohort in Northern Ireland is young people and many do not even register to vote. It is hard to escape the conclusion that education could do a lot more to empower young people to believe that a better, shared world is not only possible, but achievable.*'

The PEACE Programmes Learning Platform⁴² is a model of good practice as a repository and archive of key records related to the PEACE Programmes and provides a single point of access to the materials that have been developed since 1994. It contains thousands of different files including project case studies, evaluations, research reports, audio-recordings, films, photographs, images and promotional materials.

The Shared Education Programme, with its 2022 Mainstreaming Shared Education Strategy, provides opportunities for open and constructive discussions about the past and its implications for children and young people.

The 2019 Sectarianism – A Review report recommended that: *Every child at school should be educated and encouraged to understand that they belong together with others of different*

³⁸ [Curriculum Aim and Objectives | CCEA](#)

³⁹ Data provided by the Department of Education, for year 2020/21

⁴⁰ TEUU (2022) [Citizenship Education in Northern Ireland – An opportunity not yet realised](#)

⁴¹ QUB, Tony Gallagher (2020) [Education, Equality and the Economy](#), at page 32

⁴² [SEUPB Peace Programmes](#)

backgrounds. Every school should actively design their curriculum and programmes of activity to ensure that this wider belonging to a shared society is central. In other words, every school should plan their curriculum as 'shared education', including identified elements of shared classroom and recreational activity in each week of school⁴³.

Research carried out on behalf of the Commission, Children and Young People Engagement Project Research Report⁴⁴ (2016) highlighted concerns that *'some programmes to address sectarianism were too piecemeal and thin, when long-term engagement was in fact required. One contributor pointed to the need for long term engagement in order to address these issues, commenting: 'If a child has had 14 years of sectarianism, taking them away for a weekend is not going to change it. And the one-off school sessions are a nonsense'*.

7. The teaching and broader education workforce should be equipped and supported to facilitate education on Northern Ireland's past and its legacy.

Training and support are required for educators on teaching Northern Ireland's past and its legacy. Educators may not feel confident in discussion of what can be sensitive, contested and controversial issues. They themselves may or may not have been exposed to the Troubles/Conflict and may feel anxious or out of their depth introducing the subject for discussion.

Teachers may experience with children and young people's strongly held inherited views and attitudes. These views may have been influenced by family and community experiences of the Troubles/Conflict which can be selective or skewed, and which can perpetuate sectarianism.

Training on these issues during initial teacher training and continuous professional development for teachers and heads is essential, as well as on-going support.

Collaboration and sharing between teacher training institutions, across all areas of study, have the potential to assist in this process. Innovative, accessible and wide-ranging conflict legacy and peacebuilding programmes and resources have been produced to enhance teacher training. The Council for Curriculum and Assessment (CCEA) has produced guidance on teaching controversial issues⁴⁵. The Education Authority and Council for Catholic Maintained Schools should ensure they are widely disseminated, and their use encouraged.

Research has demonstrated the lack of diversity in the community background of teachers⁴⁶. The removal of the teachers' exception under the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 may increase mobility across sectors.

Evidence base

Research commissioned by CVS, *It Didn't End in 1998*⁴⁷ recommended *'The current training for teachers on the Troubles/Conflict and cross-community issues needs to be expanded to*

⁴³ Ulster University, Duncan Morrow (2019) [Sectarianism in Northern Ireland: A Review](#)

⁴⁴ CVS (2016) [Children and Young People Engagement Project Research Report](#), (p17)

⁴⁵ CCEA (2020) [Teaching Controversial Issues at Key Stage 3](#)

⁴⁶ Ulster University (2019) [Employment Mobility of Teachers and the FETO, Briefing Paper 1](#)

⁴⁷ QUB, commissioned by CVS (2021) ['It Didn't End in 1998' Examining the Impacts of Conflict Legacy Across Generations](#), p10-11

develop their capacity and confidence to facilitate challenging and sensitive topics and to respond to emotion in the classroom. Teachers require additional support in the teaching of the Conflict, particularly where they are dealing with their own related issues.'

A briefing paper⁴⁸ from Ulster University's UNESCO Centre of Education suggested that *There would potentially be considerable benefit from social, professional and educational initiatives aimed at ensuring that all student teachers gain practical experience of working on both sides of the divided school systems. These could operate in tandem alongside programmes that support cross-community interaction between students – within and between institutions.*

2% of teachers in Catholic Maintained primary schools attended a Controlled primary school, while 7% of teachers in Controlled primary schools attended a Catholic Maintained primary school. Higher levels of diversity were found at post primary schools with: *8% of those teaching in CCMS post primaries and 17% of teachers in Catholic voluntary grammar schools had attended non-Catholic primaries in NI, whilst 17% of those employed in Controlled post primary schools and 23% of teachers in non-Catholic grammars had attended CCMS primaries*⁴⁹. The Fair Employment (School Teachers) Act Northern Ireland⁵⁰, which will come into effect by 2024, has the potential to increase diversity in the community backgrounds of teachers in the Controlled and Maintained sectors. It will remove the existing exception of school teachers from the anti-discrimination and monitoring requirements of Fair Employment legislation. As a result, school teachers will be able to bring complaints of discrimination on grounds of religious belief and or political opinion to the Fair Employment Tribunal. Schools will be required to monitor the community background of teachers, and undertake actions such as reviewing workforce composition to determine if there is fair participation.

8. Appropriate metrics should be put in place to ensure progress can be tracked, and remedial actions put in place as required.

These recommendations require action across Government, and are not directed solely at the education sector. **Metrics to track progress must span Government departments and policies and cannot be limited to traditional educational attainment measures.** Other appropriate measures may include those within the Good Relations Indicators, such as attitudes towards other communities, and mixing socially, in sports and through education. The alignment of outcomes and priorities is required.

These outcomes are long-term and will require concerted effort to be realised. In addition to regular reporting, review and analysis will be required in order to learn from the data and information provided. Adjustments to interventions may be necessary in response to social, economic and political conditions. The data and information provided must be robust, and sufficiently disaggregated to allow for meaningful analysis across equality and rural/urban characteristics.

⁴⁸ Ulster University (2020) [Community division and student separation in initial teacher education](#), (p28)

⁴⁹ Ulster University (2019) [Employment Mobility of Teachers and the FETO, Briefing Paper 1](#)

⁵⁰ [Fair Employment \(School Teachers\) Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2022](#)

Evidence base

A range of Government strategies and policies are relevant to addressing the legacy of the past in education. At its highest level, the Programme for Government (PfG) and budget, as well as departmental strategies such as those for Victims and Survivors, Children and Young People, Anti-Poverty, and the Tackling Paramilitarism Programme.

Analysis of a range of outcomes is necessary in order to determine whether interventions have been successful. The outcomes-based accountability model used in the Programme for Government facilitates such analysis. It is essential therefore that victims and survivors' issues, and their impact upon education are built into the PfG, its outcomes and measures.

Disaggregation of data across equality and rural/urban characteristics allows for interventions to be targeted more effectively, and may demonstrate gaps in provision, which can then be rectified.

Conclusion

This paper sets out a number of recommendations which we believe will make a positive impact across not only the education system, both formal and informal, but society as a whole.

We recommend that

- 1) The Northern Ireland education system should enable children and young people to understand the legacy of the past, and contribute to building a shared, reconciled and multicultural society.
- 2) Victims and survivors' issues should be mainstreamed across Government, building them into the design of legislation, policy and service delivery. Appointment of victims and survivors' champions across public bodies could assist in this process.
- 3) Political leadership is essential to demonstrate commitment to peace and reconciliation, dispel myths that serve to glorify violence and deliver interventions to benefit victims and survivors.
- 4) Families and wider communities should be equipped and supported to help children and young people understand and talk about the past and its impacts.
- 5) Concerted action by Government and education management bodies is required to break the links between poverty, educational underachievement, and the legacy of the Troubles.
- 6) Opportunities within the curriculum, and more broadly, should be taken to increase understanding of the Troubles and its impact.
- 7) The teaching and broader education workforce should be equipped and supported to facilitate education on Northern Ireland's past and its legacy.
- 8) Appropriate metrics should be put in place to ensure progress can be tracked, and remedial actions put in place as required.

We want to gain support for these recommendations across the community, and to press for action from Government and other decision-makers. In our view, implementation of these recommendations can make a positive and meaningful difference to the understanding of our past, and its on-going impact, and how we learn from it.