

Department of Education (NI)

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**Department of Education – Public Consultation on Vision 2030 – A Strategy for Integrated Education 2025-2030.**

21 May 2025

Dear Sir/Madam,

The Commission for Victims and Survivors (NI) (CVS) welcomes the opportunity to provide a brief response to the Department of Education’s consultation on *Vision 2030 – A Strategy for Integrated Education 2025-2030*. We recognise how this consultation is focussed on the set of actions underpinning the five outcomes identified in the previous consultation with key stakeholders within the Integrated Education sector. Please accept this short commentary as a response to the consultation as we would like to make several pertinent points in direct reference to some of the actions and comments in the strategy document related to the important contribution of our education system in addressing the legacy of the Troubles/conflict.

CVS are cognisant of the developing legislative, policy and research environment in which Vision 2030 and the five-year Action Plan will be progressed in the years ahead. As noted in the Strategy, with the enactment of the Integration Act 2022 this Action Plan, if fully implemented can provide an effective vehicle for underpinning the growth of the Integrated Education sector at both primary and post-primary levels. While the strategy document refers to the remarkable growth in Integrated Education since 1981, with only 8% of all pupils in NI attending integrated primary and post-primary schools in 2025,<sup>1</sup> there is much progress to be made to support its growth under this strategy. Given the acknowledgement within the Strategy about the broad societal support for expansion of Integration Education and issues with sufficient availability of access to both primary and post-primary schools across NI, CVS support the series of actions among key educational stakeholders to address these issues in the years ahead.

CVS welcome the reference in the Vision 2030 Strategy document to the importance of both shared and integrated education as key components making positive contributions within a society emerging from decades of civil conflict. The Vision 2030 document rightly points to the vital work delivered on a routine and sustained basis within our primary and post-primary schools to learn about and reduce the impacts of prejudice including sectarianism. Additionally, from a victims and survivors perspective CVS acknowledges how many teachers and schools across NI work daily to enhance the knowledge and understanding of our young people about the legacy of our troubled past in a fair, balanced and objective manner.

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<sup>1</sup> Pivotal (2025) *Achieving greater integration in education and housing*, Pivotal Public Policy Forum NI: 6. Belfast, BT2 7DP

In 2023, CVS published the document *Building for a Better Future by Learning the Past*. Drawing on existing Commission policy, research and engagement work the document focussed on stimulating wider debate and discussion around the important contribution of formal and informal education in learning about the Troubles and the continuing impacts of conflict legacy. Among the paper's recommended actions was a call for our local education system to continue to enhance understanding about the Troubles and its legacy and to make a significant contribution to building a shared, reconciled and multicultural society. Other recommended actions relevant to this consultation were that the teaching and broader education workforce should be equipped and supported to facilitate education on NI's past and its legacy.<sup>2</sup>

Within the Vision 2030 Action Plan there are a couple of actions worth highlighting in this response. Firstly, *Action 17* refers to how the Department of Education NI (DE) will work with the Executive Office (TEO), other government departments and their agencies to support ongoing implementation of the Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) strategy. CVS would also recommend consideration of the new Strategy for Victims and Survivors 2024-34.<sup>3</sup> Under the identified 'The Future' strand of work TEO, CVS and other sectoral partners are committed 'to build on existing and create new formal and informal education programmes to enhance knowledge and mutual understanding about the transgenerational impacts of the Troubles/Conflict.' Relatedly, in progressing this Action it is worth considering CVS's most recent transgenerational research report produced by QUB in 2021. Entitled *It Didn't End in 1998*, a key report finding noted, 'whilst Shared Education has been an important step towards increased mixing within the school environment, the findings in this report support more fundamental changes to the structuring of the community in Northern Ireland.' The report went on 'increasing the provision (and funding) of integrated education, particularly given the increasing demand and oversubscription, is key and thus attention should be given to the UNCRC Concluding Observations in 2016 that a 'fully integrated education system' is actively promoted.'<sup>4</sup>

In relation to *Action 18* and as aids to post primary students to explore important and potentially controversial issues linked to the Troubles and its legacy CVS would encourage consideration of the findings, recommendations and resources linked to the *It Didn't End in 1998* report (including the one above). The primary focus of the study was on the transgenerational impacts of conflict legacy on the lives of children and young people and their parents across NI and the border region of Ireland. A significant project that aided the wider circulation of the report's findings was the 'House' and the 'House Virtual Reality' experience. Originally, the House Project was a curated installation and innovative theatrical performance produced by the Big Telly Theatre Company in two Belfast based houses in 2021 which allowed visitors to explore a range of the report's themes and issues including family-based trauma and discussion about the Troubles in a classroom environment. The House project was later adapted by the same production company into a virtual reality experience which had allowed

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<sup>2</sup> CVS (2023) *Building for a Better Future by Learning the Past*, CVS, January. Paper can be accessed here: <https://bit.ly/4dkG0m6>

<sup>3</sup> Strategy for Victims and Survivors 2024-34 can be accessed here: [Victims and Survivors Strategy 2024-34](#)

<sup>4</sup> CVS (2021) 'It Didn't End in 1998' Examining the impacts of Conflict legacy across Generations, QUB: 17. Research can be accessed here: [Microsoft Word - CVS-Final-Full-Report-02.docx](#)

CVS to facilitate access to the House with hundreds of school children in post primary schools across NI in recent years.<sup>5</sup>

A question relating to the importance of the teaching about the history of the Troubles was included in three different populations surveys conducted by CVS in NI, the Republic of Ireland (RoI) and in Great Britain (GB) in recent years. In 2021 in NI, 43% of the NI population said that the teaching of the history of the Troubles/conflict in the formal education sector should be compulsory while 28% said that it should be compulsory only at secondary school level. Interestingly among respondents who said that the teaching of history should be compulsory, 72% of students agreed with this statement. This can be viewed as an encouraging finding from the data as a cohort of the population who have recently come through the formal education sector and overwhelmingly recognise the importance of young people learning about the history of the Troubles/conflict.<sup>6</sup>

In the RoI, 43% of the adult population believed that the teaching of history of the Troubles/conflict should be compulsory and for all ages (from 5-18 years old) in the state. In GB there was a significant level of support among the GB population for the teaching of history in schools. 34% of the GB population believed that the history of the Troubles should be taught in primary schools – with almost 80% of the adult population supporting the compulsory teaching of history of the Troubles in secondary school and in sixth forms/colleges. Importantly, those who could identify as meeting the legal definition of victims and survivors<sup>7</sup> are significantly more likely to believe that the history of the Troubles should be taught in primary schools.<sup>8</sup>

CVS is pleased to have had the opportunity to respond to the consultation on *Vision 2030 – A Strategy for Integrated Education 2025-2030*. It is evident from recent opinion polls conducted in this area that there is significant support for increased provision of Integrated Education in NI in the years ahead. As was widely publicised earlier this year a Lucid Talk survey conducted on behalf of the Integrated Education Fund (IEF) revealed that 65% of the local adult population here support integrated education as the main model for the NI school system.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, the recently published Pivotal Report on integration in the education and social housing sectors in NI revealed continuing high levels of segregation in these key public sector areas.<sup>10</sup> This finding emerged despite strong support for initiatives to facilitate and encourage integrated education and mixed housing contained in the 1998 Good Friday/Belfast Agreement.<sup>11</sup> It is clear that enduring complex socio-economic challenges linked to segregation, division and

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<sup>5</sup> Further information on the House Project can be found here: <https://bit.ly/3H1K0ff> and on the House Virtual Reality Experience can be located here: [The House Virtual Reality Experience - Commission for Victims & Survivors](#)

<sup>6</sup> Further information relating to the Population Surveys in the different jurisdictions can be found here: [Comparative-Survey-Data-Paper-2024-Final.pdf](#)

<sup>7</sup> Legal definition is contained in The Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006. Can be accessed here: [The Victims and Survivors \(Northern Ireland\) Order 2006](#)

<sup>8</sup> Further information relating to the Population Surveys in the different jurisdictions can be found here: [Comparative-Survey-Data-Paper-2024-Final.pdf](#)

<sup>9</sup> Bain, M (2025) '65% of people in NI want integrated education system, with politicians and churches blamed for hampering progress', *Belfast Telegraph*, 9<sup>th</sup> April.

<sup>10</sup> Pivotal (2025) *Achieving greater integration in education and housing*, Pivotal Public Policy Forum NI, Shaftesbury Square Belfast, BT2 7DP

<sup>11</sup> Department of Education (2025) *Vision 2030 – A Strategy for Integrated Education 2025-30*, DE: 3.

deprivation are intertwined in part with outstanding unresolved conflict legacy issues. Learning about the Troubles and its legacy in a fair, objective way within both shared and integrated education settings can mitigate efforts to misunderstand or glorify the violence of the past. Equally, while it does not represent a panacea, expanding access to integrated schooling at primary and post-primary levels educating young people together from different community backgrounds from an early age can meaningfully contribute toward closing social distances in the years ahead. Vision 2030 and the series of actions collectively implemented by key stakeholders over the next five years can facilitate parental demand for integrated education, build trust and understanding within and between communities and support wider efforts to progress societal reconciliation in the future.

**Note:** If you would like to further discuss any of the policy and research work of CVS, including those referenced in this response please do not hesitate to contact us.

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