

2 December 2011
AQW 4665/11-15

Phil Flanagan has asked:

To ask the Minister of Education to detail the level, and to give some examples, of cross border co-operation within the education system.

In recent years much excellent work has been carried out on a cross-border basis in the education sector.

Part 1 of a comprehensive study on North/South co-operation in the education sector has been agreed and finalised by the Department of Education and the Department of Education and Skills.

The two departments will commence Part 2 of the report and will identify areas with the potential for future practical co-operation.

I will arrange for a copy of Part 1 of the report to be placed in the Assembly Library.

John O'Dowd MLA

COMPREHENSIVE STUDY ON NORTH SOUTH COOPERATION IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR

June 2011



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INDEX

		<u>Page</u>
1	Introduction	1
2	Departmental Strategies	3
3	Levels of activity and funding in 2005 and 2009	4
4	Youth programmes and projects	7
5	Learning from good practice in North South School and Teacher projects	9
6	Learning from other strategic areas	15
7	Four case studies	21
8	Conclusions	27

1. Introduction

This is part 1 of a study on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and the Department of Education (DE).

Part 1 was commissioned in January 2010, from a team led by Andy Pollak of the Centre for Cross Border Studies (CCBS), with assistance from Tommy Fegan and Simon O'Hare of the North South Exchange Consortium (NSEC). The study arose from the Irish Government's National Development Plan 2007-2013. This study is not a North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) initiative.

The purpose of the whole study is to provide an overview of all aspects of North South cooperation in education in recent years (including activities which were not coordinated by the Departments) and to identify areas for strengthening and developing practical cooperation.

The whole study is being overseen by a steering committee comprising senior officials from the two Departments and representatives from the Joint Secretariat of the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC). It was clarified that part 1 of the study would concentrate on the first of the seven Terms of Reference for the whole study: "Identify and describe current and previous activities in North South cooperation in education between the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Education." It was agreed that cooperation in the youth sector (under Department of Education and Department of Health and Children respectively) would be included in the study.

Part 1 is a 'snapshot' of North South cooperation viewed from mid-2010 and looking back five years and for the purposes of this study North South cooperation in the Education Sector is treated as covering pre-school, school and youth activities from an early age until school leaving age at 18-19.

This is the fourth study of this subject in nine years. In 2001 the Centre for Cross Border Studies submitted a report commissioned by the two Departments entitled *A Scoping Study of School, Youth and Teacher Exchanges on the island of Ireland*.¹ In 2005 the North South Exchange Consortium published two major studies entitled *Research on the Current Provision of North South School and Youth Exchange and Cooperative Activity 2000-2004* and *In their Own Words: Research on the Views of Participants of North South School and Youth Exchange and Cooperation*.² The first of these recommended the establishment of a 'stand alone' North South Exchange Trust to coordinate and manage North South exchange and cooperative activity. In 2008, Pauline Gildea (former Principal Officer in DES) and Matt Murray (ETI inspector), were commissioned by the two Departments to produce a report to the Departments entitled *Review of North South Cooperation on Educational Exchanges and Supporting Mechanisms* which recommended a particular mechanism for department-funded cooperative activities in the future: a single programme for North South educational exchanges to be developed and managed by the two Departments themselves.³

The underlying dual purpose of exchange and cooperative work in education was well-encapsulated by a phrase in the last of these reports as '1) *inter-cultural*

understanding; and 2) cooperation and collaboration for mutual benefit'. This study understands that although the first of these underpins all North South cooperation in Ireland, the latter element should be more the focus of this study.

The methodology of this short report is relatively straightforward. A literature review was carried out of these and other relevant reports. Around 20 senior departmental officials, major programme and project leaders and interested school principals were interviewed, and smaller programme and project leaders were telephoned for information for the summary table.

Funding and other factual information was obtained from: the two Departments, the International Fund for Ireland, the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) for EU funded projects. The researchers have attempted to situate North South cooperation activity within the strategic aims of the two Departments.

In its conclusions, this report pays particular attention to the four formal areas of cooperation undertaken by the North South Ministerial Council (Education Sector): Teacher Qualifications and Exchanges; Educational Under-Achievement; Education for Children with Special Needs; and School, Youth and Teacher Exchanges.

2. Departmental Strategies

The Department of Education has five priorities for the education sector, they are:

- Raising Standards For All
- Closing the Performance Gap, Increasing Access and Equity
- Developing The Education Workforce
- Improving The Learning Environment
- Transforming Education Management

The 2008-2010 Statement of Strategy of the Department of Education and Skills (formerly Department of Education and Science) overlaps with this agenda in several key areas. The DES's 'high level goal' in the schools area is to 'support and improve the quality, relevance and inclusiveness of education for every learner in our schools.'

Its priorities for primary and post-primary education are to:

- promote quality, relevance and inclusiveness by supporting schools in developing an inclusive environment for all learners;
- targeting interventions to address educational disadvantage;
- raising educational attainment;
- meeting the needs of learners with special education needs;
- providing supports for newcomer children;
- progressing the modernisation agenda;
- enhancing teacher education and professional development;
- promoting ongoing curriculum development, school evaluation and quality improvement; and
- providing high-quality school accommodation, administrative and financial supports.

Key areas of overlap between the two departmental strategies are raising educational standards, addressing educational disadvantage (including of children with special education needs and literacy/numeracy problems, and newcomer children), and improving teacher education.

The Social Inclusion Unit of DES make the point that, in relation to educational underachievement, the evidence from research, which underpinned the 2005 DEIS identification process, underlines the relevance of the social context of disadvantage. The research strongly supports the view that educational disadvantage will occur, to the extent that supplementary supports will be necessary, in schools and school communities where socio-economic disadvantage is most concentrated.

Newcomer children are not necessarily educationally disadvantaged as whilst some may come from homes who exhibit one or a number of 'disadvantage' characteristics, many of their parents are very engaged with their education and have ambitious targets for their children who are achieving good outcomes.

3. Levels of activity and funding in 2005 and 2009

North South cooperation in education was probably at its height in 2005, the baseline for the present study. This high point had been reached after two rounds of generous funding by successive EU Peace Programmes since the late 1990s and by the International Fund for Ireland since the late 1980s, along with the relevant government departments in the two jurisdictions. It presented a picture of an impressively wide-ranging but extremely complex and almost totally uncoordinated and unsystematic range of programmes and projects.

The consultants who carried out the 2005 NSEC report, *Current Provision of North South School and Youth Exchanges and Cooperative Activity, 2000-2004* collected data on 686 organisations and groups involved in North South school and youth exchange cooperation, and estimated that this represented only 40% of the totality of such activity. The report identified 30 different programmes administered by 18 different organisations, ranging from the three responsible government departments, North and South, to organisations set up specifically to support cross-border activity such as Cooperation Ireland, the Centre for Cross Border Studies and the International Fund for Ireland; cross-border partnerships between government departments and statutory and voluntary sector bodies; structurally all-island organisations such as the YMCA and the churches; and dedicated reconciliation organisations like “Corrymeela” and “Glencree”.

The 2005 report estimated that over €69 million had been spent on such cooperation in 2000-2004. The main sources of funding were as follows (**see Table 1**):

- International Fund for Ireland (IFI): €38.2 million (55% of the total, although this was heavily skewed by the large proportion of this funding which was devoted to one international youth training project for 18-28 year olds, Wider Horizons);
- EU Peace II programme: €20.7 million (30% of the total);
- Government Departments: Department of Education and Science; Department of Education and Department for Employment and Learning: €8.8 million (12.7% of the total, although this rose to 20.2% - €14 million, and the EU contribution fell to €15.53 million – when the relevant exchequer contribution to the EU Peace II programme was included).

The NSEC report also detailed the extraordinary range of projects funded, and the complex and variegated mechanisms for doing so. It listed 40 programmes and projects funded by DES, DE and DEL; 10 significant programmes funding their own projects, largely with EU Peace II money; and 73 projects funded directly by the EU Peace II programme. Another section of the report listed 11 major projects with over 700 participating youth organisations, youth groups and schools; and 106 other projects. The report estimated that, in total, more than 1,800 organisations, comprising over 3,000 schools and youth groups, and more than 55,000 young people, had participated in funded North-South school and youth projects in 2000-2004.

The large growth in North South educational activity during this period can be seen by reference to the Centre for Cross Border Studies' earlier 2001 scoping study,

which listed 537 schools and 53 youth organisations and groups involved in North South cooperative activity in education. The decline in growth can be seen in the 262 cross-border organisations and groups, including many small youth groups, listed in Annex 2 of this report as being active in 2009-2010.

The five years up to 2009 – the period of the present study – saw a small decline in total overall funding for North South educational programmes and projects, from €69.3 million in 2000-2004 to €64.1 million in 2005-2009 (*see Table 2*). Perhaps surprisingly, DES and DE’s own figures - as supplied to the Centre for Cross Border Studies – show an increase of 25% in exchequer funding, from €8.8 million to €11.1 million in direct funding during the latter period compared to the former (this rises to €14 million if Peace II and Peace III exchequer contributions are included: almost identical to the total for 2000-2004).

Similarly the International Fund for Ireland – which remains the largest single funder in this sector, largely because of Wider Horizons – has increased its educational and youth funding slightly, probably because it has set itself the task of spending the money available to it before its projected closure date in or around 2014.

In contrast, Peace II and Peace III Programme figures show a 45% decline in EU funding for school, youth and related programmes: from over €20 million in 2000-2004 to €11.35 million in 2005-2009 (this is based on the number of projects which had their Letter of Offer accepted between 2005 and 2009 according to statistics supplied by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, and probably under-estimates the total figure since CCBS found other Peace III-funded projects during this period not on NISRA’s list). This figure hides a much sharper decline over the past 12-18 months, since €9.9 million of this sum was spent under the Peace II programme in 2005-2008 but only €1.45 million was spent in 2009-June 2010 under the Peace III programme. The 2005-2008 EU funding was also boosted by a dedicated ‘one off’ education ‘measure’ (5.5) which was administered by the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Education and which on its own accounted for €2.38 million during this period.

Table 1: Main funding sources (2000-2004)

FUNDING SOURCE	(Euro)	FUNDING(%)
Department of Education and Science	5,624,064	
Department of Education	2,984,396	
Department for Employment and Learning	207,050	
Sub-total (DES, DE and DEL)	8,815,510	12.7
Peace II (EU contribution @ 75%)	15,534,131	
Peace II (exchequer contribution @ 25%)	5,178,043	
Sub-total (Peace II)	20,712,174	30
The International Fund for Ireland	38,200,000	
Sub-total (IFI)	38,200,000	55
US Government	1,600,000	
Sub-total (US)	1,600,000	2.3

TOTAL	69,327,684	100
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Source: *Research on the Current Provision of North South School and Youth Exchange and Cooperative Activity 2000-2004*

Table 2: Main funding sources – estimated by CCBS (2005-2009)

FUNDING SOURCE	Euro	%
Department of Education and Science	7,933,277	
Department of Education	3,431,000	
Sub-total (DES and DE)	11,364,277	18
Peace II and III (EU contribution @ 75%)	8,512,000	
Peace II and III (exchequer contribution @ 25%)	2,838,000	
Sub-total (Peace II and III) (DES is not involved in providing funding under the Peace III programme)	11,350,000	18
The International Fund for Ireland	12,583,000	
Wider Horizons (18-28 year olds)	28,133,000	63
Sub-total (IFI)	40,716,000	
US Government	925,000	1
Sub-total (US)	925,000	
TOTAL	64,355,277	100

Source: CCBS calculations based on DES, DE and NISRA figures

Notes for table 2:

- 2005-2009 Department for Employment and Learning funding is not included.
- Several higher education and research projects (including the Centre for Cross Border Studies, Universities Ireland and the Washington Ireland Programme) – which are outside the brief of this report – are included for comparative purposes.
- This table does not include projects funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs Reconciliation Fund and Anti-Sectarianism Fund.
- CCBS believes the NISRA figures for EU Peace III funding supplied to it understate the actual figure.

4. Youth programmes and projects

Responsibility for youth affairs transferred from the then Department of Education and Science to the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA) in January 2009. The OMCYA focuses on harmonising policy issues that effect children and young people's lives in areas such as early childhood care and education, child welfare and protection, children and young people's participation, youth justice, youth work and youth services provision, and research on children and young people. This study however has concentrated largely on school-based cooperation and exchanges rather than on non-formal education and the youth sector.

The main innovation in the youth sector during this period was the establishment of the North South Education and Training Standards Committee (NSETS) to accredit training courses for youth workers, North and South, in cooperation with youth work accreditation bodies in the UK. Causeway, a Léargas-British Council-Youth Council of Northern Ireland administered programme, continues its good work linking youth groups on both an East-West and a North South basis; Causeway is funded by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA) – Department of Health and Children, Dublin, and the Departments of Education in Bangor and London.

The scattered and fragmented nature of this sector and the very different structures north and south make it difficult to monitor and measure in terms of its North South cooperation activities.

A sense of the very wide range of mainly small-scale youth projects linking on a North South basis can be gauged by looking at the educational projects (the great majority of them youth projects) funded with small grants from the Department of Foreign Affairs Reconciliation and Anti-Sectarianism Funds in 2009-2010: 83 projects worth €1.9 million.

At system level there appears to be less north-south contact than 5-10 years ago. Longstanding links between the South Eastern Education and Library Board and the Vocational Education Committees (VEC) in Cork City, County Cork and County Clare have come to an end. With the ending of the EU Peace-funded North South Education Forum, which brought the chief executives of border region VECs and of the Education and Library Boards together in regular meetings and to undertake joint projects on marginalised young people and youth information, there appears to be little or no current contact between these officials.

In contrast, senior executives of the 10 main youth organisations listed in Annex 2 have built good personal relationships and maintained contact.

However, with the establishment of the post of Assessor of Youth Work a number of structures and systems have been introduced to identify and improve effectiveness in the youth work provision. Chief among these relates to the establishment of a standards framework for the youth work sector.

The National Quality Standards Framework (NQSF) for Youth Work was launched in Dublin in July 2010 by Minister Barry Andrews, TD, Minister for Children and Youth

Affairs and represents the Irish Government's first national standards framework to ensure and enhance quality youth services for young people.

The National Quality Standards Framework (NQSF) is primarily a support and development tool for youth work. It provides a structured framework for organisations to assess, indicate and enhance their work and will provide organisations an opportunity to articulate their youth work practice using a common language.

The net effect of the NQSF will be to identify and improve the effectiveness of youth work service provision, resulting in an advancement of good practice and allowing organisations to address the needs of young people to an even greater extent. The NQSF will apply to all staff-led youth work organisations, services, projects and programmes funded by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and will operate on a 3-yearly cycle. The framework is being introduced nationally on a phased and incremental basis commencing in September 2010.

It should be noted that there has been good cooperation and mutual learning between the Department of Education and the Assessor of Youth Work, OMCYA, regarding the development and implementation of the respective youth work standards systems in both jurisdictions. It is envisaged that the NQSF will act as the foundation for the establishment of more in-depth assessment mechanisms to be developed by the Assessor of Youth Work. As part of this process OMCYA proposes to make further contact with the Inspectorate working with youth work services within the Department of Education so as to ensure that the learning derived from the well established practices and procedures in its area can inform the development of appropriate assessment mechanisms to be employed within the youth sector overseen by OMCYA.

The renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-18) – Council Resolution of 27 November 2009 - provides the EU context for the development and implementation of policy in both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland. The OMCYA is also in the process of developing a new policy framework for youth work and youth service provision. The aim is to develop a clear and coordinated national strategy, congruent with the content and duration of the new National Children's Strategy for the delivery of enabling and effective structures, services, programmes and supports for young people.

5. Learning from good practice in North South school and teacher projects

The writers of this report have chosen five North South education projects whose funding and activities have been sustained for more than a decade to examine best practice over the period 2005-2010: the European Studies Programme, which started in the late 1980s; and Dissolving Boundaries, Education for Reconciliation, Civic-Link and the Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS), all of which started in the post Good Friday Agreement 1999-2000 period.

There are some common themes running through some or all of these projects which are worth exploring to see if they can provide good practice lessons for a more focussed, systematic and cost-effective future for North South cooperation activity.

5.1 Use of ICT

Most successful projects have increasingly used ICT to connect their participant teachers and students, while continuing with the face-to-face contact which is crucial for the mutual understanding elements of any exchange across a contested border. In their 2008 report, *Review of North-South Cooperation on Educational Exchanges and Supporting Mechanisms* Pauline Gildea and Matt Murray stressed that 'the future direction of exchange and cooperative work needs to take full account of the potential of the increasingly sophisticated tools available for e-learning and e-communication and the ease with which young people use them.'

Although the European Studies Programme (ESP) was first into the field – with significant numbers of children in the South using email for the first time in the 1990s through their participation in ESP – Dissolving Boundaries is clearly the leader here, with its use of video-conferencing and of the latest technologies such as Moodle and Marratech. Evaluations show that the participating students clearly enjoy the technology; it forces sometimes reluctant teachers to learn about ICT in circumstances where they feel they have a duty to the children to 'make it work'; it is a vital skill in an increasingly skills-based curriculum in both Irish jurisdictions and internationally; and – after an initial capital outlay – it reduces significantly the costs of cross-border exchanges. As Taoiseach, Brian Cowen, said in November 2009 when launching the Smart Schools=Smart Economy report, the integration of ICT into teaching and learning in schools has 'a positive effect on students learning outcomes, develops higher order skills including analysis, evaluation and problem-solving, and helps to produce the graduates with the knowledge and skill-sets to meet the needs of a modern economy based on innovation and research.'

All five of the selected 'good practice' projects – Dissolving Boundaries (www.dissolvingboundaries.org), European Studies Programme (www.european-studies.org), Civic Link (www.civic-link-org), Education for Reconciliation (www.reconciliation.ie) and SCoTENS (<http://scotens.org>) – now have interactive websites widely used by teachers and students.

In the North South cooperation area, Dissolving Boundaries has been a pioneer in the use of ICT in schools. The work here begins early (as all education authorities say it should) with the majority of Dissolving Boundaries schools (121 out of 177 in

2009-2010) coming from the primary sector. It was the first North South project to use software (Moodle) which enables teachers and pupils to engage in on-line group discussion, to use a 'wiki' as a shared on-line 'space', and to adapt the software for customised uses.

Moodle is asynchronous: i.e. it does not require schools to be on-line at the same time, which means that teachers can fit 'Dissolving Boundaries' work in around other commitments. Dissolving Boundaries does not use the Northern schools ICT service(C2k)'s Virtual Learning Environment, Learning NI, because until recently, under the terms of its commercial software licences, schools using Learning NI have not been allowed to link with Southern schools (this has been relaxed recently, with Southern schools being allowed to participate as 'guest users'). Another constraint has been that a small number of Southern schools still do not have the guaranteed bandwidth accessed by all Northern schools, a *sine qua non* for this kind of work.

Dissolving Boundaries is also unusual in its targeting of special schools: 22 in 2009-2010 and 50 since the project began.

Dr Roger Austin of Dissolving Boundaries quotes teachers in two participating Special Schools in Belfast and Dublin commenting how the use of technology and the link with the other school had both raised the self-esteem of the pupils and improved their communication skills, with pupils gaining a sense of ownership in their learning and the confidence to be 'leaders' in their schools.

The Education Inspectorates in both jurisdictions are currently conducting a joint evaluation of the Dissolving Boundaries programme aimed at assessing the educational outcomes and wider benefits of the programme and producing recommendations for Ministerial consideration. This is the first evaluation of the programme since it started in 1999.

5.2 Targeting Disadvantaged schools

The 2001 *Scoping Study of School, Youth and Teacher Exchanges on the island of Ireland* concluded a statistical survey of 537 schools involved in North South cooperation projects: 'The statistics indicate that there is a considerable job of work to be done if schools from the less well-off parts of society are to take part in this growing rapprochement. Taking the island as a whole, half the grammar and/or fee-paying second-level schools in both jurisdictions are involved in cross-border contact, compared to just over a quarter of other second-level schools. There is also a considerable amount to be done to bring more primary and Special Needs schools into contact with their counterparts across the border.'

Few of the major cross-border projects have targeted disadvantaged schools, for the obvious reason that they are 'hard to reach' because of poor resources, under-motivated teachers, and students with problems caused by both social and educational disadvantage. In particular, and again for obvious political and cultural reasons, schools in often disadvantaged, working class loyalist areas are among the most difficult to attract to participate in North South exchanges.

5.3 Civic-Link, which brings schools and youth groups together across the border to explore and (it is hoped) work together on a common issue in their local community, is one of the very few that has targeted disadvantaged schools. It did not always do so. A 2003 evaluation concluded that the main positive effect on Civic-Link participation in its first four years was among students from *non-disadvantaged* schools.

Following this the Department of Education and Science made it a condition of funding that Southern schools selected for Civic-Link would have to be on its 'designated disadvantaged' schools list.. The Department of Education has not supported Civic-Link's main North South programme in recent years. However it supports a small cross-community version of Civic Link, with 12 schools every year (compared to 50 in the cross-border version) from 2007-2010, but this funding was ended earlier this year.

Civic-Link organisers emphasise that they have worked hard to find matching schools with Southern disadvantaged schools. One organiser estimates that around 20% of students in participating Northern schools are eligible for Free School Meals.

5.4 Centrality to the Curriculum

To be relevant North-South exchange work needs to be firmly rooted in the curriculum. Aidan Clifford, Director of the Curriculum Development Unit of the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee says: 'Education for Reconciliation is a project that is at the heart of the citizenship curriculum in schools. It is a way in which Irish children, North and South, can more easily engage with vital and relevant contemporary issues such as interculturalism, peace building and overcoming conflict, policing and human rights. This work is an integral part of Civic Social and Political Education (CSPE) in the South and Local and Global Citizenship in the North. It is *not* an 'add on' activity which can be dismissed by teachers as not important because it is not part of the examined curriculum. It is a mainstream activity, and it is our challenge to maintain it as a mainstream activity.'

The 2001 Centre for Cross Border Studies' *Scoping Study* quoted Department of Education and Education and Library Board officials saying one of the strengths of the European Studies Programme was the fact that it was rooted in the curriculum, with direct relevance to the very full statutory curriculum in the North, particularly in the areas of history, geography, ICT and Education for Mutual Understanding.

However, one of the perceived problems of even the most sustained North-South projects centring on citizenship education – Education for Reconciliation, the European Studies Programme and Civic-Link among them – is that citizenship education is not as firmly rooted in the curriculum as it might be on an island that has experienced several centuries of deep social division and conflict.

As Professor Tony Gallagher of Queen's University Belfast notes in a recent article about good practice in citizenship education in both Irish jurisdictions: 'As long as schools are held to account primarily for academic achievement, through base-lining, targets, inspection and development planning, citizenship education is always going to come lower down, perhaps much lower down, the pecking order.'⁴

5.5 Teacher Education

The importance of the training and development of teachers, as key influencers of the open minds of generations of children and young people, has been stressed by many OECD, EU and government reports.

As Pauline Gildea and Matt Murray noted in 2008, when writing about Education for Reconciliation: 'Although the ultimate aims of the project are pupil-centred, the focus is on the professional development of teachers as agents of social change'. The underlying premise is that teachers are significant "cultural multipliers", influential in their pupils' formation of attitudes and values. Consequently, developing the skills of teachers in promoting reconciliation is an investment in a future of sustainable peace and a means of resourcing the educational system to deal with the legacy of conflict.' They said this 'cultural multiplier' factor was an important policy consideration.

In the words of Professor John Coolahan, a co-founder of the Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS):

Both governments in Ireland have emphasised education for human resource development as a central dimension of economic and social policy. They are also concerned that education should promote greater mutual understanding and cooperation on the island, regarding this as integral to improved quality of life for the whole populace. Teacher education is strategically placed to play a catalytic role in attaining such objectives. Teacher education professionals work with teachers within a lifelong learning framework. They exercise considerable influence on the understanding, attitudes and skills of teachers during the formative periods of pre-service training and early professional development.⁵

Pauline Gildea and Matt Murray, in their 2008 *Review of North-South Cooperation on Educational Exchanges and Supporting Mechanisms*, pick out SCoTENS as an example of a necessary emphasis in North South work on 'exchange and interaction for the purposes of collaboration on issues of mutual interest which can be furthered by the sharing of experience and practice.'

Teacher education is at the centre of many of the more successful, sustained North South cooperation projects, notably Education for Reconciliation and Civic-Link (and, of course, SCoTENS). As Aidan Clifford of the Curriculum Development Unit of City of Dublin VEC says: 'The classic dilemma for funders of North South cooperation initiatives is "Do you invest in the students or in the permanent members of the educational system: the teachers and principals?" Exchanges of students can look good, make you feel good, and get your school into the local media. But if you want such work to lead to whole school and institutional change, the teacher dimension is more important, and supporting teachers and the North South dimension of teacher education should be the priority.'

The evaluator of this project, Karen O'Shea, adds: 'Education for Reconciliation is in good hands. Hands that have been encouraged to engage with sensitive and controversial issues, hands that feel more competent in supporting students to address such issues, and hands which will potentially have another cohort of

students next year and the year after that and the year after that. Such is the value of focussing on teacher development.’⁶

Civic-Link manager, Marianne McGill, says: ‘In our experience North South school projects or exchanges are only as good as the relationship established between the teachers - the stronger and more positive that relationship, the better the project or exchange. It has been demonstrated from focus group interviews which we have conducted in Civic-Link that the dynamic of the relationships established between teachers partnered on a North South basis was inevitably mirrored among participant student groups’.

5.6 Alignment of policy

At their best, North South cooperation projects can contribute to some alignment of policy between the two jurisdictions. Roger Austin stresses that the small four-person Dissolving Boundaries team based in University of Ulster and National University of Ireland, Maynooth could not have carried out their work without the active support of ICT advisers in the Education and Library Boards in the North and Education Centres in the South, who nominated schools to take part. Similarly important was the technical support from Classroom 2000 (C2k) in the North and the National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) in the South, the two agencies charged with providing ICT infrastructure for every school in the two jurisdictions.

Austin believes strongly that this network of university-based lecturers and cross-border project managers, Education and Library Boards and Education Centres, and ICT specialists in both jurisdictions has changed the thinking of all those involved, so that they now think much more in all-island terms. ‘In effect, we can say there has been some alignment of policy between the Dissolving Boundaries programme, the strategic ICT goals in each jurisdiction, and the agencies charged with policy implementation. What is still needed is a more explicit policy statement from government in both jurisdictions about the role of ICT in promoting both social cohesion and intercultural education.’⁷

Similarly, Dr Tom Hesketh, the Northern co-Chair of SCoTENS and Director of the Regional Training Unit in Belfast, remarks of teacher education research, which was an underdeveloped ‘Cinderella’ area in both jurisdictions before SCoTENS began its work in 2003:

Perhaps the most significant outcome of SCoTENS to date has been the greater alignment effected between departmental policy directions (within each jurisdiction) and the foci, interests and energy of the education research community. Much of SCoTENS activity and outcomes relates to key agendas such as education reform, raising standards, teacher efficacy, school improvement and leadership development – all in the context of international best practice and global exploration of the key educational challenges of our time.

Aidan Clifford, Director of the Curriculum Development Unit of the City of Dublin VEC, points to the positive relationships that have been built up over the 12 years of the Education for Reconciliation project.

A number of project leaders have said they believed that if there had been a coherent structure for North South educational cooperation over the past decade, under the management or oversight of the two Departments, the opportunities for mutual learning, dissemination of good practice and closer policy alignment would have been much greater.

6. Learning from other strategic areas

This section will focus on a number of areas which may be of interest for future North South collaboration: educational under-achievement; Irish medium education and Irish language teaching; Special Educational Needs; and links between education and the economy.

6.1 Educational disadvantage and inequalities

Some significant work has been done in this area under the auspices of the Education Sector of the North South Ministerial Council. This work has been facilitated by the NSMC Education Sector's Educational Under-achievement Working Group. This North South Working Group of officials from DES and DE has an ongoing work programme. This programme for 2010, for example, included ways of ensuring that work on promoting good practice in literacy and numeracy fed back into teacher education, and of learning from successful approaches in the youth and Special Education sectors working with the most disadvantaged communities.

Literacy and numeracy are two areas about which the two Departments have been liaising closely on a North South basis. For example, a well-attended North South conference in Enniskillen in February 2010 on Numeracy explored the case for reforming mathematics teaching and maths in the curriculum in both jurisdictions; shared ideas on best practice in improving the teaching of maths; and explored areas for future joint working in this area. Five key points emerged from the conference: a common need to find ways of engaging young people in maths; the importance of good quality teaching to raise standards; the importance of the professional development of teachers, good quality resources and the dissemination of good practice; the important role of parents in changing young people's attitudes to maths; and the benefits of North South collaboration in this area – particularly the benefits of collaborative professional development and sharing of best practice on a North South basis. Similarly, the two Departments have been engaging to share information and best practice on issues relating to school attendance and retention.

6.2 Special Educational Needs

The policy decision to set up the Middletown Centre of Excellence for Autism in the South Armagh village was made in 2001 and was formally recognised at a North South Ministerial Council meeting in April 2002. DE and DES established a holding company, Middletown Centre for Autism (Holdings) Ltd, to purchase the property in 2004 and an operational company, Middletown Centre for Autism Ltd, which opened in 2007 to provide services, with funding from both Departments.

The intention was that the new Centre would 'not only provide specialist residential and educational facilities for the children and young people, but would offer much needed opportunities for family support and professional development. The Centre would provide children and young people with a period of assessment and support so that intervention strategies can be assimilated into the family and classroom routine.' It would be first of its kind in Ireland to offer such a comprehensive range of educational, training and research services to teachers and other special needs

professionals, and to families and their children. A range of residential accommodation would be provided at Middletown. In the event there were delays in purchasing the property until legal matters on behalf of the vendors were resolved in 2004. A further delay was caused, notably in May 2009, when the then Minister for Education and Science, Batt O'Keefe TD, announced a funding 'pause' for the project on the Southern side (this was lifted in December 2009).

It is planned that the Middletown Centre provides 4 services. Two of these services are already being provided since the Centre opened in 2007; Training and Advisory Service and a Research and Information Service. It is proposed that the Centre will provide two further services, an Educational Assessment Service and a Learning Support Service following the completion of the main building and refurbishment project.

There is no residential accommodation ready for use on the Middletown site at present as the main building and refurbishment project has not commenced. To enable the Centre to begin to deliver services from December 2007 both Departments funded refurbishment works to provide suitable accommodation for training, research and administration staff. The December 2009 meeting of the NSMC looked forward to the 'commencement of interim capital works' on the site. Subsequently, urgent health and safety maintenance work have been funded by both Departments. The NSMC also noted plans by the Departments to develop a multi-annual phased plan for the development of the Centre in conjunction with the Board of management of the Centre. Building and refurbishment plans for the Centre have been brought to 'pre-tender stage.'

Nevertheless the Centre has a full training schedule, and over 5,000 people, mainly teachers, health professionals, voluntary sector workers and parents, have been trained since December 2007. A number of research bulletins, providing accessible summaries of relevant peer-reviewed articles, have also been published, the most recent in relation to educational assessment.

One issue is that Special Needs provision in the South has improved dramatically over the past decade, driven by decisions of the High Court in favour of parents seeking specialised services for their children, and by greatly improved funding for the area.

Two very successful North/South conferences on autism were held on 15 April 2008 and 13 November 2009. The conferences presented an opportunity to showcase and share local and international good practice, provide support and information to parents, and professional development for teachers, educational psychologists and other ASD professionals.

6.3 Special Educational Needs (SEN) Cross-Border Professional Exchange Programme

The Special Educational Needs (SEN) Cross Border Professional Exchange Programme funded by Peace II, enabled teachers, principals and educational psychologists, from Northern Ireland and the border counties of the Republic of

Ireland, to participate in professional exchanges. This facilitated the exchange of good practice, the dissemination of information and the promotion of dialogue particularly in the specialist areas of autism, dyslexia and marginalised youth. The project, which resulted in the production of some very useful resources for schools finished in June 2006.

6.4 Special Educational Needs (SEN) Cross-Border School and Parent Community Partnership Programme

Due to the successful outcomes of the “Profession Exchange Programme”, a further Programme, “The Cross Border School and Parent Community Partnership Programme”, funded by Peace II Extension, involving schools, parents and the community, operated from September 2006 to August 2008. This project aimed to further extend the learning of the first project to create a cross-border schools/parents/community partnership approach to the education and socialisation of children, with special needs by aiming to bring schools, parents and their communities together by establishing effective local networks with schools at the heart of the home-to school programme.

There were three elements to the programme:

i. **Children with Autism** - A Home to School Support Programme, This encouraged school to develop positive working relationships with parents and offered advice, practical help and support as the child settled into school.

ii. **Hard to Help Young People** - The home - School Virtual Link - This aimed to use ICT to provide home based computerised learning support training to six schools and support identified young people over an 18 month period.

iii. **A Portable Language and Communication Programme** - A total of 22 schools from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland participated in the project to develop a support programme to enable parents / carers to assist in the development of children's language skills.

The three elements produced a binder containing the following resources:

- See my Word Tree Grow;
- Through the School Gates and Autism - Coping with the Changes from Home to School.

6.5 Irish medium education and Irish language teaching

In 1999-2001 the Western Education and Library Board (WELB) led a cross-border project to produce Irish language materials in the Ulster dialect for use in Irish language primary schools in Northern Ireland and the Southern border counties. It translated 22 fiction and non-fiction children's books into Irish. It also assisted St Mary's University College in Belfast to write and translate new Irish-specific content for the Kingfisher children's micropedia on CD-ROM.

The project was administered by a steering committee including WELB representatives, inspectors from both jurisdictions, gaelcoileanna (Irish-medium

schools) on both sides of the border, the Belfast-based bunscoil (primary) and naíscóil (nursery) schools umbrella group Gaeloiliúint, the Northern Irish language group Gael Uladh, - the third level sector and teachers' groups. It was funded by the EU Peace and Reconciliation Programme with IR£331,000 over two and a half years through both Departments of Education. The project was favourably evaluated by two Celtic Studies academics from Queen's University Belfast who said a large majority of both teachers and pupils have 'enjoyed their experience and have nothing but praise for the services rendered to them during the project.'

Conversations with responsible departmental officials and Irish medium education spokespersons did not uncover any comparable North South Irish medium education or Irish language teaching project funded by any EU programme in the 2005-2010 period.

The Director of Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, the North's representative body for Irish medium education, Seán Ó Coinn, admits that North South cooperation between Irish medium schools is 'very ad hoc', consisting largely of occasional exchanges and trips to Southern Gaeltachts.

Since spring 2009 there has been an all-island network called An Coiste Seasta Thuaidh Theas ar an Ghaeloideachas (the North South Standing Committee on Irish Language Education), modelled on SCoTENS, with representatives from all Irish medium and Irish language (i.e. Gaeltacht) education bodies on the island, along with relevant government departments, Irish language promotion bodies and Irish language teachers' groups. The bodies represented on its committee are Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, Department of Education, Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta, Foras Pátrúnachta na Scoileanna Lán-Ghaeilge Teo, Gaelscoileanna Teo, An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG), Comhdháil Náisiúnta na Gaeilge, Comhar na Múinteoirí Gaeilge, Foras na Gaeilge and Comhar na Naíonraí Gaeltachta Teo. Ó Coinn admits that for the moment this is a 'talking shop', existing on a small grant from the Department of Education and planning to hold its first conference towards the end of 2010.

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta is itself planning a first all-island Irish language teachers conference in late 2010, with up to 30 teachers attending from both jurisdictions and with assistance from the Irish language Curriculum Support Service in the South and the Education and Library Boards' Curriculum Advisory Support Services in the North.

St Mary's University College in Belfast has a strong North South dimension to its B.Ed through Irish, which is the only dedicated Irish medium teaching degree on the island of Ireland. A number of Southern students attend this course to gain their teaching qualifications, as it currently meets the Irish teaching requirements of the Department of Education and Skills/Teaching Council Ireland. However with more Northern applicants entering the growing Irish medium sector there, the proportion of Southern students on this course has declined in recent years.

There has been some discussion about the possibility of producing common all-island textbooks and other curricular resources for Irish medium education across a range of subjects. However this would present significant barriers such as the cost

involved at a time of financial cutbacks; the copyright and adaptation issues required if texts used in Southern schools are to be translated for use in Northern schools; and the problems of accountability and funding if curriculum bodies have to approve and monitor curriculum materials being used outside their statutory jurisdiction.

6.6 Links between education and the economy

North South work in this area has been a significant element in the International Fund for Ireland's Wider Horizons youth training programme for 18-28 year olds, which is largely outside the brief of this report.

The main initiatives examined were the Enterprise for Youth (KEY) and Learning and Educating Together (LET) programmes, again run by the International Fund for Ireland, and Dissolving Boundaries' new enterprise collaboration with the Joint Business Council of the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC) and the Confederation of British Industry (NI).

KEY brings together 14-16 year old school students from both Northern communities and the South in annual residentials to develop their entrepreneurial skills; challenge their perceptions of themselves and their peers; and promote mutual understanding and respect. They are encouraged to undertake projects such as setting up a model company in order to learn about product design, finance, customers, sales and marketing, and thus to make a real connection between business activities and earning money.

The external evaluation of the 2008-2009 programme reported that there had been improvements in entrepreneurial attitudes among participants as well as in related skills such as team working. Parents and teachers thought that the business content of the residentials had enabled the young people to develop 'unexplored skills'. Teachers thought the programme had provided a useful introduction to the concepts and language of business. One very successful element of the programme was increased job seeking, CV writing and interview skills by participants

LET is a similar residential programme targeting 12-13 year olds, which also focusses on young people of that age at risk of alienation and disaffection, and thus 'dropping out' from mainstream schooling. The evaluation findings were similar to the KEY programme, with the additional finding that participants' communication and particularly oral communication skills had improved. Teachers observed positive personal development changes among the young people, including 'troubled' students whose participation 'has the potential to be life changing.'⁸

2009-2010 is the first year of a two year pilot project between Dissolving Boundaries and the IBEC-CBI Joint Business Council, under which DB is working with 20 schools per year (primary and post-primary) with enterprise as a focus for their cooperation work. In return, DB receives approximately £30,000 from the JBC in EU INTERREG funding, to be directed towards equipment and training for schools and for project dissemination.

A showcase event for participating schools was held in May 2010 with a videoconference link between University of Ulster and NUI Maynooth. This allowed

students to present and discuss their business projects, including issues like marketing strategies and profit margins. One of the outstanding examples showcased was a lettuce growing company Lettuce Be Healthy formed by 9-10 year olds, which was growing and selling lettuces in the locality of their school.

7. Four case studies

This section will examine four case studies: one a successful and expanding North South initiative in the area of inclusion and diversity; the second an example of less sustained cooperation between government agencies in the area of curriculum and assessment; and the third an innovative private sector driven initiative in the ICT area.

7.1 A case study of expanding North South cooperation: Inclusion of 'newcomer' children

In 2005 Mary Yarr of the Southern Education and Library Board in Armagh and Professor David Little and Dr Barbara Simpson of Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT), a Trinity College Dublin campus company, applied to the Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS) for a small amount of seed funding (£5,000) to research and develop a 'Toolkit for Diversity in the Primary School.' This was a pilot project to develop a resource for use with non-English speaking children in primary classrooms, North and South, which were rapidly becoming both multicultural and multilingual. In particular, large numbers of 'newcomer' children from Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia, children of immigrant parents, had come into primary schools in both Dublin and the Armagh-South Down area in previous years as well as throughout the island.

This resource was launched in December 2007 by Minister for Education, Caitríona Ruane MLA, and Minister of State for Integration, Conor Lenihan TD. Its design, printing and distribution were funded by the Department of Education and the Department of Education and Science. This toolkit was unique in that it was the first English language curricular resource developed as part of a North-South initiative to be distributed to every school – in this case every primary school.

Not only did it provide an invaluable resource for use in primary schools throughout the island, the toolkit (in its introduction) also explicitly encouraged policy makers in both jurisdictions to begin discussing common issues in this new area: notably home-school communication with immigrant parents; appropriate induction procedures and pastoral care for newcomer children; creating intercultural environments in Irish schools; and the changing role of boards of management in these circumstances.

Following the development of the primary toolkit the Inclusion and Diversity Service then moved on to develop an equivalent post-primary toolkit. This was developed by the Inclusion and Diversity Service with Dr Simpson as a consultant to ensure that it could also be used in the South. Officials in both jurisdictions kept in regular contact throughout the development of the post-primary toolkit and consulted with principals and teachers in both jurisdictions. An interim evaluative conference was held in Malahide, with input from Northern, Southern and Council of Europe experts. Minister for Education Caitríona Ruane MLA launched the post-primary toolkit in March 2010 at an event in Newcastle, Co Down. At the same time she launched two amended primary toolkits: one for special schools and one for the early year's education sector.

In 2009 the Inclusion and Diversity Service had carried out research which highlighted the need for more professional development for those acting in a coordinating role in schools in delivering education to pupils whose first language is not English. The DES Inspectorate is currently evaluating the quality of EAL teaching and learning in Southern schools.

It was also proposed that the development of a 'coordination training tool' for such teachers be developed: this would be a 'blended' e-learning tool with some face to face input. The aim is to develop a flexible tool, based on the existing toolkits, which can be used both by primary and post-primary schools in both jurisdictions. The new tool will also be piloted in both parts of the island.

Four outcomes are envisaged from this initiative: school coordinators of English as a second language will have the knowledge and skills to disseminate best practice across their schools; schools will have a deeper understanding of intercultural education and how to support it in the classroom and the school in general; schools will increase their capacity to meet the needs of pupils and parents from an immigrant background; and staff will be clear about their roles in the new situation of interculturalism in the school.

A strategy group for this project has held its first meeting: represented on it are the North-Eastern Education and Library Board (representing the ELBs), Laois Education Centre (representing the Education Centres and facilitating the pilot), the Inspectorates of both jurisdictions, and school principals in both jurisdictions. There is also a North-South operational group to oversee the work. Moodle has been selected as the e-learning platform to facilitate use of the new tool outside Northern Ireland.

This is an example of a growing oak tree of North South cooperation in education emerging from a very small cross-border acorn. There is a view that the small amount of funding required for the 'coordination training tool' will be forthcoming.

7.2 A case study of North South Cooperation appearing to run out of steam: the Curriculum

The 2001 *Scoping Study of School, Youth and Teacher Exchanges on the island of Ireland* reported a 'considerable increase in dialogue' between the two curriculum and assessment bodies on the island – the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and the Northern Ireland Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) – as well as the work of the Joint Curriculum Review Liaison Group, bringing together the senior curriculum experts from the five jurisdictions in these islands.

The curricular area has been one in which there has been significant North South contact and joint work over the past decade. Biennial conferences were held between the two Councils to discuss common curriculum and assessment issues. There were relatively frequent exchanges of speakers at conferences. A joint CCEA-NCCA steering committee was set up, consisting of the chairs of both councils and

two other nominees from each. This met three or four times, the last meeting being towards the end of 2008.

There was pioneering cross-border work on the FÓN project, which explored the use of mobile phones and networked computers for teaching, learning and assessing Irish at post-primary level. This project won the European Award for Languages – the Language Label award in 2009, and the Taoiseach’s Public Service Excellence award in 2010.

Under this innovative project, mobile phones are used in three ways: 1. to send vocabulary via SMS to students on a daily basis; 2. to facilitate students to dial a voice-response system where they leave recorded responses to their teacher’s questions; 3. to facilitate students to dial up to a ‘voice chat’ with another student in their class, in the same school or in another (including cross-border) school. The chat is based on a teacher’s task which the students receive when they are paired with their chat partner. The networked computers are used to facilitate on-line text-chat between students in a secure and teacher-monitored area. Both teachers and students have secure on-line interfaces where the former can listen to the students’ responses and provide feedback, and the latter can access all chats and responses as well as teacher feedback.

The funding for this project was provided largely by the North South Irish language body, Foras na Gaeilge, with technical support from the National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) and CCEA organising the required substitute cover in the North. In 2008-2009 FÓN worked with 420 second year students and their 14 teachers in six cross-border post-primary schools. Unfortunately in 2009-2010 the project worked with third year students in Southern schools studying for their Junior Certificate examination and there was no Northern involvement.

In 2009, an NCCA group also visited the CCEA’s Digital Media Centre in Belfast, which pioneers methods of putting teaching materials on video and the Internet for downloading to MP3 players, and there were initial conversations about greater cooperation in this area. However these did not materialise into a concrete project.

There was also pioneering pilot work on an all-island curriculum for the group of students known as ‘students with exceptional abilities’ in Ireland, and ‘gifted and talented pupils’ in the UK. A joint project led to a set of all-Ireland curricular guidelines that were published in November 2007. This was the first and only time such curricular guidelines carried the logos of both curriculum councils – it was, in the words of one official, the ‘zenith of cooperation’ between the two bodies.

This project led to the NCCA leading a European project which looked at curricular guidelines for students with exceptional abilities in a number of EU countries. Northern Ireland was not involved in this project.

In recent years the NCCA has invited the CCEA to a number of international meetings to discuss curricular themes most recently to a meeting in Dublin in mid-June 2010 to take part in a meeting of specialists from eight European countries in curricular innovation in mathematics for post-primary schools. These invitations tend not to be taken up.

It is perhaps no coincidence that in its latest list of strategic goals, the NCCA uses the term 'maintain' to describe its 'special relationship' with CCEA, rather than 'develop'. Neil Anderson, stressing that his council has had to re-examine its current priorities in the light of spending cuts, says that CCEA is keen to maintain the relationship at 'a level that is sustainable for the time being' with the hope that in three-five years they would be able to 'return to a developmental phase again.'

7.3 A case study of a North South private sector driven initiative in ICT

The Intel Computer Clubhouse Network now has 105 Clubhouses in 20 different countries all over the world. Computer Clubhouses provide a creative and safe out-of-school learning environment where young people from disadvantaged communities work with adult mentors to explore their own ideas, develop skills, and build confidence in them through the use of technology. The Network is a collaboration begun by Intel, the Boston Museum of Science and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Media Lab.

The Computer Clubhouse is a more vibrant environment than a standard computer classroom in a school, with elements of an artist's studio, inventor's workshop, TV newsroom, film and animation studio, architect's office, robotics lab and music studio. Activities are guided by current educational research showing that adolescents learn most effectively when engaged in designing projects, rather than memorizing facts or learning isolated skills. The aim of the Clubhouse is to foster a learner-centred, informal educational approach that encourages young people to discover their interests and apply their own ideas. Given the support to pursue their own ideas, the Clubhouse promoters believe that disadvantaged young people, in particular, can overcome their apathy about education and become motivated to learn and grow.

The first Clubhouse in Ireland was set up in 2003 in the Liberties, a working class area of central Dublin, as a 'state of the art' multimedia technology centre for disadvantaged young people aged 8 to 18. Seed money from the Intel Foundation enabled the South West Inner City Network (an umbrella group of community groups in south inner-city Dublin), supported by the City of Dublin Youth Services Board, to set up the Clubhouse. The project is run by two full-time coordinators, two part-time seconded youth workers and a team of volunteers called 'mentors', who have all the relevant background in multimedia. A second Clubhouse now exists in Blanchardstown, in Dublin's western suburbs.

Mentors work with young people on both continuous and short-term projects in areas like film-making, website building, animation, game design and music production, offering the participating young people one-to-one guidance which is invaluable to building their confidence. They learn about and use software such as Adobe Creative Suite, Final Cut Pro, Google Sketchup, Garage Band, 3D Game Maker and Mission Maker.

Using the informal constructivist approach, allowing young people to explore their own creativity while being supported by mentors, the Clubhouse network is one of the leaders of the newly emerging sector of non-formal multimedia learning centres. At a time when ICT is becoming increasingly important in delivering education at all

levels, it demonstrates how technology can be used as a tool to enable young people in socially and educationally disadvantaged areas to develop personally as well as educationally and creatively. It is also a movement led by the resources and expertise of the most dynamic and fastest-growing part of the private sector.

The cross-border Clubhouse programme began three years ago. It involves groups of young people visiting the other Irish jurisdiction's Clubhouses up to four times a year (twice in each direction) to take part in 'fun' technology-related activities. For example, in October 2009 Dublin and Belfast Clubhouse groups came together to do ICT and physics-based activities at Queen's University Belfast, the first time many of them would have been on a university campus. In 2008, the Irish cross-border Clubhouse exchange won the world Clubhouse network's annual Kudos award for their work together.

Belfast is unique among the 105 cities in the world with Clubhouses in that it has two: one in the Shankill area and one in the Falls area. At a recent session for coordinators in Boston Museum of Science, the Belfast coordinator was asked when Belfast would come into line and merge into one Clubhouse! Clubhouse members travel the one kilometre twice a week by taxi to meet up with their cross-community colleagues. Volunteer mentors come from Queen's University, University of Ulster at Jordanstown and St Mary's University College.

Funding is a particular struggle for the Dublin Clubhouses, and this has particularly been the case in the past 18 months as recession has started to bite in the South (the Belfast Clubhouses have UK Big Lottery funding until spring 2011). Since the demise of the Irish government's ambitious Media Lab Europe project of which it was a part the Dublin Clubhouse has had to exist on 'once off' small grants from Irish government agencies, Dublin City Council and private philanthropists. The recent agreement that the Institute of Art, Design and Technology at Dún Laoghaire would become the Liberties Dublin Clubhouse's official education partner has not meant any influx of funds but has ensured a continuing flow of volunteers to become mentors, the other lifeblood without which the Clubhouse could not continue. However the future is still uncertain.

7.4 A case study of North South co-operation in sharing best practice and improving Traveller Education

The Joint North South Traveller Education Conference, held in Newry at the Canal Court Hotel on 11 March 2009, attracted 150 delegates from across Ireland for a day of sharing good practice.

The conference focussed on how schools, individuals and organisations have overcome barriers to improve the attendance and achievement of Traveller children at school.

Principals, teachers and others involved in the education of Traveller children, including Traveller parents, were able to hear both Minister Caitriona Ruane of the Department of Education and Minister Sean Haughey of the Department of Education and Science share their vision for Traveller education across Ireland, and have the opportunity to see eight presentations of good practice throughout the day.

The key themes addressed were engagement, inclusion, participation and pathways to work with presentations on four examples of best practice within each theme. Delegates enjoyed cultural presentations from St Malachy's Primary School in Newry and St Paul's High School in Bessbrook. Following on from the Conference the two jurisdictions agreed that a north/south forum to research and consider good practice should be established. This is to be considered alongside the recommendations of the Taskforce on Traveller Education.

The Taskforce on Traveller Education was established in the north in November 2008. It is cross-sectoral and includes members of the Traveller community from across the north, and representatives from a range of non-government organisations, government Departments and public bodies from all of Ireland. It is building on current engagement with the voluntary sector to explore how the statutory sector and the organisations which are supporting the Traveller community can work together to ensure better educational outcomes.

The aim is to create an action plan which will be a catalyst for real and lasting change in the area of education for children from the Traveller community.

The Taskforce is well into its work and the six thematic subgroups established in September 2009 have concluded consultations with Travellers, including children and young people, and have developed recommendations for consideration by the Taskforce. A draft report outlining the Taskforce's agreed recommendations is expected by the end of this year and it is hoped that a final report will be presented to the Department early in the New Year. The Department will consider the recommendations and draft an action plan to be implemented which will be monitored by the Taskforce for the next two years.

The input from organisations in both the north and south have shaped the thinking and direction of the Taskforce and the benefits of working together can be explored further upon conclusion of the group.

8. Conclusions

These conclusions will pay particular attention to the four areas of cooperation undertaken by the North South Ministerial Council (Education Sector): Teacher Qualifications (and by extension Teacher Education); Educational Under-Achievement; Education for Children with Special Needs, and School, Youth and Teacher Exchanges.

The 2005 North South Exchange Consortium report, *Research on the Current Provision of North South School and Youth Exchange and Cooperative Activity*, estimated that over 55,000 children and young people had participated in funded cross-border exchanges and other activities in 2000-2004 alone, and 'guesstimated' that this would be in the region of 90,000 if activities not funded by EU or statutory agencies were taken into account.

The estimated figures for individual programmes over the past decade or more are equally impressive: 70,000 young people through the European Studies Programme, 30,000 through Dissolving Boundaries; 16,500 through Wider Horizons; 14,000 through Education for Reconciliation; 9,000 through Civic-Link; 8,000 through the International Fund for Ireland's KEY programme, and so on.

Most of this immense activity has been led by teachers and principals, youth workers and individual people doing it, in the words of Brian Harvey in his 2008 study of cross-border community development, because '*they had a vision of and passion for cross-border work and cross-border development and were prepared to commit considerable time and energy to such a venture, some a lifetime.*'⁹

In their endorsement of the 2005 NESC report, *Current Provision of North South School and Youth Exchange and Cooperative Activity*, the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Education paid tribute to the 'passion, commitment and hopes' expressed by the young participants in these programmes and projects.

This huge and almost totally unstructured movement – funded to an unprecedented degree by a combination of governments in Ireland, Britain, Europe and North America – could not have been more coherently organised so as to overcome documented weaknesses (documented by all three previous reports in 2001, 2005 and 2008) arising from a lack of coordination at policy, programme and funding level. This led, in Gildea and Murray's words, to '*an element of overlap and duplication at the expense of complementarity and partnership, and uneven participation. This inhibits a sharing of learning across programmes and the dissemination of good practice.*'

This lack of coherence was not helped by the contrasting conclusions of the two studies tasked by the Departments to find a way of delivering North South educational cooperation more strategically and coherently. The 2005 NSEC report, *Research on the Current Provision of North South School and Youth Exchange and Cooperative Activity 2000-2004*, recommended the development of the North South Exchange Consortium into a formal body, the North South Exchange Trust, which should 'coordinate and manage the north south programme framework by

identifying priority areas for funding, delivering programmes through tenders, developing an overarching monitoring and evaluation framework and developing a corporate plan’.

The 2008 report, *Review of North South Cooperation on Educational Exchanges and Supporting Mechanisms*, came to the opposite conclusion: that the ‘outsourcing’ of this work, either to an existing agency or a new one, would not be ‘a viable mechanism for managing exchanges in the future.’ Instead the two Departments should themselves ‘jointly develop and manage a single programme for North South exchanges and cooperative work.’ The authors did ‘not believe that the scale and level of activity in the area of exchanges warrants a specialist agency to carry out the work’. It recommended that the proposed single programme should be undertaken by a multi-level inter-departmental structure headed by a Joint Management Group led by the two Departments, with representation from experts in the chosen areas of activity.

In the area of **educational under-achievement**, for understandable reasons to do with time and resources, the ‘hard to reach’ schools in disadvantaged areas in both jurisdictions have usually not been targeted successfully by the promoters of individual North South exchange and cooperation projects.

However policy makers in both jurisdictions are interested in working more closely together in a number of areas associated with under-achievement. There has been pioneering work in literacy and numeracy both through the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) programme in the South and the Achieving Belfast and Bright Futures (Derry) initiatives in the North.

In the area of **Special Educational Needs**, as has been noted above, perhaps the time for the Middletown Centre for Autism to be the flagship of north-south SEN provision is passing, with doubts among both professionals and parents about the wisdom of taking young people with autism – who find change difficult at the best of times – away from their families and communities to a rural location in a relatively remote part of the island.

Given the claims of Dissolving Boundaries that it has been successful in raising the self-esteem and communications skills of pupils in Special schools through North South ICT links, perhaps this is an area of SEN that could be explored further for its cross-border potential. It will be interesting to see the conclusions of the joint evaluation of Dissolving Boundaries which is currently being carried out, in relation to this area. Recommendations about the increased use of ICT come with the warning that all evaluations of North South projects emphasise the importance – in terms of both the enjoyment of the young participants and the outcomes in helping to break down barriers of misunderstanding – of continuing face-to-face contact.

Another North South project which has been an outstanding success in the area of **teacher education** has been the Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS). Since its formation in 2003 (following an initial conference in 2000), SCoTENS has seed-funded 61 North-South and cross-border research, conference and exchange projects in the areas of special education and inclusion; citizenship and diversity; technology and mathematics; pedagogy of science, history

and geography; teacher education; language learning, and other key areas. It has held seven international conferences with speakers from the OECD, UNESCO, the European Commission, and countries such as the USA, Norway and Finland. It has overseen the North South Student Teacher Exchange project which has seen nearly 150 student teachers do a key part of their assessed teaching practice in the other Irish jurisdiction. The then Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin TD, said at the 2007 SCoTENS conference:

I mean it quite genuinely when I say that we wouldn't be able to work at the level we are working at – at ministerial or departmental level – if the 'on the ground' cross-border work hadn't been happening for the last few years. If the type of interactions, workshops, seminars, publications and visiting speakers hadn't been going on in frameworks like that of SCoTENS, the barriers wouldn't have been broken down to the same degree. The contribution that SCoTENS and the Centre for Cross Border Studies have made to the overall process of peace and cooperation in this country is probably not widely noticed, but it is certainly well recognised and well appreciated as part of the overall process.

The quality of the teaching profession in both parts of the island of Ireland is among the highest in Europe, matched probably only by Finland and Scotland. The morale and retention rates of teachers are far higher than in most European countries. Colleges of education and university education departments, North and South, continue to attract school-leavers with top examination results. Working with teacher educators on a North South basis is a key way to ensure that this rich human resource for the whole island is nurtured and developed into the future.

The Minister of Education, Caitríona Ruane MLA, noted in her strategy-outlining 2008 speech, *'our education system is a contradiction. At the top end, we outshine all the other education systems in these islands. That said, we no longer shine internationally. And remember our competition is international. At the other end, we have a shocking level of under-achievement, with far too many of our young people leaving education without the basics they need to make their way in the world.'*

There is already significant North South learning going on in the range of regular meetings taking place between departmental civil servants under the auspices of the education sector of the NSMC.

A North South network like SCoTENS, on whose committee, for example, the heads of the teaching councils both sit, could become a vehicle for greater North South consultation among: policy makers, inspectors, principals and teachers. SCoTENS is linked to and constantly learning from international good practice in all aspects of teacher education and education generally.

The National Council for the Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in Dublin already invites its Northern counterpart, CCEA, to many pan-European curriculum network meetings in which it takes an active part.

There is also East-West learning to be gained. For example, in 2010 the National Foundation for Educational Research, a UK independent research organisation, selected Dissolving Boundaries as one of 10 case studies across the UK (the only

one in Northern Ireland) which it researched for the Department of Education in London as part of a study of programmes which help to tackle the risk of violent extremism among young people.

These North South networks also spawn wider international networks: notably the European Studies Programme of school links, which, starting from an Irish base nearly 25 years ago (as the brainchild of a senior Northern Ireland schools inspector), now spans 27 countries and is the largest inter-schools network of its kind anywhere in the EU.

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