Literature Review

Independent Review of Education

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The timescale for the literature review was limited and therefore review of some of the literature, particularly that relating to System Level Design and Delivery, is somewhat restricted. When in place, the Panel may wish to consider commissioning further research into this with a particular focus on

- how the Department of Education and the Department of the Economy (and its partners) works collaboratively with other bodies to support education outcomes,
- the better alignment of education provision and funding, at all levels, with NI Executive priorities,
- the review of school management type and assessment of the consequences of the current model,

- an analysis of areas of best practice, innovation, sharing and collaboration in the current system and an assessment of their potential for broader application,
- an assessment of resource intensive services within education delivery and identification of priority areas for further investment,
- an analysis of the current network of education settings and its long-term viability and sustainability, and
- consideration of appropriate measures and indicators to determine performance of the education system.

Literature Review

Aims & Objectives

"The Executive will establish an external, independent review of education provision, with a focus on securing greater efficiency in delivery costs, raising standards, access to the curriculum for all pupils, and the prospects of moving towards a single education system".[1]

1. Aim and Objectives

AIM

To conduct a detailed literature review drawing upon current work, previous reviews and existing research concerning educational provision in Northern Ireland (NI) to inform the forthcoming work on the Independent Review of Education, established by the New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) (2020) document.

OBJECTIVES

1. To independently review relevant papers on education policy and policy documents on wider thinking on education reform / transformation / modernisation, published between 1 January 2010 and 28 February 2021 and, where required, important papers outside this range.

2. To identify and locate relevant papers from the following sources:
   i. Government commissioned reviews or studies,
   ii. Education papers from local political parties or Assembly / Parliamentary Committees,
   iii. Academic papers on the design and delivery of education locally, and
   iv. Advice to Government from local bodies.

3. Through the process of review to identify recurring themes, key issues or previous recommendations made to the Department.

4. To produce a comprehensive report, providing an independent assessment of the key points raised in the reviewed literature.

[1]United Kingdom and Irish Governments (2020) *New Decade, New Approach:* 7

Literature Review

Introduction

2. Introduction

There is general consensus among the political parties and relevant stakeholders that the current system education system in Northern Ireland (NI) is excessively costly, unsustainable and contributes to community separation (for an overview of the complexity, and to help to contextualise this literature review, see 3.4.1). New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) has therefore commissioned the Independent Review to consider the "prospects of moving towards a single education system" (NDNA, 2020: 7).

A visionary reboot of the system of schooling for the recently created Northern Ireland was proposed in 1923 (Akenson, 2013). A century further on there is, once again, an opportunity to re-shape education here. This may be a once in a lifetime opportunity – a Beveridge moment - to devise a system that genuinely meets the needs of a dynamic and diverse society in the twenty first century.

In 1831 and again in 1923, a system was envisioned where Catholic and Protestant pupils would be educated together – where religious instruction would take place outside of school hours – and where schools would be managed on a cross-community basis. Neither approach was implemented.

There remains a challenging question as to how much education can be expected to deliver societal change, and whether, for example, a single education system can be delivered in isolation without a simultaneous impetus to creating mixed housing. Despite evidence of some progress (Shuttleworth and Lloyd, 2018), much of NI's population continue to live in segregated housing areas, especially in public housing which, in Belfast in 2009, was 94% segregated into different communities (NIHE, 2016). While the vast majority (77%) of people aspire to living in mixed neighbourhoods (NI Life and Times Survey, 2019) there has been limited progress, despite efforts by the Housing Executive and others (NIHE, 2016). Without integration of housing areas, the extent to which education reform alone can lead to societal change has to be considered, at least in the short term. As Reimer et al. (2021) say "widespread residential segregation and a largely separate school system limit

opportunities for intergroup contact between adolescents from the different communities" (Reimer et al., 2021). It is nevertheless important to address education as a key aspect of public provision.

The creation of a single system might not solve all of the problems, not might a single system be viewed as providing acceptable levels of parental choice. While it has been argued that some of them would be addressed in a single system (social exclusion and underachievement, for example, might be ameliorated in a system that no longer used academic selection: Andrews et al., 2016; Gorard and Siddiqui, 2018), other issues may remain such as access to the curriculum for all learners. It might be realistically considered that a single system would be less costly (Salisbury et al., 2013) and, if those savings were to be reinvested in education, some of the other issues might be addressed. We can speculate that educational issues would not be solved at a stroke, but the enhanced social cohesion that a single system might contribute to, in the longer term, might make such a move desirable, nonetheless.

2.1 Development of Themes

The Terms of Reference for this review of literature identified that the scope should cover relevant papers published between 1 January 2010 and 28 February 2021 – although relevant older documents of significance should not be excluded simply because of their date of publication. It was suggested that the types of reports that should be reviewed would include:

a. Government commissioned reviews or studies;
   e.g. Schools for the Future (Bain, 2006), Review of Common Funding Scheme (Salisbury, 2013), Independent Review of Careers (Ambrose, 2014), Review of Integrated Education (DENI, 2017c).
b. Education papers from local political parties or Assembly / Parliamentary Committees;
   e.g. Education Funding in NI (NI Affairs Committee, 2019), Manifestos or policy papers from the main political parties, Inquiries or Reports by the Education, Economy or Public Accounts Committees in NI Assembly, Reports by the NI Audit Office.

c. Academic papers on the design and delivery of education locally;
   e.g. Taking Boys Seriously (Harland and McCready, 2012), Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks (Shewbridge et al., 2014), Education, Equality and the Economy (Gallagher, 2019), Skills Strategy NI (OECD, 2020).
d. Advice to Government from local bodies (i.e. sectoral bodies, community and voluntary sector, policy think-tanks, children's rights organisations, Trade Unions, charities). Examples from these sources include Children's Charter for NI (Barnardo's NI and NSPCC, 2016), Fund Mapping (Dartington Social Research Unit, 2016); Moving forward – putting NI on track for the future and Education, skills and training for young people (both Pivotal, 2020), advice from the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Reports relating to implementation of the UN Convention on the Right of the Child in Northern Ireland, and alternative Manifestos.

Given the timeframe, it was crucial to apply systematic strategies to ensure that the work was completed as comprehensively as possible. The first task was to identify themes within which relevant literature could be located, organised and framed. The ToR noted that, if education is to be successfully reformed, then a vision is required. This was thus identified as the first theme for the literature review. Sub-themes within this were identified from the text of the commitment to the review contained in NDNA.

The ToR also proposed three core strands: (1) Education journey and outcomes; (2) Support for schools and settings; and (3) System level design and delivery. For each of these strands a list of potential sub-topics was provided.

Taken together this provided four themes around which the literature review could be conducted (Table 1), with sub-themes suggesting more focused topics, although some of these were subsequently combined, or divided.

Table 1. Themes and Sub-themes

Theme	Sub-themes
Vision for the future	Single system
	Curriculum
	Outcomes

	Governance and administration
Education journey and outcomes	Early years
	Primary to post-primary transfer
	Further and higher education
	Special educational needs and disabilities
	Curriculum, assessment and qualifications.
	EOTAS
	Youth services
	Shared education
	Mental health
	Participation of children and young people in decision-making
	Educational outcomes
	Measuring outcomes
	Remote learning and the role of technology
Support for schools and settings	Pupil support services
	Support services provided for education settings
	Initial teacher education (ITE) and
	In-service Tutor Education and how education leaders and practitioners are empowered to fulfil their potential and share excellent practice
	Roles and responsibilities of school leaders and teachers
	Education inspection and school improvement
	Distribution of funding
	Resourcing requirements
	Education governance
	Infrastructure
	Digital infrastructure
	Innovative practice
	Learning from COVID-19
System level design and delivery	Education administration
	Arm's length bodies
	Alignment of education provision NI Executive priorities
	School management
	Duplication, segregation and fragmentation
	Independent Review of Integrated Education (2017)
	Best practice
	Priority areas for further investment
	Sustainability of the network of education settings
	Measures and indicators to determine performance
	Defining a "single education system"

2.2 Method

As NI is geographically and demographically small, the pool of experts and academics working to gain an understanding of the issues facing education is correspondingly compact, and members of this community are generally aware of each other's work. Key policies, reports and local research into relevant topics can, therefore, usually be identified and obtained using traditional 'manual' methods for gathering literature. For the initial phases of the research, these techniques proved perfectly adequate. However, in order to ensure that the review was as comprehensive as possible, a more focused, systematic and comprehensive literature search was required.

Ridley (2012: 24) identified six discrete purposes for conducting a literature review: it can provide both a historical context and identify contemporary issues, it should outline relevant theories and concepts, it may facilitate the introduction of relevant terminology and definitions, it can identify related research, and finally, it can provide supporting evidence that underlines the significance of the work. These purposes are all pertinent to the current enquiry.

A reliable and valid method was required through which to reduce the range of potentially relevant literature to a manageable size and to ensure the capture of those documents that were most pertinent to the research aim. The 'scoping' approach proposed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) offered the best fit to ensure a comprehensive review of the breadth of relevant material (Table 2, Scoping Review).

Table 2. Scoping Review approach to ensure comprehensive coverage

Research question broad
Inclusion/exclusion can be developed post hoc
Quality not an initial priority
May or may not involve data extraction
Synthesis more qualitative, and typically not quantitative
Used to identify the parameters of the body of literature

Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) model outlines four phases through which the search can be effectively managed, and the material discovered can be rationalised:

#1 Searching – searching for relevant documents,

#2 Initial Screening – reading the abstracts/outlines/summaries of identified documents; assessing pertinence,

#3 Secondary Screening – reading and reviewing the text of identified documents, and

#4 Narrative Synthesis – arranging and presenting the material.

By the end of these manual and electronic search processes a total of 434 documents had been identified for consideration in this literature review, selected from a total of over 500 items.

Handling such a quantity of material and producing a report in a short period of time required considerable co-ordination of limited personnel. Each member of the core team was asked to focus on one specific theme.

In the initial phase, potentially relevant documents were identified, and their location logged. Some were sourced through the websites of government departments or other organisations, some through academic search engines while others were drawn from the websites of political parties or from archives of political party manifestos and other materials.

In the second phase the abstracts and/or executive summaries were read to identify whether or not each document was pertinent to the review, according to the inclusion/exclusion criteria developed. A number of documents that had initially seemed to be of possible interest were rejected at this stage. Those documents considered to be of greatest relevance were then further reviewed – a secondary screening – and a synopsis was written for each in line the project remit to identify what recommendations were made and for what reason at the time, what was delivered and to what benefit and to explain why other recommendations were not taken forward, where this was possible.

These synopses were then collated and compiled prior to being synthesised into a single document which formed the starting point of the literature review. Throughout these four phases senior members of the team acted as critical friends to each other in order to monitor the outputs and relate them back to the final report in grouped themes / issues.

A considerable amount of literature has been produced over the last two decades that relates directly to education in NI – some comes from academia, some is related to policy and implementation, some is produced by pressure groups and bodies with a remit for children's welfare, for instance, while other material articulates political aspirations. There is an even wider range of literature not specific to NI, but which deals with or illustrates similar educational issues to those which are faced here. There

is a limit to how much literature can be reviewed in a time-limited framework, but we have tried to incorporate as much as possible to reflect the full range of views.

In the remainder of this literature review, we will examine each of these themes in turn, beginning with the *Vision of the future* (3.1). We will then look at the *Education journey and outcomes* (3.2), *Support for schools and settings* (3.3) and finally *System level design and delivery* (3.4). Each sub-section in 3.1 to 3.4 will be summarised in a short statement at the end of each section. After a short *Summary and conclusion* (4.0), the *List of sources* is provided (5.0), followed by a *Glossary* of the acronyms and abbreviations used in the document (6.0).

Literature Review

Overarching Themes

3. Overarching themes

3.1 Vision for the Future

3.1.1 A Single System

Visions of education have attracted a great deal of political attention over the years. Historically, rivalries, self-interest and mutual antagonism between the two dominant blocs, the Irish-Nationalist-Catholic and the British-Unionist-Protestant have effectively stymied transformation to a single system. In 1831, a template for a national education system in Ireland was proposed by the Chief Secretary of Ireland, Lord E. G. Stanley. The *Stanley Letter* set out a vision of a unified system that would unite children of different creeds. Pupils were to be taught non-spiritual subjects together; religious instruction was to take place *outside* of school hours. The National School system was also to look favourably on those schools that were managed jointly by Catholics and Protestants.

This secular ideal was challenged by church authorities on both sides. The hierarchy of the Catholic Church, fearing a loss of influence, brought pressure to bear on the National Board to allow them to control their own schools. The Presbyterian Synod of Ulster passed a resolution rejecting the Act, and opposition in County Antrim and County Down led to teachers being intimidated and some schools being burnt down.

Thus, the system that the Northern Ireland Ministry of Education inherited at the time of the partition of Ireland was largely denominational; furthermore, the Commissioners of Education for the whole island of Ireland were still based in Dublin. NI was, in effect, established as a jurisdiction without its own structure for the administration of education (Daly and Simpson, 2004).

In consequence, a commission was set-up in 1921 to design an education system for NI, the Lynn Committee. Representatives of the Catholic church were invited to take part in the process alongside representatives of the other churches; Catholic authorities were suspicious of the motives of the new Government and boycotted

the proceedings. The legislation that emerged (the 1923 Education Act) proposed that *all* primary schools should be under the control of the state – that the existing array of schools would be replaced with a single, unified, non-denominational system. The 1923 Act also banned religious instruction during school hours and prohibited school authorities from taking religion into account in the appointing of teachers. A school that chose to remain outside this new system would still receive state funding according to a sliding scale – the less control the government had over the school, the lower the level of funding that would be made available to it.

The perceived secularism of the new system was anathema to the main Protestant denominations involved in school management at the time – the Presbyterian Church, the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church. However, while schools under Catholic management and voluntary grammars remained outside the state-controlled system, the Protestant churches were eventually brought on-side with guaranteed places on school Boards of Governors, the reintroduction of bible instruction and permission to appoint teachers on the basis of their faith. The divisions in the system of education in NI were, therefore, embedded.

The challenges faced by those who wish to develop a single system in 2021 may once again be confounded by tensions between the two political blocs representing the two dominant communities in the consociational Northern Ireland Assembly.

The Good Friday/Belfast Agreement contained a commitment to "facilitate and encourage integrated education" (Govt. of UK & Govt. of Ireland, 1998). Opinion polls regularly show that around 60% of parents support the principle of mixed schooling (Wyatt, 2019). However, since 1998, there has been only a small change in the proportions of children who are educated in Integrated schools (Figure 1) and the community separation evident in the profiles of the pupils who attend schools in the Controlled and Maintained sectors remains a striking and pervasive feature of education (Gallagher, 2019).

The Programme for Government 2011-15 (OFMDFM, 2011) included a commitment to "build a strong and shared community" and contained specific objectives relating to Shared Education – any reference to Integrated Education was visibly absent.

In July 2012, the Minister of Education established a Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) on Advancing Shared Education. The MAG revealed its report on the advancement of Shared Education in Northern Ireland in April 2013 – the recommendations were duly accepted by the Minister.

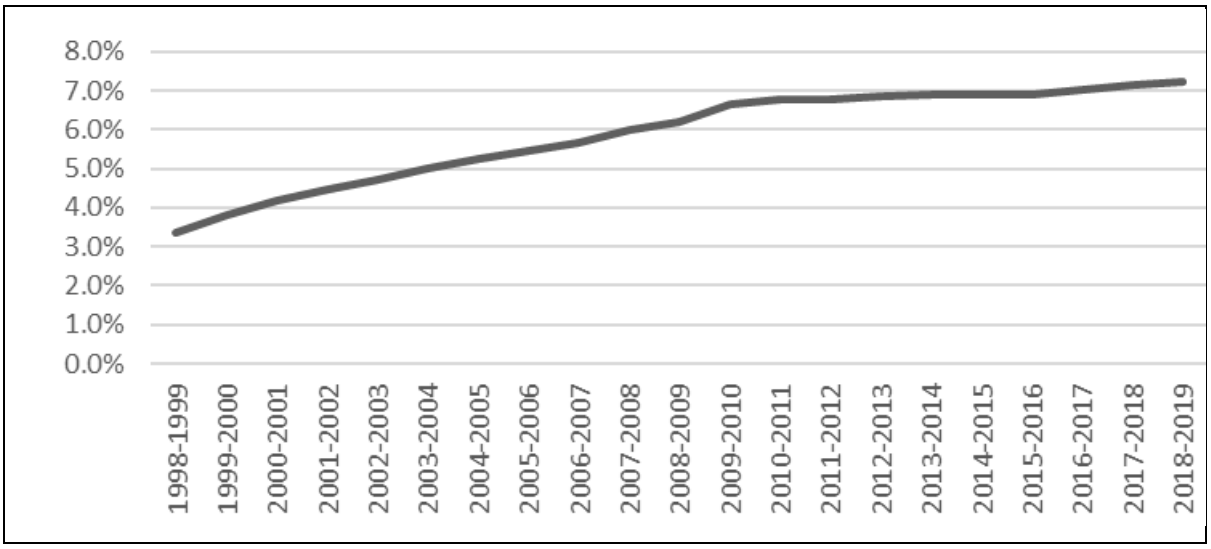

Figure 1. Increase in % of pupils in integrated schools 1998-2019

Crucially, Shared Education and Integrated Education offer markedly different visions of post-conflict education. Shared Education supports the sharing of resources and contact between pupils of "different religious belief and from different socioeconomic backgrounds"[2]; Integrated Education on the other hand advocates the dissolution of the divided system and the establishing of wholly mixed schools. The introduction of shared education can be viewed by some as a triumph since the two main parties in the coalition have agreed on a policy designed to bridge the gap in education while maintaining the status quo. An alternative view is that shared education is the least-worst option for these two parties but may do little to advance reconciliation (Hansson and Roulston, 2020). It has been suggested that the current model of governance in NI has allowed for the sharing-*out* rather than the sharing *of* power (Barry, 2017).

Similar political entrenchment was evident in the debates around the proposed introduction of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) which was designed to bring the employing authorities of all schools (including the five education and library boards, and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools) under a single

[2] Shared Education Bill - Article 1, Sections 2a and b

management system. The creation of the ESA was endorsed by Sinn Féin but opposed by the DUP. Subsequent political wrangling lasted from 2007 until 2014 and cost an estimated £17M (cited in Borooah and Knox, 2015a) before agreement and compromise was reached with the creation of the Education Authority. The new body was effectively a merger of the ELBs (Gardner, 2016). The management and advocacy bodies for state Controlled, Catholic Maintained, Integrated, Irish Medium and Voluntary Grammar schools remained – and continue to remain – separate.

There is very little literature which presents a coherent vision for the future of education in terms of its structure. One exception is from the Integrated Education Forum (IEF, 2018). This charity is committed to the promotion of Integrated Education and so the 'Integration Works for Everybody, Alternative Manifesto', unsurprisingly, argued for a reformed education system "which brings children, staff and governors from Catholic and Protestant traditions, as well as those of other faiths or none, and of other cultures, together in one school" (IEF, 2018: 3). They argued for a system which is less costly, and less needlessly complex. There should, they contended, be a target set by government to increase the percentage of pupils in integrated schools to 10% in the three years after the manifesto was launched (in fact, the proportion reached just over 7% in that time). They wanted integrated education to form the priority focus of the current area planning process for schools and a presumption that any new school should be integrated, subject to community consultation. They argued for structural change across the system, including the creation of a single Initial Teacher Education college open to students of all religions and none (2018: 10).

While the IEF (2018) are one of the few organisations setting out a vision for an education service for the future, there have been calls for change starting from the onset of the Troubles in 1968 which may accept that system redesign is too difficult or undesirable, and they look for other ways of promoting social harmony. McCully and Reilly (2017) articulated three approaches. While the first of these focuses on systemic change, two other responses work within the divided system to ameliorate its effects:

- Breaking down the segregated system of education and the establishment of common, integrated schools,
- Accepting the segregated nature of society, and schooling, and trying to establish meaningful contact between sectors, and
- Pursuing societal change through curriculum innovation, regardless of school structures (McCully and Reilly, 2017).

Beyond system change

The NI curriculum is predominantly organised through established subject disciplines but since the introduction of the National Curriculum in the 1990s, improving community relations has been included as an overarching objective (McCully and Reilly, 2017). While the impacts of that objective may be particularly pertinent for those who teach history, RE or Citizenship, it is of importance for all subject teachers, and for all those interested in education.

Colwill and Gallagher (2007) laid out their vision of what an effective curriculum requires. It needs to

> "… articulate clearly the key aims that will shape and drive it; be sufficiently visionary and flexible to allow teachers to respond to the needs of students now and in the future; and provide on-going support to help embed and sustain change. The three are inter-related and successful curriculum development involves considering them together" (Colwill and Gallagher, 2007: 411).

The curriculum in NI schools has been designed around the three key aims articulated by Colwill and Gallagher. A core intention is to develop learners' skills related to critical and creative thinking and problem-solving which extend beyond traditional subject-specific teaching. These have come to be known as 21st Century skills, and there has been a drive towards foregrounding these in school curricula internationally (OECD, 2005). The skills frameworks go beyond the basic skills of literacy and numeracy to include more complex interpersonal and social skills, as well as cultural values (Gallagher et al., 2012). In the UK, the curriculum is devolved to national level in Scotland, Wales and NI and, since 1998, there has been divergence in what is taught and how it is taught (Gallagher et al., 2012). That divergence allowed Wales and Scotland to develop curricula which reflected their

national culture and identity (Raffe, 2007) but, in NI, national identity is disputed and potentially divisive, so there was a need for the curriculum "to acknowledge complex identities, and to open up pupils' narrow, culturally acquired conceptions" (Gallagher et al., 2012: 135). This led to the development of critical and creative thinking skills which, alongside personal capabilities, were placed at the heart of the Revised Northern Ireland Curriculum, now termed the NI Curriculum (NIC), when it became statutory in 2007.

The development of the new curriculum required navigation of a range of tensions – there were those who felt that the curriculum should be concerned with the transfer of knowledge, while others felt that it should focus on the development of transferrable skills, such as those of communication, using mathematics, using ICT and thinking skills and developing personal capabilities. Some felt that the curriculum had to satisfy the needs of the economy while others had a broader agenda. As curricula were coming to be seen as a force to address societal issues, the role of citizenship was much debated. Colwill and Gallagher (2007: 415) noted a "…tension between the desire to equip students for the future and the need to promote the values of the past, which in turn raised issues of culture and national identity" (2007: 415). These debates informed much of the shape of the curriculum. Thinking Skills and Capabilities were established for all age groups from Foundation Stage (early years) through Key Stage (KS) 1 (6-7 year olds) to KS2 (8–11 year olds) and KS3 (11–14 year olds). This curriculum was envisaged as a spiral curriculum, with topics revisited in greater complexity throughout the learning journey. It was designed to be accessible, and relevant to the needs of learners. Deliberately content-light, it allowed schools and teachers to focus on the development of skills which crossed curricular boundaries and which were designed to meet the needs of learners as individuals, as contributors to society, the economy and the environment.

One challenge initially was that the new curriculum replaced one which had been heavily prescriptive meaning teachers' skills of curriculum development had been largely lost. Creating a curriculum which fits the needs of your learners is liberating. However, having to return to devising a curriculum was challenging for many, with

36% of teachers in post-primary schools, for instance, claiming to have no expertise in curriculum development in 2006 – this figure had reduced slightly to 26% in 2010 (Gardner et al., 2011: 58).

A further challenge has been the transition from KS3 to KS4. In KS3 there are no external assessments equivalent to GCSEs or A levels, and this allowed a "thinking skills" focus to be developed in schools. However, the post-14 examination system is poorly aligned with the 4-14 thinking skills agenda. When the NIC was first established, the examination systems at KS4 and A Level in England, Wales and NI were very closely aligned, so no customisation of the examinations to more closely reflect thinking skills was undertaken. What is taught can clearly reinforce the intention of a curriculum (Matters, 2006), but "curricula can be impoverished by assessment against too narrow a set of measures. There appears to be little incentive within the assessment and examinations requirements for schools to maintain an explicit emphasis on the development of thinking" (Gallagher et al., 2012: 127). This can result in a change in classroom practice by teachers after KS3, reflecting a much more traditional and didactic approach to learning and teaching.

Gardner et al. (2011) examined teacher perceptions of the NIC and found that the new curriculum had increased workload for teachers in terms of administration (81%), lesson planning (82%) and lesson preparation (83%) (2011: 65). However, 71% of respondents reported that the NIC had had a positive impact on the effectiveness of their teaching (2011: 103).

There had been some, albeit muted, criticism of the theories that underpin the NIC. Kitchen (2020) suggested that the neuroscience which, at least initially, provided some of the justification for the development of the NIC is not valid. Kitchen highlighted claims made by CCEA which, he argues "…bear all the hallmarks of attempts at fitting an educational model around pseudoscientific claims and hypotheses" (2020: 6). Nonetheless, he conceded that, if a curriculum needs to change, then it should be changed, but asks for more rigour and scientific credibility around the contextual drivers for such change.

Despite some criticism, the revised curriculum may be seen to present a vision of a curriculum which meets the needs of learners in a more effective way than was the case previously, and that prepares them for a world which is rapidly changing, and where previous skillsets may not be sufficient. This is a vision of learners with a flexible skillset, being prepared to become lifelong learners, and to develop as individuals, as contributors to society, to the economy and environment (CCEA, 2007). However, there remains a question as to how far it has actually been implemented in schools, particularly in terms of thematic work and the social dimensions of the curriculum. There is a need for evaluation and research similar to the NFER study (Harland et al., 2002).

Improved outcomes

The vision exemplified by the introduction of the Northern Ireland Curriculum for all learners in 2007, is undermined by educational inequalities across the education system in NI. Poorer educational outcomes seem to be particularly associated with Looked After Children (LAC), Traveller and Roma children, Newcomer children, young carers, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGB and T) young people and children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) or disabilities (NICCY, 2017a). Burns et al. (2015) indicated a wide range of groups who are disadvantaged in educational terms including by religion, gender and age. They also noted that there is little available data on other groups for whom educational access and advancement may be restricted. This includes transgender people, people within the 'Other' religious category, which they argued should be disaggregated, people of varying political opinions and Roma and Eastern European migrants (Burns et al., 2015: 18).

The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) (2017a) suggested that government departments and agencies should "ensure that they are co-operating with each other effectively in line with their statutory obligations to improve outcomes for all children and young people, particularly in providing for the needs of children with additional educational needs such as those with SEN or who are looked after" (NICCY, 2017a: 5). NICCY also expressed unease

that funding from the Common Funding Scheme, intended to improve outcomes for specific groups such as newcomer children, may actually be used by schools to fill gaps in general school funding (NICCY, 2017b: 12). This implied a vision of an education system which is accessible to all, but currently is not.

Moore and Campbell (2017) noted the "strong link between poverty (low income) and cognitive outcomes in the early years" (2017: 1). They recommended, among other things, an integration of early education and childcare noting that

> "In Northern Ireland, the current system continues to segregate early education and childcare, leading to variations in funding, regulation, staff requirements and qualifications, with resulting confusion and complexity for families" (Moore and Campbell, 2017: 13).

They also recognised that area-based learning collaboration solutions are the best approach in tackling the attainment gap, which needs, they argued:

> "commitment to outcomes-based, collaborative approaches, but reduction of the achievement gap and child poverty will depend on the funding of viable area-based partnerships that focus on the best interest of disadvantaged children" (2017: 16).

The need for educational interventions to be collaborative is widespread, but some highlighted the dilemma of expecting collaboration within a system in which competition has been fostered and encouraged. Hughes et al. (2016) exposed that conundrum when they note that developing

> "… collaborative relationships between schools to enhance educational and social outcomes for all pupils is inconsistent with an education system where competition is seen as a healthy driver of standards, and the achievement of 'market share' (and therein resources) for one school is enhanced by its ability to 'outperform' neighbouring schools or offer a unique ethos. (Hughes et al., 2016: 1096-1097).

Finnegan et al. (2016) emphasised the importance of developing language skills early in children. It is considered vital as there is widespread "evidence on the long-term impact of a child's language ability on their social, emotional and other educational outcomes" (Finnegan et al., 2016: 7). They identified problems in general learning later in primary schools associated with delayed literacy skill development as well as mental health issues and diminished employment prospects in adulthood. It is emphasised that "you need good language to be able to read,

but also to interact, develop emotional skills and to learn" (2016: 12). That the prospects for future outcomes are better if a child is able to take advantage of high-quality pre-school education is well known. Finnegan et al. stressed that

> "high-quality pre-school education depends on a highly qualified, valued and respected workforce, with children's outcomes strongly linked to staff qualifications and training" (Finnegan et al., 2016: 25).

These researchers were concerned that there is no single, agreed way of recording a child's progress in early years, and therefore it is difficult to assess what progress they are making. They recommended that this be rectified, and they have a vision of progress being tracked in a systematic way with "national child development measures to track young children's progress against agreed milestones and outcomes from birth to starting school" (Finnegan et al., 2016: 32).

The vision here was of schools working in collaborative networks to the benefit of all learners and of society as a whole.

In terms of academic achievement, schools in NI seem to be performing well overall compared to other parts of the UK, certainly if measured by the proportion of the school population getting five A*-C Grades at GCSE (DfE, 2017). However, there is a widespread characterisation of NI's education system as "high performing grammar schools but a long tail of underachievement in secondary non-grammars" (Borooah and Knox, 2017: 320). Even if this were once the case, it may no longer be accurate. In NI, the gap between the proportion of learners achieving five or more A*-C GCSE grades at grammar and non-selective schools has been steadily narrowing. In 2008/09 the difference was over 40%: 96.8% of students in Grammar schools achieved five A*-C grades, with just 54.1% achieving this in non-selective schools. By 2018/19 the difference had shrunk to just 16.4%, with Grammar schools managing 96.1% with five A*-C GCSE grades but non-selective schools achieving 79.7% (DENI, 2019: 24). While Grammar schools had little room to improve on their results at GCSE, at least on the measure of that metric alone, non-selective schools seemed certainly to be adding value to their intake. Perry (2016d) noted that this measure (A*-C at GCSE) does not take account of the value added to learner outcomes. In other words, educational outcomes of a school may

be good, but little more than might reasonably be expected – more value is added if learners achieve beyond what might reasonably be expected of them. If value-added was taken into account, the non-selective schools might appear to be higher performing.

Of course, it may be a problem with the measure of five A*-C grades. Henderson et al. (2020) suggested that addressing educational inequality could be improved if a target was set with a wider focus, rather than just looking at the proportion of Free School Meal Entitlement (FSME) children achieving the five GCSE benchmark, noting that there is also a differential in academic performance in community, gender, school type and geographical area sub-groups (Henderson et al., 2020: 4). The Children's Law Centre (2020) also recommended that disaggregated data is collected about the educational experiences of groups at risk of educational inequality, to better inform policy and practice (Children's Law Centre, 2020: 27). Henderson et al. (2020) also cited the Chief Inspector's concern (ETI, 2016b) about some Year 12 pupils being excluded due to accountability pressures on schools, estimated as 7% of the year group, and the impact that exclusion has on any evaluations of the five GCSE benchmark figure, presumably masking the degree of educational underperformance within schools and overall.

Perry conceded that the majority of causes of underachievement are outside the control of schools, but noted that "…the education system can play an important role in mitigating against key factors in underachievement, such as deprivation" (Perry, 2016d). Deprivation is certainly a factor in educational underachievement, but Leitch et al. (2017), while accepting the correlation, argued that the reality in NI is more complex and "that there are influences on educational performance that go beyond multiple deprivation alone, one of which appears to be religious identity" with underachievement in Protestant Wards being particularly apparent (Leitch, 2014: 1). The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) (2020) recommended specific support for underperforming cohorts, such as children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, boys, particularly Protestant and 'Other' boys, and children who do not attend grammar schools (NIHRC, 2020: 3-4). Educational underachievement was highlighted in the 'New Decade, New Approach' agreement.

It contained a requirement that: "the executive will establish an expert group to examine and propose an action plan to address links between persistent educational underachievement and socio-economic background, including the long-standing issues facing working-class, Protestant boys". An expert group has been established by the Minister of Education and is to produce a final report by the end of May 2021.

Addressing educational underachievement is very important, particularly for those individuals and groups which are underperforming, as well as for the economic future of our society. However, social outcomes are also important to consider. In a context where almost 93% of the population attend effectively segregated schools, there may be considered a need to build an educational infrastructure which allows young people to grow up prepared to share the same civic space with others who hold different national identities, and the different and contrasting loyalties that can flow from those (Worden and Smith, 2017). As happened with other initiatives to promote reconciliation in education (Education for Mutual Understanding and Cultural Heritage), the teaching of citizenship in post-primary schools has gradually languished since its first introduction into the curriculum, peripheralised to the edge of a curricular system which prioritises examination success (Worden and Smith, 2017: 391). This is discussed further in 3.2.4 and 3.2.5.

We can continue to have schooling which is largely focused on and measured in terms of academic success, but which ignores the issues facing a divided society emerging painfully from conflict. However, such a narrowly conceived educational driver would seem to be miss opportunities to improve wider outcomes for young people and for society as a whole. The Bain Report (2006) recommended that the contribution of schools to peace and reconciliation outcomes should be included in the annual reports of schools and in Inspection reports and there may still be a need for that to be enacted, and for other changes to promote reconciliation to be introduced.

Many argue that any vision for the future of education in Northern Ireland should be inclusive (Loader and Hughes, 2017; Gallagher, 2016) and some have argued that another aim should be to reduce the current complexity, whether by removing selection (Gallagher and Smith, 2000) or by removing division based in community divisions (Hansson and Smith, 2015). There should be a curriculum delivered by skilled teachers working in well-equipped and modern schools. These teachers should be digitally adept and prepared to use these new technologies innovatively (Galanouli and Clark, 2019). Learners too will have access to devices in school and at home as well as reliable and fast connectivity. The gross inequalities in educational underachievement for certain groups should be eliminated in this vision of a future education system (Leitch et al., 2017). Initial Teacher Education will provide a stream of effective teachers who can enthuse and excite children and young people, using a revitalised NI curriculum to help to embed a lifelong love for learning and aiming to meet the changing skills which young people need. They will be adept at teaching in a context of a divided society emerging from conflict, and skilled at devising and exploiting interventions to promote understanding and reconciliation (Donnelly and Burns, 2020). Teachers' careers will emphasise continuous learning and professional development, keeping their skills fresh and up-to-date, and there will be structures which support leadership at all levels in the profession (Connelly et al., 2014). The needs and views of the community, including the views of children and young people, will be given due consideration when making decisions about the shape of education provision in an area, with the need to develop community cohesion prominent in any decision making. Links between the community and schools will be strong and pathways for all children and young people will be well developed and communicated effectively through strong careers structures at key phases of the educational journey.

While there is much to praise in NI's education system, there are fundamental problems concerning educational inequalities leading to underachievement and a system which has yet to find ways of fully addressing social division. There are two sorts of educational outcomes which need to be addressed in NI: academic and social. Academically, certain groups are being left behind, although the main metric which is relied upon might provide an incomplete picture of the degree of the problem, and its locus. Improved social outcomes of an educational system, in terms of developing a citizenry who have an understanding of the views of others and who can help to create a shared future, have also to be considered.

3.2 Education journey and outcomes

3.2.1 The preparation of children for schooling in the early years, and transition to primary school

Free places in pre-school education are offered to all three-year-olds in NI, prior to starting primary school. While pre-school attendance is not compulsory in NI, it is seen as offering a smooth transition into primary school and has been developed so as to lead onto the Foundation Stage of the NI Curriculum (Primary 1 and 2). Funding is allocated to the child, which then goes directly to the provider. The aim is for the Department of Education "…to provide one year of non-compulsory pre-school education to every child in their immediate pre-school year whose family want it" (DENI, 2021a). Most parents take advantage of this offer for their children. Sometimes known as Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), this experience of education before formal schooling begins has been shown to improve life chances considerably and to be important in contributing towards the process of building a shared society. Local and international research indicates that it provides children with significant and lasting positive effects (Perry, 2013; Moore and Campbell, 2017). Melhuish et al., (2010) concluded that "high quality pre-school is an important part of a nation's infrastructure for education of the population and economic development". Moore and Campbell (2017) commented that "development in early childhood is likely to account for a significant proportion of the gap in educational achievement in primary and post-primary school" (2017: 1) but assert that the association of poverty and low achievement can be addressed by effective pre-school education. NICCY (2017) quoted figures from Save the Children NI (2016) showing that one in five children leaving primary school have limited reading skills, and argued that tackling educational inequalities requires early intervention and a preventative approach, including support for parents, early years workforce development, monitoring children's progress and outcomes from birth to starting school. They cited the Barnardo's NI (2012) report asking the NI Executive to undertake a strategic review of what is effective and invest resources

accordingly. Finnegan et al. (2016) reiterated the need to invest in the early years workforce to help to fully address early language development as well as strengthening support for parents and tracking children development and the reaching of agreed milestones between birth and starting school. Children in poverty are at particular risk and more likely to fail to meet expected standards.

The growth of Nurture Units in primary schools in Northern Ireland has underlined the need for, and value of, early intervention for some of the most disadvantaged children. This targeted intervention is widely used across the UK and the DE currently funds 32 Nurture Units. The placement of a child in a Nurture Unit is intended to be short-term interventions, particularly for pupils who have difficulty coping in the mainstream classroom, who are not engaging the learning process and who are at risk of underachievement. An evaluation of Nurture Units in NI concluded that they had 'a consistent, significant and large effect in improving social, emotional and behavioural outcomes among children from some of the most deprived areas and demonstrating high levels of difficulty' with potential to contribute significant savings to both the education system and society (Sloan et al., 2016: 13).

There is evidence that pre-school children are able to display sectarian or racist attitudes (Magennis and Richardson, 2019, Connolly et al., 2009) and there are concerns that pre-schools are even more segregated that primary schools (Roulston and Cook, 2020), challenging other research which suggests that pre-schools are "…not normally attended by one community or other" (Magennis and Richardson, 2019: 3). Nonetheless, Magennis and Richardson described how, in pre-schools in NI, inclusion and diversity are promoted through staff taking on positive role models and the use of multicultural resources. Their research highlights the importance of addressing diversity and inclusion at this young age, helping children to experience and understand where they belong. Topping and Cavanagh (DENI, 2017c) called for DENI to take forward an annual call for jointly managed schools, including pre-schools.

The arrangements for pre-school provision are complex. The government's commitment to provide a free pre-school year to every child whose family wants it resulted in 92% of all three-year-olds taking up a pre-school place in 2018/19. Provision is offered through a complicated network of statutory, voluntary and private providers across NI (Roulston and Cook, 2020: 2-3). The voluntary pre-school sector includes provision which is run by community groups, management committees or charities and these, alongside private providers, comprised almost half of the 771 pre-school units in 2018/19. Some children attend specialist nursery schools, while others attend nursery units attached to primary schools. Additionally, while the Education and Training Inspectorate have responsibility for pre-schools, and inspect them in the same way as schools, those aspects deemed 'care' are the responsibility of the local Health and Social Care Trusts, and their Social Workers inspect centres annually. All voluntary and private providers, if they are to receive funding, must be registered by their local Health and Social Care Trust. This reflects the responsibility for early years and childcare being spread across a number of departments and arm's-length bodies in NI; this governance has been criticised as not helping to provide a coherent and consistent approach to governance. More recently, NIHRC (2018) welcomed "the emphasis on strengthening partnerships with health and social care, as well as statutory, voluntary and other early years providers to develop more integrated provision and support for children and young people with special educational needs." It appears that further integration between health and education may be required in pre-school and across Early Years.

Considerable research (Heckman, 2008; Karoly, 2001, Field, 2010) suggested that intervening in early years has most impact in developing skills and social abilities. It also has a cost-benefit ratio of up to 1:17, meaning that it returns 17 times more in savings than the cost of the investment (Sinclair, 2007). Moore and Campbell (2017) made four recommendations:

- Transform provision of Early Education and Childcare (EECC) to better support young children's early learning though integrating early education and childcare systems, implement a workforce development plan to ensure a highly skilled workforce, extend funded high-quality provision to children under three years of age.

- Implement a parental engagement strategy and action plan that links to a workforce development strategy and is informed by international best practice.
- Invest in area-based collaboration to tackle the attainment gap in the early years, building on existing collaborative approaches in communities.
- Provision by Government of centrally-held disaggregated data about children's development from birth. There is no universal indicator or measure of overall early childhood development and this is essential to demonstrate effectiveness of policies and programmes.

From this limited consideration of the literature, it seems that Early Years is a key sector to target for maximum impact on children's development. Present arrangements appear to be complex with responsibility divided between government departments and a plethora of statutory and voluntary agencies.

3.2.2 The transition and transfer of children from primary to post-primary schools

Around the Craigavon area, academic selection is at age 14 (the Dickson Plan); before that pupils transfer from primary to a Junior High School where they remain for three years before transferring to a Senior High School, three of which were designated as Grammar schools – two of these remain but the non-selective and selective post-14 Maintained schools have now amalgamated into a comprehensive post-14 school.

Craigavon's arrangements are unusual. Most of NI operates academic selection at age 11 with a system of selective and non-selective schools, although recently a number of Maintained schools and Voluntary Grammars with a Catholic ethos have amalgamated, thus discarding selection. Some Catholic ethos Voluntary Grammars retain selection, as do most Controlled Grammars and Voluntary Grammars with a Protestant ethos (Roulston and Milliken, 2021).

There are some who argue for retaining a selective system of education. In his study of academic selection in England, Mansfield (2019: 7) found that "BME pupils are more than five times as likely to progress to Oxbridge if they live in a selective

area… it is clear that for many disadvantaged pupils, grammar schools do provide a ladder of opportunity".

Maurin and McNally (2007) used a policy reform in the 1980s in NI which allowed the intake to Grammar schools to increase by 15% to compare educational outcomes with those in England, finding that the wider intake raised educational attainment as measured by examination results at GCSE and A Level. They also found that "that inequalities in access to the more academic track produces inequalities later on in pupils' educational careers (and therefore into the labour market)" (Maurin and McNally, 2007: 23), although they are careful to note that "clearly, this paper cannot be interpreted as evaluating the overall effects of a comprehensive or selective/'tracked' system of education" (Maurin and McNally, 2007: 23).

Galindo-Rueda and Vignoles (2004) examined the relationship between educational achievement and early cognitive ability, family background and school selection in the UK. They found that that, to use the authors' term, the 'most able' (who they define as the top 20% of the ability range), particularly females, did do better in a selective school system, although academic selection had no significant selection effect on attainment for lesser ability pupils (2004). They also found "positive effects of selective schooling for mid-ability individuals, entirely driven by the large positive impact amongst those 'fortunate' enough to attend grammar schools" (Galindo-Rueda and Vignoles, 2004: 22).

The case against academic selection is rather better documented. The claims that academic selection helps social mobility, allowing academically gifted children access to a grammar school, irrespective of their background are disputed. Harris and Rose (2013) noted that "pupils in grammar schools have greater examination success but this 'value added' comes at a cost to those not in the [grammar] schools. The low prevalence of Free School Meal (FSM) eligible pupils in the Grammar schools casts doubt on their ability to aid mobility" (Harris and Rose, 2013: 151). The low proportion of such children in Grammar schools in NI (just 14% of their enrolment in 2019/20, compared to non-grammar schools with 38%)

would suggest that selection here does not act as a mechanism to reward merit but instead has the effect of concentrating disadvantaged children in some non-selective schools. With private tutors helping more affluent children to access grammar schools, Tomaševski's phrase "'inter-generational transmission of privilege' has been used to describe this feature of the NI education system" (Henderson, 2020: 6).

There are also questions about how reliable the tests are, particularly since the present tests are not regulated but are provided by private companies. The tests which focus on elements of literacy and numeracy which are amenable to pen and paper tend to exclude other curricular areas. Some report that the tests could be considered "…of dubious reliability or comparability" (Perry, 2016: 4). There are also doubts that Grammar schools really raise achievement as "if the intakes to grammar schools really are already on a path to success …subsequent success at Key stage 4 (KS4) aged 16 must not be mistakenly attributed to having attended a grammar school in the meantime" (Gorard and Siddiqui, 2018: 912). Additionally, the experience of the tests, for those who do not sit them or for those who 'fail' has a negative impact on attitudes to education of those people, which can last into adulthood (Furlong and Lunt, 2020: 14).

There have been some efforts to remove academic selection. Following the Costello Report (2003), established by a direct rule Minister during one of the suspensions of the NI Assembly, the 2006 Education (Northern Ireland) Order included provision to inhibit Boards of Governors from using academic ability as an admission criterion. The Education Minister in the newly recalled Assembly then declared that the current transfer arrangements were to cease. While this did not receive the explicit backing of other political parties in the Assembly or the Executive, the final state-sponsored transfer test took place in November 2008. Grammar schools decided to set their own tests and, eventually, two consortia emerged with one test operating generally for admission to Catholic-ethos grammars and the other for those of Protestant-ethos. Despite efforts to combine the tests (DENI, 2017a), both have been operating since 2009, with children "sitting the Protestant test or the Catholic test" (Norton, 2017), and some children sitting both. In 2020-21, due to the

pandemic, no academic selection took place and grammar schools applied their own criteria for entry. The selection criteria vary from school to school but may, for instance, give preference to applicants who have a sibling as a current or former pupil. Some schools not using academic criteria for 2021 entry have announced that they will not use academic criteria for 2022 entry either.

Local academic literature is critical of academic selection in NI and its impact on individual learners, on the whole education system and on overall educational outcomes (Gallagher and Smith, 2000; Gardner and Cowan, 2005; Gardner, 2016; Kelleher et al., 2016; Henderson, 2020). While Perry (2016a), in a Briefing Note for the NI Assembly, conceded that "academic selection is a contentious subject" (2016: 6), she amassed a considerable argument against it, citing "clear evidence that non-selective schools have much higher concentrations of disadvantaged pupils, with a range of implications, including for academic outcomes" (2016: 7). She listed seven points of concern including the lack of reliability or regulation around the tests, the concentrations of disadvantaged students in non-selective schools and the implications for equity. Her last point argued that selection works against other DENI objectives

> "… for example, in relation to the departmental objective to close the performance gap and increase access and equality, and the Programme for Government indicator on reducing educational inequality" (Perry, 2016a: 7).

Gallagher (2021) cited three reports from the Advisory Council for Education in the 1960s and early 1970s which questioned the fairness and accuracy of academic selection (Advisory Council for Education, 1964, 1971, 1973), and this has been followed by many others. DENI (2001), often known as the Burns Report, was unequivocal: "The transfer tests (11+ tests) should end as soon as possible" (DENI, 2001: 1). DENI (2003), often known as the Costello Report, concluded "The Transfer Test should be removed as soon as possible and be replaced by arrangements based on parental and pupil choice" (DENI, 2003: 48). In 2009, the Catholic Bishops spoke out against academic selection, saying "Northern Ireland should move away from the current process of academic selection by schools at age 11 to a more just, modern and fit-for-purpose process of transfer which gives every child and every school the opportunity to achieve their full potential" (Irish

Catholic Bishops' Conference, 2009). Connolly et al. (2013) recommended that the Executive "should, without delay, introduce the necessary legislation to prevent schools from selecting children on the basis of academic ability and require schools to develop admissions criteria that are truly inclusive and egalitarian in nature" (Connolly et al., 2013: 124). Moreover, the United Nations (2016) suggested that it is a breach of the UK's Human Rights obligations (UNCRC, 2016). The Children's Law Society (2020b) stated that "academic selection differentially adversely affects children from disadvantaged groups, and recent research found that preparation for the transfer test was causing young children severe anxiety" (Children's Law Centre, 2020b: 28). They call for its replacement with a system that ends educational inequalities and is compliant with children's rights. The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (2020) "recommends that a non-selective system of post-primary school admission is introduced in order to abolish unregulated post-primary selection in NI" (NIHRC, 2020: 3).

There appear to be no Independent Reports suggesting that academic selection should be retained in Northern Ireland, although it has the support of lobbying bodies such as the Governing Bodies Association, which have the stated aim to "… further and advance the interest and well-being of voluntary grammar schools in Northern Ireland in all respects" (GBA, n.d.).

Academic selection has got political support from some in NI, and there are some academics who have supported it. However, the bulk of academic argument is not supportive and successive reports over the last half century and more suggest that it can be damaging both for individuals and also for the whole education system.

3.2.3 The transition of young people into careers, further and Higher Education, and the interaction between schools and these sectors

In 2014, an Independent Careers Review Panel was appointed to build on the deliberation of a NI Assembly Committee for Employment and Learning (2013). That Review (Ambrose, 2014) made five recommendations:

- ensuring consistency and quality within and across schools,

- providing access to careers information for young people, particularly though improving the careers website through NIDirect,
- establishing a minimum specification for work experience, including an encouragement for all young people but especially females to explore careers in STEM sectors,
- creating and maintaining an eportfolio from Primary 7 which reflects work experiences, careers learning and relevant extra-curricular activity, and
- using impartial careers advisors for 16 to 18-year-olds at key points before starting a publicly funded course.

Timeframes were provided for each of these recommendations, and some appear to have been implemented.

In March 2016, the Department of Employment and Learning and the Department of Education jointly released their Preparing for Success 2015-2020 document which set out a strategy for careers education and guidance. This provided five policy commitments:

1. Accountability and Quality Assurance Framework: including a statutory duty for providing impartial careers guidance,
2. eDelivery and labour market information: including online webchat and social media to provide user-friendly and up to date labour market information,
3. Work experience: this was to be improved to ensure equality of opportunity and improved administration processes,
4. Impartial advice: accessing this was to be maintained and improved and include face to face impartial advice to young people at key transition stages, additional support to those at risk of becoming disengaged and those with any barrier, as well as advice to parents, and
5. Achievements and experiences recorded using an ePortfolio: designed to improve employability of young people.

The NIDirect website (https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/11-19-your-learning-and-career-options) is available to children and young people and has a webchat open from 9.30-4.30 each day which delivers the impartial advice to which commitments were made. It is not clear what progress has been made with ePortfolios.

There has been considerable emphasis in education and training for the 14-19 age group and this has been accompanied by considerable research, although much of that has focused on England and Wales. Hodgson and Spours (2008) argued that the focus on 14-19 was driven by the need to "… encourage higher levels of

participation in post-compulsory education and training as part of the drive for skills development and economic competitiveness and greater social cohesion" (2005: 2). Lumby and Foskett (2005) saw 14-19 education as "a particularly critical fulcrum in the educational process, where learners are distinctive, where the expectation of governments, young people, families and employers, amongst others, are funnelled and competing … as a consequence, 14 to 19 education is a battlefield" (2005: 4-5). Irwin (2019) pointed out that NI is a distinctive region of the UK, and has particular challenges in terms of skill shortages, lack of qualification and high unemployment. It has also, she noted, an education system which is divided by community and by academic selection. She asserted that "[FE] colleges … have a crucial role in up-skilling individuals to meet the economic needs of the workforce" (2019: 270). However, she cautioned that

> "… the FE sector is part of a segregated educational system, divided by religion, ability, gender and class, and so participation trends and student pathways must be seen within the demands of this wider framework" (2019: 273).

That there is a need for skills development in Northern Ireland is evident. Gunson et al. (2018) pointed to NI, compared to other regions of the UK, having higher economic inactivity, more people with no qualifications and the lowest productivity. As well, career progression and median income is lower than the UK average. They too argued that "… the skills system will be crucial to meeting the challenges and changes facing Northern Ireland in the coming years" (2018: 3). One of the issues they highlight is a gender gap, for example in "… STEM course and career uptake due to barriers to participation faced by women" (2018: 30) and they are concerned about the gendered nature of much of the employment in NI, particularly insecure employment (Wilson, 2018).

Irwin pointed out that many of the policy initiatives in the FE and skills sectors in NI have been borrowed from the English context and adapted to address NI's needs. In NI, a new Further Education (FE) strategy "Further Education Means Success" was launched in 2016 (DfE, 2016), setting the direction for the FE sector, using employer support programmes. "Skills to Succeed" followed (DfE, 2017) aiming to develop skills that employers need, and government funding was made available to FE colleges to provide that training. An apprenticeship strategy,

"Securing our Success", had been launched in 2014, at first conceived as a mechanism to develop skills in those individuals who had left school but were not inclined, or able, to attend Higher Education, but then widened to other groups (Gunson et al., 2018: 27). FE colleges had a fall in enrolments in 2019/20, although some of this may have been due to COVID-19 (NISRA, 2021) and there were reductions in apprenticeships through Securing our Success. However, this may be explained by more young people staying in school and studying vocational courses (Gunson et al., 2018: 35). Nonetheless, there remain significant problems in skill development in NI. It has been suggested that low rates of pay, alongside limited progression, contribute to the comparatively high levels of in-work poverty and poor productivity in NI. Gunson et al. recommended tackling the pay rates and the poor progression to help to grow the NI economy and tackle social inequality (2018: 20). Writing before Brexit had taken force, they also emphasised the importance of

> "the skills system to work together in a more coherent way to tackle levels of no qualifications in Northern Ireland. This must be a pressing priority in advance of Brexit, but also in advance of automation and technological change taking the labour market further out of reach for this part of the population" (2018: 42).

They note that funding, particularly for the FE sector, has been falling and are not optimistic about that improving. At a time when there are uncertainties about the effects of Brexit, particularly impacting on NI, combined with worldwide changes such as automation, technological changes and increased globalisation, there is great uncertainty about the preparedness of NI's workforce. Without high skills, the resilience of the local economy is in doubt. Gunson et al. (2018) concluded:

> "Northern Ireland has pre-existing economic weaknesses and social inequalities that need to be addressed. In addition, we are entering a period that is likely to see huge change and disruption. … change will be significant and likely to happen at an increasing pace" (2018: 45).

Some time has passed since the Ambrose Review and Henderson et al. (2020) suggested that more recent data would be helpful in formulating policy direction. They also recommended that what they term the "vocational pathway gap" (2020: 29) needs further attention. With the looming changes presaged by Gunson et al. and Irwin, this is even more important.

Some progress has been made in improving careers advice to children and young people but more remains to be done to keep up in this rapidly changing field, particularly in light of the considerable skills gap between NI and the remainder of the UK.

3.2.4 Curriculum, assessment and qualifications

Prior to 1991, there was no prescribed curriculum for non-examination classes, and each school could determine the format, pace, depth and content of study. In GB, the Education Reform Act of 1988 made major alterations to the curriculum, heralding a National Curriculum. One year later, the Education Reform Order was enacted in NI. This curriculum was heavily prescribed in terms of content and imposed a uniformity across schools. In addition, this standardisation was criticised as discouraging differentiation and not allowing for children with special educational needs (Morris, 1992). The curriculum was heavily knowledge-based and was characterised as having an overabundance of information. It was a "prescriptive strait-jacket" (Gallagher, 2012:114). Contact time per subject was also controlled, while strict assessment procedures enabled evaluation through statistics (Gallagher, 2012), increasing accountability for schools and individual teachers (Dowgill, 1998).

The Harland et al. report (2002), a longitudinal cohort study, critiqued the curriculum and its outputs, finding that Northern Irish pupils were disengaged with what they were learning. Many pupils described the curriculum as lacking in stimulation and relevance (Harland et al., 2002). The lack of rationale for the curriculum was highlighted both by learners and teachers who showed a "lack of commitment" in implementing its demands (Colwill and Gallagher, 2007:414). Pressure grew for a new curriculum.

The Revised Curriculum in NI, now termed the NI Curriculum (NIC), was introduced from 2007 for all learners from KS1 to KS4. It employed a constructivist approach, contrasting with the behaviourist strategies of its predecessor (Winter, 2009), and aimed to establish a clear rationale for learning. It was also innovative in that it

encouraged a spiral curriculum, 'scaffolding' students to higher and higher levels of understanding. It was deliberately content-light, instead focusing on the development of skills and leaving the choice of content to teachers (Colwill and Gallagher, 2007). Furthermore, learners were encouraged to take more responsibility and ownership for their own learning, as teachers gave students opportunities to develop their own skills. There was a more child-centred focus (Gallagher, 2012).

The structure of the curriculum at primary level is common to all three stages: Foundation (Years 1 and 2), Key Stage 1 (Years 3 and 4) and Key Stage 2 (Years 5 to 7). Areas of Learning are covered in all Key Stages, appropriate to the needs of learners. These comprise:

1. Language and Literacy (including Talking and Listening, Reading and Writing; schools are also encouraged to teach additional languages),
2. Mathematics and Numeracy (focusing on the development of mathematical concepts and numeracy across the curriculum),
3. The Arts (including Art and Design, Drama and Music),
4. The World Around Us (focusing on the development of knowledge, skills and understanding in Geography, History and Science and Technology),
5. Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (focusing on emotional development, social skills, learning to learn, health, relationships and sexuality education and mutual understanding in the local and global community), and
6. Physical Education (focusing on the development of knowledge, skills and understanding through play and a range of physical activities). (CCEA, 2007: 2).

In introducing a radically different curriculum across primary and post-primary schools, creating cross-curricular links as well as Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities required for life and work, some commentators believed that NI had taken "a giant step forward" (Colwill and Gallagher, 2007:420). Additionally, subjects such as Citizenship and Learning for Life and Work were introduced. These had been overlooked in the National Curriculum (Gallagher, 2012). Thus, the new curriculum became significant in dealing with "societal issues" (Colwill and Gallagher, 2007:415), particularly significant for a society emerging from conflict.

Citizenship is a component of many curricula. As it 'aims to promote harmonious co-existence and foster the mutually beneficial development of individuals and the communities in which they live" (De Coster et al., 2017:3), it would seem to be a vital element in any curriculum offered in NI schools. Thus, Local and Global Citizenship (LGC) became part of the statutory curriculum for all learners in NI from 2007, intentionally emphasising both local and global elements so that there is neither too much local concentration on a single issue at the expense of a wider view nor an avoidance of local controversies. However, the impetus to promote citizenship has faded and "the diminishment of LGC in schools has created a critical curriculum gap in developing the civic and political literacy of young people" (O'Connor-Bones et al., 2020: 480). This reflects the divergences that beset its development and implementation as a discrete subject. Research suggests that the introduction of LGC was flawed, its curriculum position is uncertain, and, in the current policy environment, radical change is unlikely (O'Connor-Bones et al., 2020). While aspects of good practice exist, school performance as measured by examination results and parental choice tend to trump innovation. As Donnelly et al., (2020: 11) put it, "in a culture inspired by neoliberal values, citizenship education remains a 'low status' subject compared to those with a more obvious economic appeal." There remains the conundrum of implementing and monitoring a transformative subject area within a conventionally accountable framework.

A variety of approaches to teaching citizenship have been noted. Donnelly and Burns (2017) highlighted differences in citizenship teaching between Catholic and Protestant schools. There was a noted reluctance to address controversial issues (Pace, 2019, 2021). Even in Integrated schools where, with mixed community classrooms, opportunities easily exist, Donnelly and Hughes (2006) noted that contentious issues were often avoided. Other research suggested that "many teachers admit to adopting a 'culture of avoidance' where politically or religiously contentious issues were either glossed over or judiciously avoided" (Hayes et al., 2007: 477), and also in music education, where the "social impact or associated controversial aspects of apparently opposing musical cultures in their classrooms" (Scharf, 2019: 103) can be ignored. Loader and Hughes (2017) highlighted a range of controversial topics which are avoided by teachers and learners in shared

education contact (see 3.2.8). Niens and Reilly (2010) noted a reluctance for teachers to engage in socio-political issues and recommend that the Department of Education provide guidance for schools on implementation of a global dimension of citizenship, including whole school implementation. They suggested that efforts should be made to mainstream global citizenship, raising awareness and providing resources in age appropriate and subject-specific ways. Further, they called for training and support for teachers to help them address controversial issues. Clarke and Abbott (2019), evaluating the Department for International Development (DfID) funded Global Education project in Northern Ireland, which provided training for groups of student and serving teachers and established an online resource base. The evaluation examined pupils' conceptions of, and attitudes towards, social justice and equity in both local and global contexts finding evidence of both a social justice mentality both in tandem with, or instead of, the prevailing charity mentality.

Other subjects too may provide a context for examining difficult issues but might also provide opportunities for avoidance. McCully (2019) described the evolution of school history teaching in NI over a period of nearly fifty years as it has dealt with a background of tensions and often violence between Unionist and Nationalist communities, and then responded to a society trying to transform after conflict. While huge progress is reported, the experience indicates that even where there is considerable goodwill, expert guidance and sophisticated resources, in a society that is deeply divided there remain significant challenges in moving teachers and students forward to new understandings in the face of collective memory within each community. Despite a curriculum which asks for engagement with difficult histories in an Irish context there are still teachers who eschew difficult conversations in classrooms, and there continue to be major gaps in students' historical knowledge, particularly related to recent conflict. Even when young people are exposed to enquiry-based history, as they become politicised, they tended to use knowledge selectively to support the dominant views of their respective communities. It is difficult for young people to move beyond the formative family or community narrative even when they value what they encounter in schools (McCully, 2019).

McCully (2019) went on to raise questions about pedagogy and practice since the early 1990s. Possible explanations for challenges faced by history teachers were that:

1. Enquiry-based history puts too much store on cognitive understanding despite communal allegiances associated with national identity having deeply felt emotional associations. Unless teachers are confident with handling emotional reactions, students may fail to connect the formal learning in school with the raw allegiances that matter in the community.
2. Teachers convince students of the worth of a multi-perspective approach yet often lack the pedagogical skills to fulfil these expectations in practice.
3. Constant reference to the two dominant perspectives, those of unionism and nationalism, while broadening students' understanding, also tend to perpetuate students' view of the conflict as two opposing and irreconcilable blocks, whereas historical study should reveal a more nuanced picture in which individuals and minorities frequently act in ways different from the majority in their respective communities.

McCully recommended a greater understanding of the emotional / affective dimensions at play when dealing with the sensitive past. Additionally, he argued for more direct collaboration between the teaching of history and the teaching of citizenship. As developing citizenship is such a central part of the Northern Ireland Curriculum, it is important that any opportunities to embed it within the curriculum are taken.

The Costello Report (DENI, 2003) also made a strong case for change to widen the curriculum. In response to an economy in NI which had faced a decline in its traditional industries, and challenges in terms of demographic changes, there was a lack of choice and flexibility particularly from KS4. The report highlighted a tail of underachievement, a social differential in educational achievement and expressed concerns as well about academic selection, open enrolment and the challenges for cohesive planning and management, in part due to the diverse ownership responsibilities in a divided system of education (2003: 10-11). An Entitlement

Framework was proposed, guaranteeing learners access to a broad and balanced curriculum with, at KS4, access to 24 courses, and at Post-16, 27 courses. In both instances, at least one third had to be 'vocational' and one third 'academic'. This was given Statutory effect in the Education (NI) Order 2006. The specified number of courses was reduced from 2017 to 21 courses for each age group.

Such a wide range of subjects was to be delivered through Area Learning Communities, with schools working together to help to deliver the Entitlement Framework. Burns and Costello were both instrumental in moving schools towards collaboration and away from competition (McGuinness, 2012: 226). There has been some comment that asking schools to collaborate while still having them compete for intake, which is tied to funding, can be challenging (Roulston et al., 2021: in press).

The Northern Ireland Curriculum attempts to address the needs of children and young people to equip them to develop as individuals and as contributors to society and to the economy and environment. There are challenges in delivering both local and global citizenship. The Entitlement Framework can support a wider curriculum and help to forge links between schools.

3.2.5 Educational outcomes and their measurement

In terms of educational outcomes, NI appears to be performing well. Differences in qualification across the UK mean that "direct comparisons are not advised and should not be used as a comparison on system quality" (DfE, 2018:1). Nonetheless, in 2015/16, when England, Wales and NI were all using the proportion of children achieving 5 or more A*-C grades (including English and Mathematics) at the end of compulsory schooling as a metric (DfE,2017), NI seemed to be performing relatively well. In other outcomes too, NI seems to have high outcomes. TIMSS 2019 suggested that it significantly outperformed 51 of the 58 participating countries in Mathematics for primary aged pupils and, while slightly lower scoring for science, was still above the international average showing improvement over TIMSS 2015 (NFER, 2019). PISA (2018) (see DENI, 2019e) indicated very high scores for reading, significantly higher than in Wales for example, although science and

mathematics performance was similar in NI, Wales and Scotland, and closer to the OECD average, while England was significantly higher.

While there is much in these international comparisons which is reassuring, there are other aspects of educational outcomes which give more cause for concern. Moore and Campbell (2017) highlighted that just under a quarter of all children in NI (over 100,000 children) live in poverty. The report found that over one third (34%) of five-year-old children growing up in poverty are in the lowest performing group compared to one fifth (22%) of their peers not in poverty. The performance of children living in poverty is lower than that of other children at age 5 and this lower performance increases with age. The report states that, "for children in poverty, only 29% of those in the top quartile at age 5 remain in the top quartile at age 7 and by age 11 that is 35% and by age 14, 24%." (2017: 9). Moore and Campbell discussed a range of factors which influence the development of children's cognitive and language skills, including socio-economic or structural facts, family background, home learning environment, parenting styles and behaviour. They suggested that, by the age of five, structural or socio-economic characteristics, such as family income, multiple deprivation and parental education account for half of the gap in cognitive and language development between children from low income and those from high income families.

There are particular educational challenges for children in care in NI. Personal Education Plans (PEPS) were introduced to NI in 2011 and now all children in care should have one of these. Nonetheless, there are gaps in the performance of young people in care with significantly lower A*-C grades compared to children not in care. School attendance in NI is 95.1% for primary schools and 92.7% for post-primaries, in the most recently available data (2017-18). However, in the last survey of LAC that was completed (VOYPIC, 2013), while "two thirds (69%) reported they never miss or dodge school … nearly a third (31%) reported dodging school 'sometimes' or 'a lot'" (VOYPIC, 2013: 32). This suggests that LAC and young people may be missing school more often than other learners. In addition, the research found that a growing proportion of young people over 12 years of age who had been out of

education for more than three months in the previous year lived in residential care. The numbers had increased from 52% in 2011 to 76% in 2013 and this raised

> "… concerns about the prevalence of missing school, suspension and expulsion amongst children and young people in care, particularly those living in residential care. [While] School attendance may already have been an issue for these children and young people before they came into care. The challenge for support workers may be, not only to maintain regular school attendance but also to reintegrate others to education" (VOYPIC, 2013: 33).

Harland and McCready (2012) focused on the challenges for boys and note that barriers to boys' learning were usually evident by, and within Year 8, and had been present in primary school. A higher number of boys report abnormal levels of conduct, hyperactivity, peer and social problems than the averages across the UK, and this is often associated with complex understandings of masculinity constructs. The boys in this study associated the school environment with "levels of misbehaviour and negative attitudes towards learning" (2012: 11). Boys were found to be less prepared for key transitional stages during adolescence such as transitions from primary to post-primary school, Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4, and from school to college/university/work. The transition from boy to man was an additional change for which few felt prepared. The research found that the nature of the teacher/pupil relationship was a primary factor in determining boys' engagement in class and their expectations of learning. The boys in the study felt that the content of most subject teaching did not connect directly to the reality of their everyday lives outside school and the formal nature of the classroom and passive transmission of knowledge left many feeling bored and frustrated. In contrast, active learning approaches had a more positive impact. Bullying was experienced by a minority but when present it was suffered in silence. There has been addition work on bullying in schools, one examining bully policies in schools (Purdy and Smith, 2016). They note that, while

> "Most schools included reference to physical, verbal, relational, material and cyberbullying but a minority mentioned racist, homophobic, sexual, adult/teacher–pupil bullying or bullying related to disability or religion" (2016: 281).

The impact of schooling on these boys impacted much beyond the school years. It was found that, as boys got older, they became more isolated from adults, from the norms of wider society and from the peace process. Many encountered ongoing incidences of sectarianism and fear of paramilitaries.

Harland and McCready recommended early intervention to address these issues and also a range of other measures including improving the linkages between primary schools and post-primary schools. This was particularly important at the transfer stage between primary and post-primary school. They further recommended changes in Initial Teacher Education to improve interpersonal skills of teachers and suggested that there is considerable value in Youth Workers and Teachers having shared training to promote closer working relationships between formal and non-formal education. Other crucial points where closer attention should be paid are in the transition between KS3 and KS4, particularly in relation to subject choices for GCSE examinations; this entails improvements to careers advice. Further they recommended building on non-school relationships, particularly with parents and the wider community, to help these young men to maximise their potential.

Many sources pointed to high-end achievers but a long tail of under-achievement in NI schools (Borooah and Knox, 2017: 319). Borooah and Knox's research pointed to better academic achievement at GCSE and A Level by girls over boys, irrespective of the deprivation level of the area in which they lived. Additionally, Catholic school leavers significantly outperformed their Protestant counterparts both at GCSE and 'A' level, again irrespective of the deprivation level of the area in which they lived. They also found that SEN status reduced GCSE scores more than Free School Meals Entitlement (FSME), but not at 'A' Level. Living in an area with high levels of multiple deprivation was also a predictor of poorer examination results, for all groups except FSME males. They concluded that "the school leaver most likely to obtain good GCSEs is a non-FSM, non-SEN, Catholic female from an area with low levels of deprivation…[and] the school leaver least likely to obtain good GCSEs is a FSM, SEN Protestant male from an area with high levels of deprivation" (Borooah and Knox, 2017: 328). Drawing on literature showing that pairings of schools with a poorer

performing school paired with a stronger performing school had the effect of improving outcomes, they suggested using Shared Education initiatives to pair "stronger" schools, which they believe to be Catholic Girls' schools with low FSM and SEN and located in a more affluent area, with "weaker" schools, which they believe to be Protestant schools, particularly boys, with a high proportion of FSM and SEN, and located in areas of social deprivation (Borooah and Knox, 2017: 331).

Despite these findings, more recent research (Early, 2020) found the attainment difference between Catholic and Protestant pupils to be negligible. Early was able to examine attainment trends for three whole population cohorts who sat their GCSEs in consecutive academic years (2011 to 2013), using socio-economic measures that had not previously been available for analysis in educational research in NI. There are some commonalities with Borooah and Knox's findings in Early's findings. Her analysis found that the best predictor of CGSE attainment was attending a grammar school, followed by gender (in favour of females). The mother's and father's education qualifications, FSME and housing tenure reflected the highest socio-economic effects within analysis with, for example, pupils entitled to FSM having lower attainment in all subjects across age groups.

The Governing Bodies Association, which supports voluntary grammar schools, produced a position statement on educational underachievement (GBA, 2020). They made recommendations in several areas. One is the removal of system-wide barriers to achievement; they suggested that "the Northern Ireland Curriculum is overdue a review" (GBA, 2020: 10), alongside a re-evaluation of the effectiveness of current high-stakes examinations, emphasis on Early Years learning, emphasising underachievement in ITE and introducing a Pupil Premium. They also suggested that improvements in the quality of school leadership are required and called for a dedicated College for School Leadership as well as a revisiting of the Performance Review and Staff Development (PRSD) scheme and CPD provision. Further collaboration to share best practice across ALCs was also suggested. Finally, they stressed the importance of enhancing learning and teaching practices to

develop their effectiveness, particularly for boys, improving careers guidance and further developing pastoral care structures (GBA, 2020).

As central government has devolved assessment arrangements to individual countries within the UK, this has allowed differences to creep in. There appear to be differences in the drivers for change with accountability measures paramount in England (Gove, 2013) while those in other countries, including NI, tend to be more focused on inclusion and motivation (cited in Barrance and Elwood, 2018: 253). Barrance and Elwood (2018) examined the views and experiences of GCSEs held by students in NI and Wales in the light of changes to assessment policy reform following the collapse of the three country (England, Wales and NI) regulation in 2013. Since that time, new GCSE Specifications have been produced, potentially allowing even greater differences to emerge. There now exists a situation where students across the UK study for an examination with the same title – GCSE – but it may be quite a different experience in terms of content and examination arrangements. In Northern Ireland, GCSEs are designed to conform to the NI Curriculum, and its overarching aims to prepare young people for life and to develop their skills. The aim is not primarily to increase the accountability of schools. In England, there was substantial review of content at GCSE with the stated intention of increasing rigour, a return to a linear form of assessment (where the examination is only available at the end of the course), the removal of controlled assessment in most subjects and a reduction in the number of resits available. There was also a move to a numerical grading scale (9 to 1) as the A* grade was perceived as not sufficiently discriminating of high performance. NI did not follow suit. However, as many young people from Northern Ireland enrol in English Universities, it was important to retain the currency of the NI GCSEs and so an additional grade C* was introduced to give an equivalency with the Grade 5 in England (Weir, 2016).

Barrance and Elwood (2018) explored the views and experiences of students in NI and Wales on the assessment and reform of GCSEs. They found that students had concerns about the rapid pace of reform and that they were not convinced that the changes were in their best interests. There was particular apprehension about the end of three-country regulation of GCSEs and the consequences of this for their

futures. As they rightly pointed out, as those most affected by changes to assessment policy, they wanted a greater role in determining these national assessment policies. Hence, Barrance and Elwood (2018) argued that the concept of the 'student voice' should be broadened to accommodate young people's involvement in national assessment and educational decisions.

There seems to be a mismatch between aspects of the NI Curriculum emphasising transferable skills and capabilities, and examinations at KS4 which have tended to remain academic in nature, and largely examining content. Nehring and Szczesiu (2015) called for an urgent review of external assessment measures at GCSE to overcome what they term "a deadening influence on twenty-first century learning" (2015: 344), particularly in the core subjects which emphasise examinations. They recommended that DENI explores alternative assessment strategies such as "extended projects with clearly articulated products, portfolios and other locally based assessments" (2015: 344). Additionally, as their research had included Maintained, Controlled and Integrated schools serving a significant percentage of low-income families, they recommended that

> "DENI should leverage pastoral care and prioritize intersectarian integration as a means to fostering twenty-first century skills. This case suggests that substantial cross-community contact, developed in meaningful ways, is a potentially powerful lever not only for peace-building in the province, but high level learning for the province's youth. Greater policy level emphasis should be placed on such efforts" (Nehring and Szczesiu, 2015: 344).

McGrath (2019) examined gifted and talented students and their experiences of education in NI. She analysed results for NI in PIRLS, PISA and TIMSS and identifies shortcomings at the upper levels of achievement with low performance at higher levels in all three subjects in PISA (reading, mathematics and science) and in mathematics and science in TIMSS, compared to other OECD countries. While the sample size was small, the respondents reported insufficient challenge in school, and a lack of differentiation in classes. The preferred form of differentiation articulated was more demanding work in class, followed by fast-paced classes with older, advanced students. McGrath welcomed the changes to GCSE grading, suggesting that "the current A* is relatively easy for them [gifted children] to achieve" (2019: 50).

Although there is evidence of relative success in international comparison studies such as TIMMS, educational outcomes in NI are harmed by deprivation. There are some groups whose educational outcomes are relatively poor including LAC and, in some cases, boys. Difference by religious/community grouping was asserted by some evidence and disputed by others. There is a persistent long tail of underachievement. Assessment arrangements in NI have diverged a little from other UK countries.

3.2.6 The provision of education other than at school (EOTAS)

Article 86(3) of the Education (NI) Order 1998 stipulated that "Each board shall make arrangements for the provision of suitable education at school or otherwise than at school for those children of compulsory school age who by reason of illness, expulsion or suspension from school or otherwise, may not for any period receive suitable education unless such arrangements are made for them."

The McVicar et al. (2000) Status Zero survey of marginalised and socially excluded young people, identified that those who are neither in employment nor in full-time education/training often suffer low self-esteem, low expectations and little ambition. The report also documented that, when they reach adulthood, these young people are also more likely to be long-term unemployed.

Education Otherwise than at School (EOtaS) provision has been developed to meet specific needs and help young people overcome barriers to learning, in particular, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties – it is not designed as a standalone alternative to school (Perry, 2015). The aim of current EOtaS provision is to allow children who have been expelled from, suspended from, or have otherwise disengaged from school to maintain their formal education until they:

1. Achieve a new school place,
2. Re-enter their existing school place, or
3. Reach compulsory school leaving age (i.e. 16 years old).

For many of these young people this takes the form of Alternative Education Provision (AEP).

The current Department of Education guidance on EOtaS in Northern Ireland dates back to 18 September 2014. In it, DE instructed the Education and Library Boards (which were succeeded by the Education Authority in 2015) to make educational provision for children with social, emotional behavioural, medical or other issues who, without its provision, cannot access suitable education. They proposed that, in order to meet the diverse individual support needs of pupils, a flexible approach was required.

In 2000, ETI inspected EOtaS provision and highlighted the value of using non-formal person-centred, relational educational approaches with disaffected young people rather than traditional, didactic and formal educational techniques; they also drew particular attention to the need for interagency work.

Kilpatrick et al. (2007) followed a cohort of young people in AEP through their final year of compulsory education. They found that visionary leadership was vital to ensuring the success of such projects, but noted that schools often saw the acceptance of a problematic pupil into an AEP project as being a solution to their difficulties rather than as an opportunity to revise their approaches to avoid the need to make further such placements.

> "Schools do not appear to be informed of or equipped to deal with the range of problems some young people are presenting in post-primary education resulting in some students feeling pushed out and deliberately excluded" (Kilpatrick et al., 2007: 118).

During the academic year 2018/19, 4,549 pupils (about 1.5% of the total school population) were temporarily excluded from school in NI and 30 were permanently excluded (Department of Education, 2020b). In October 2019 (DE, 2020b), 666 pupils were enrolled in EOtaS provision (including a proportion who attended both a mainstream school and an EOtaS project). There are currently 34 EOtaS centres across NI (Torney, 2019). Approximately half of these (*n = 15*) are managed by EA. The remainder are provided by an independent organisation from which EA purchases services. In addition, Duffy et al. (2021) suggested that, in order to obscure statistics relating to exclusions, some schools may be using unofficial or

informal practices to remove disruptive pupils from a school's intake (off-rolling) in an unregulated manner.

In comparison with the other jurisdictions of the UK, there has been limited research into school exclusion in NI over the last decade (Duffy et al., 2021), although Goodall (2019) did research a group of teenage boys with ASD. This work determined that most of the young people studied found an accessible education and a greater feeling of inclusion within the AEP than had been the case with the mainstream school that they had previously attended.

EOTAS caters for young people who are disaffected, excluded or at risk of exclusion from school, aiming to address individual needs of learners and to overcome barriers to learning – it generally adopts a less formal approach to education, and this has shown benefits for these pupils. However, concerns have been raised about issues such as off-rolling pupils and there seems to have been limited research in this area.

3.2.7 The provision of non-formal education through Youth Services

Just as with formal schooling, the roots of youth work lie with the churches whose philanthropic and outreach work led to the establishment of the YMCA, the Boys Brigade and the first Boys' and Girls' clubs at the end of the nineteenth century – these initiatives were quickly adopted by congregations in the North-East of Ireland (McCready and Louden, 2015).

In 1972, formal education (schools) and elements of non-formal education (youth work) were united under the 1972 NI Education Order and reinforced by the 1986 Education and Libraries (NI) Order and the 1989 Youth Service (NI) Order. The designation of youth work as an educational service was underlined in 1987 with the launch of the "The Policy for the Youth Service" by Dr Brian Mawhinney (a Conservative MP and Junior Minister in the Northern Ireland Office who had grown up and been educated in Northern Ireland) (McCready, 2020b). Mahwinney's *Blue Book* outlined a curriculum for the youth service in Northern Ireland that included a requirement for youth groups to: "promote greater understanding of a society

with diverse traditions and approaches and willingness to communicate positively with it".

The informal, relational, community-based dimensions of youth work were thus recognised as having particular potential to engage young people in projects to reach across the divide in NI. In 2000, the Joined in Equity, Diversity and Interdependence (JEDI) youth work initiative was launched by the Minister of Education with a vision to:

> "To increase the ability and confidence of youth organisations and young people to be at ease with difference, acknowledge one another as equals and promote improved relations between all" (cited by Milliken, 2020c: 442).

The ethos of JEDI was subsequently woven into the revised Youth Service curriculum document, "A Model for Effective Practice", in 2003 which was revised specifically to place the values of equity, diversity and interdependence (EDI) at its very core.

In 2002, O'Connor et al. noted:

> "The relationship between schools and the youth service merits greater development. It is recommended that greater cohesion be developed between schools and the youth service in the area of community relations, particularly to draw upon the skilled practice of youth workers."

The potential for Youth Work to impact positively upon community relations work in schools was also highlighted in "The Nature of Youth Work in Northern Ireland":

> "A major challenge facing youth work and educationalists is the need for a new system or way of educating and learning that can tackle issues associated with growing up in a post conflict society. It is perhaps in this context that formal approaches to education such as schools could be combined more effectively with informal educational youth work approaches. Whilst there are apparent difficulties in regard to ethos, purpose and expected outcomes within schools and youth work, there is clear evidence in this research of the many benefits to young people that would accrue through combining formal education with youth work" (Harland et al., 2005: 56).

Traditionally, however, youth work in schools had been seen as a mechanism to assist them to manage the problem of disaffected pupils – the potential for co-working and skills-sharing between the two professional disciplines in order to make

a contribution to the creation of a restorative society had not been on the agenda (Morgan et al., 2008).

In 2011, DENI published the "Community Relations, Equality and Diversity (CRED) Policy". This new policy drew on Section 75 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and was specifically designed to sit comfortably with the schools and youth work curricula and other education policy initiatives. It was notable, though, that while CRED drew on the established principles of EDI the notion of *equity* with its intrinsic tenet of fairness had been replaced with the concept of *equality* and *interdependence* had been dropped altogether.

In 2015, the Education and Training Inspectorate carried out a review of the delivery of community relations through youth work and concluded that:

> "Given the continued segregated system of education and the widening equality issues across society, there are examples of sector-leading CRED practice in schools and youth organisations which are ahead of some of the views expressed within society" (ETI, 2015a: 8).

The Youth Service includes both a statutory sector (which is under the control of EA) and a voluntary sector (which is considerably larger and is managed through a number of small NGOs). There are approximately 1,600 units registered to provide youth services – including church youth groups, uniformed organisations and full-time youth centres – and these cater for around 140,000 young people.

Uniformed organisations make up 57% of the total number of youth units and account for 37% of the young people who participate in youth service activities on a regular basis, the regular running of which is reliant on a workforce of 20,881, of whom over 90% are volunteers (EA, 2017).

The place of the youth services within the broader context of education was outlined by Linda Wilson of DE to the Education Committee of the NI Assembly in September 2012:

> "Youth work, as part of education, is recognised as an important part of a coherent package of education services for all children and young people. Youth services are available to all young people. However, they can be particularly relevant to young people who are at risk of disengaging

> from society; those who become disaffected at school; those who are at risk of offending; those who could become non-stakeholders in their communities; and those who are affected adversely by the legacy of the Troubles" (NI Assembly 2012).

Consequently, the Department's youth work policy framework, "Priorities for Youth", which was released in 2015 (DENI, 2015d) was designed to align with DE's key priorities: raising standards, closing the performance gap, and increasing access and equity. Although this document has contributed to the further embedding of statutory youth work within education it has also faced criticism from the youth work profession. Committing non-formal education too tightly to the achievement of prescribed outcomes is seen as being "alien to the values of youth work" (McCready, 2020b: 306)

Youth work (non-formal education) has its roots in the churches and communities and in addressing community division. Although it remains largely voluntary, there is also a statutory component and current policy aligns youth work with the Department's educational priorities. Pressure for youth work to align more to the targets addressed by formal education have been challenged by the youth work profession.

3.2.8 The opportunities provided and outcomes improved by different types of educational provision

Within NI's complex education provision there are three main approaches to educational provision. Ninety three percent of pupils are educated in schools which have a predominance of one section of the community. These communities are often characterised by the reductive categories 'Catholic' and 'Protestant', but are really ethno-sectarian groupings which share cultural, political and social characteristics. Nonetheless, among all of the social divisions in NI, this continues to dominate much of NI life, including in education.

Gracie and Brown (2019) made the case for Controlled schools not being de facto Protestant, arguing that a significant proportion of the schools' enrolment is not Protestant but Catholic (10%), no religion (18%) and 6% other (2019: 363). That still makes the composition of Controlled schools 66% explicitly 'Protestant' and it is possible that the remainder may share political, cultural and social attributes with

those who describe themselves as 'Protestant'. The authors accept that Controlled schools are not de facto secular but argue that "many Protestant parents might be concerned to find that [secular schooling] is what their children are experiencing".

The period during which an Education Skills Authority (ESA) under a new Education Bill was being proposed was a fraught one for the Protestant churches, according to Armstrong (2017). Byrne and McKeown (1998) had concluded that "the Protestant churches' desire to re-establish their influence in schools was 'unlikely to succeed' [in contrast to] the 'success story' of Catholic influence in schooling. They were particularly concerned with losing governance rights over schools which had never belonged to the church and which had been built by the state, granted under decades of custom and practice. Under the proposed new legislation, this representation would be lost as DENI had been advised that, to continue with those governance arrangements would not be legal. After considerable lobbying by the Protestant churches, when the proposed Education Bill appeared in the NI Assembly, the governance was restored. As the Bill stalled in the Assembly, the Protestant churches continued to lobby for a non-statutory sectoral body to be established to support Controlled schools. When attempts to establish ESA were abandoned in 2014, a slimmed-down Education Authority was established instead. The Controlled Schools Support Council was established in 2016. Armstrong asks the question "Can a publicly-funded body such as CSSC explicitly promote a Christian, never mind a Protestant ethos, in non-denominational, publicly-owned schools?" (Armstrong, 2017: 100).

While a series of curricular intiatives have been made to address the issue of schooling largely segregated by ethno-sectarian grouping (Education for Mutual Understanding, Community Relations Equality and Diversity programme and Cultural Heritage, for example), perhaps the most noticeable attempt to address the division in education has been the introduction of integrated schools, which has been characterised as providing, "… constitutional and structural safeguards to encourage joint ownership by the two main traditions in Northern Ireland" (Kilpatrick and Leitch, 2004; 564). The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) website refers to Integrated schools as bringing "… children and

staff from Catholic and Protestant traditions, as well as those of other beliefs, cultures and communities together in one school" (NICIE, n.d.: para 1). Under the 1989 Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order, the Department of Education (DE) has a statutory duty to "…encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education that is to say the education together at school of Protestant and Roman Catholic pupils".

The Education (Northern Ireland) Order also provided statutory funding for integrated schools and established the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) in 1987 to co-ordinate the development of integrated schools and provide support for parents. Funding was made statutory for two new categories of integrated school – Grant Maintained Integrated (GMI) and Controlled Integrated (CI), the latter also known as transformed integrated schools. There are currently 65 grant-aided integrated schools in NI, the number largely unchanged in the last 6 years. Of these, 38 are Grant Maintained Integrated (23 primary and 15 post-primary) and 27 Controlled Integrated (22 primary and 5 post-primary). These will be joined by another primary school in 2021– Seaview Primary in Glenarm (DENI, 2021c). This addition is significant as it is the first Maintained school to successfully transform to integrated status; all previous transformations have been by Controlled schools. In 2020/21 the total enrolment, was over 24,861 accounting for around 7% of the school population and there continues to be consistent, if slow, growth in enrolment numbers in this sector (Table 3).

Table 3. Numbers enrolled in integrated schools

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Numbers enrolled in Integrated schools	22,017	22,607	23,088	23,624	24,261	24,861

Source: NISRA (2021) Annual enrolments at schools and in funded pre-school education in Northern Ireland 2020-21

Blaylock et al. (2018) studied friendships in two post-primary schools. One was an integrated school while the other had a Catholic ethos but had a quite mixed intake. This study was limited to those two schools as there are relatively few mixed non-integrated schools in NI. The authors found a high level of interconnection and

friendships between pupils in both schools. It was, however, the integrated school that demonstrated a greater tendency towards cross-group interactions and the closest friendships were found in the integrated school. It was considered that an integrated schools encouraged social cohesion whilst a denominational school was more likely to promote their particular ethos. The authors concluded that, "in line with contact theory, these findings suggest that it may not be enough to simply create opportunities for intergroup contact but that optimal conditions, such as institutional support, may be a prerequisite for positive relationships to flourish" (Blaylock et al., 2018: 643). Additionally, they recommended that future policy should consider additional ways that separate schools can be more 'open' to the other community, thus reducing the boundaries between them.

It should be noted that the Catholic church do not see their schools as barriers to mutual respect, peace and reconciliation. Indeed, they would consider that their ethos makes them ideally placed to promote respect for diversity. They would welcome a wider intake, and "… the presence of children from other denominations is seen as an enrichment of the education experience offered by the Catholic school" (CCMS, n.d). State schools too would assert their openness to all denominations and their promotion of tolerance. One politician argued that controlled schools were available to everyone, stating

> "…their door is open, whatever religious denomination or persuasion children are. There is no sign across the door of a controlled school that says that Catholics need not apply" (Storey, 2013).

Nonetheless, to a large degree, learners do not cross the community divide to attend schools in either direction.

In 2017, Topping and Cavanagh made 39 recommendations in relation to Integrated schools (DENI, 2017c). This included adding 'promotion' to the legislation around integrated education. Currently, the Department are required to encourage and facilitate integrated schools, while shared education is to be encouraged, facilitated and promoted. They also recommended the removal of financial disincentives to schools wishing to become integrated or jointly managed. They favoured a more proactive approach to encouraging integrated education by,

for instance, promoting it even if there is unfilled provision in the area. They also recommended that the Department of Education should ensure that all pre-service teachers have substantial professional training and cross-community contact to prepare them to teach in any publicly funded school in NI.

Topping and Cavanagh (DENI, 2017c) also noted that there appears to be considerable funding for Shared Education but little political discussion or Executive commitment and funding to support integrated education. "In an era where public and political attitudes have evolved to the degree where moving to a more inclusive educational system is a distinct possibility, the future nature and development of integrated education now requires focus" (DENI, 2017c: 19). Another reason for the recommendations was the belief that educating children together was increasingly being accepted as beneficial, although there was a recognition of the challenges reform might produce:

> "… there is increasing recognition of the benefits of educating children together while still considerable support and attachment to a diverse school system that largely reflects traditional religious and economic divides in society. In addition, the difficult financial environment, characterised by falling real-terms budgets, compounds the challenges of implementing reform" (DENI, 2017c: 20).

Horgan (2014) highlighted the additional cost of division in education and recommends replacing the current expensive segregated education system with a socially integrated model stating that "... too much of the cost of education in Northern Ireland goes into maintaining a segregated system – segregated on lines of religion, social class and gender. Evidence from across the world is clear that mixed-ability schools with a good social mix provide the best educational outcomes. Our children deserve no less" (Horgan, 2014: 106).

The production of the document *Integration Works: Transforming your school* (DENI, 2017b) demonstrated a commitment from the Department of Education to encourage and facilitate integrated education. The aim of this guidance document for schools was to reinvigorate the transformation process, by showing schools how to "build consensus around the benefits of Transformation, decide on the most effective way to plan for Transformation and agree a framework to assess proposals

for Transformation" (2017: 2). Despite this support no schools transformed to integrated status until Seaview Primary did so.

Critics of integrated schools have suggested that they require learners "to surrender their identities: for the time that they are in school these are subordinated to an 'integrated' identity." (Borooah and Knox, 2013: 930). The integrated movement have challenged this, claiming that they acknowledge and celebrate all identities (see McGuinness et al., 2018). Although integrated schools have been established explicitly to address reconciliation, there is further criticism that, in many classrooms in integrated schools, the opportunities to address differences, challenge misconceptions and prejudice, and to develop respect for diversity can be neglected (Donnelly, 2004, 2008). This may require changes to ITE and teacher CPD to prepare teachers better to address difference and to confidently explore and address controversial issues to advance reconciliation.

Shared education is defined as

> "… two or more schools … from different sectors working in collaboration with the aim of delivering educational benefits to learners … promoting equality of opportunity, good relations, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion" (Connolly et al., 2013: xiii).

Some see Shared Education as the promotion of a more integrated system of education rather than a system of integrated schools (Borooah and Knox, 2013). Schools maintain their distinct and separate identities, including separate pupil uniforms, buildings and staff, whilst entering into an interdependent, collaborative relationship (Duffy and Gallagher, 2014). Shared Education involves all sectors, including Integrated schools and, as a policy, it aims to allow for further collaborations and co-operation making the existing boundaries between sectors and schools more porous (Duffy and Gallagher, 2014). The Department of Education referred to an all-encompassing vision for:

> "Vibrant, self-improving Shared Education partnerships delivering educational benefits to learners, encouraging the efficient and effective use of resources, and promoting equality of opportunity, good relations, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion" (DENI, 2015b: 4).

The Shared Education Bill emphasised the education together of "…those of different religious belief, including reasonable numbers of both, Protestant and Roman Catholic children or young persons; as well as those who are experiencing socio-economic deprivation" (NIA, 2016a: 1). The Bill also referred to the duty of the Education Authority to encourage, facilitate and promote Shared Education. Neither IME nor integrated education are required to be 'promoted'.

Part of the vision was for shared campuses, but while plans for ten of these were launched in 2013, so far there has been limited success in progressing these. One of the few which have been developed is the shared sixth-form provision and STEM centre being built for two neighbouring schools: Limavady High School and St Mary's High School, Limavady. A major project on the former army base at Lisanelly, Omagh, the Strule Education Campus, where six post-primary schools were to be to relocated into a major shared campus seems to have stalled with the most recent news story on the website dating from January 2019 (https://strule.org/latest/news/). Only one school has relocated thus far: Arvalee, a school for children and young people with Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD) and Serious Learning Difficulties (SLD).

Shared education has attracted significant financial support, including funding from the US bodies Atlantic Philanthropies and the International Fund for Ireland. European Peace Funding (Peace IV) has also been secured (Gallagher, 2016). Peter Weir, in his introduction to the Second Shared Education report to the NI Assembly said:

> "During the academic year ending in June 2019, over 87,000 children and young people, one quarter of our pupils, had the opportunity to meet, learn and socialise with their peers from different religious and socio-economic backgrounds. In many cases opportunities for contact would simply not have been available without involvement in Shared Education. And, of course, teachers and school leaders also benefit from sustained contact with those from different backgrounds…Shared Education is not a panacea to address our troubled past. But it does contribute to changing attitudes and I am confident that it will, over time, as part of a wider, coordinated approach across all areas of civic and public life, help to create a more peaceful, prosperous and harmonious society for us and for future generations" (DENI, 2020c: i).

It is realistic to claim, as Gallagher did, that "'in a relatively short period of time, shared education seems to have transformed the educational landscape in Northern Ireland' (Gallagher, 2016: 372). However, there have been some misgivings regarding shared education. Bates and McCully (2020), in a study of a project which involved shared teachers, found clear benefits in educational terms through shared resources, planning and curricular enrichment, but observed that limited use of the shared teachers undermined the potential for positive community relations. Additionally, they questioned the sustainability of the project once external funding is removed.

Hughes and Loader (2015) recognised that, while shared education is generally effective in promoting positive assessments of other group members, there needs to be more intentionality about reconciliation objectives. Without that, there is a danger that any impact may be diminished by the foregrounding of educational over reconciliation priorities. While it may have been necessary initially to emphasise the benefits to education, for example by allowing subjects to be delivered in Area Learning Communities (ALCs) in shared classes at GCSE and A Level which otherwise would have been unsustainable in terms of numbers, the reconciliation objectives of shared education may require more prominence.

There are also challenges identified in encouraging shared education in a system based on competition between schools. Hughes et al. (2016) noted that

> "… shared education that encourages collaborative relationships between schools to enhance educational and social outcomes for all pupils is inconsistent with an education system where competition is seen as a healthy driver of standards, and the achievement of 'market share' (and therein resources) for one school is enhanced by its ability to 'outperform' neighbouring schools or offer a unique ethos" (Hughes et al., 2016: 1096-1097).

Additionally, similar to integrated education, there was often avoidance of addressing controversial issues or of discussing reconciliation (see Austin and Turner, 2020:371-372). Donnelly and Burns (2020) noted that there was a lack of clarity on this, and used the heading "Shared Education and dealing with controversial issues: a case of cautious sidestepping?" within their paper. They also

noted that "training in the handling of controversial issues has been available to education staff in Northern Ireland for decades, but it is voluntary, and schools need to be committed to it in order for teachers to engage" (2020: 13) – this is, of course, a much wider issue than just with shared education, but it is a concern there also.

Shared education is seen by some as acting as a possible pathway towards transformation to integrated education as, "over time, some schools involved in Shared Education might decide to adopt a fully integrated model" (DENI, 2017b: 9), but for others it is seen as an alternative to integrated education, and Borooah and Knox (2013), for instance seem to regard it as a 'Third Way', alongside segregated and integrated education. There is some concern that shared education may be used by politicians and others as a substitute for making more fundamental structural changes to education (Hansson and Roulston, 2020) and there is a worry that "if the focus is solely on contact programmes between schools there may be less priority on institutional and systemic change" (Smith and Hannson, 2015: 14).

Schools in NI are largely divided along community lines: Catholic schools and State schools which many regard as, effectively, Protestant. Integrated schools are an attempt to educate both traditions together, but their growth is slow. Shared education has gained a lot of political and other support. A more recent initiative, it promotes collaboration between schools, and shared classes, but retains school structures as they are at present.

3.2.9 The preparation of teachers

There are two routes into teaching in schools in Northern Ireland – an undergraduate (BEd (Hons)) and a postgraduate (PGCE) route. There are four Initial Teacher Education providers in NI (3.3.3 deals with the structural provision of ITE). Stranmillis and St Mary's University Colleges offer mainly a four-year undergraduate qualification for primary teachers and courses are provided for post-primary teachers of Business Studies, Religious Studies, Technology and Design and Mathematics/Science. In St Mary's UC, a one-year postgraduate course for teaching in Irish Medium primary schools is available, with a one-year course in

Early Years available in Stranmillis. Both Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University offer one-year postgraduate courses in post-primary subjects. To avoid duplication, most of these subject specialisms are specific to each institution. Ulster also have a one-year postgraduate course for primary teaching. Unlike in GB, there are no other pathways into teaching available in NI. In 2019/20, there were 290 pre-service teachers on four-year undergraduate programmes in St Mary's UC and Stranmillis UC and 290 pre-service teachers on postgraduate programmes, across the four providers (EURIDICE, 2019a). The numbers of admissions to each course is determined by the Department of Education and Initial teacher Education (ITE) courses are part-funded by the Department for the Economy, with pre-service teachers paying 'top-up' fees.

Successful completion of an ITE programme allows teachers to register with the GCTNI, conferring 'eligibility to teach', a requirement to teach in a grant-aided school.

While each pathway prepares pre-service teachers to teach a certain age group and subject in a post-primary context, the teaching qualification is neither subject nor age specific, and qualified teachers can teach any subject at any age range. There are some restrictions for subjects such as Technology and Design where there may be a health and safety risk.

The programmes offered by all of the ITE providers require approval by the Department of Education (DENI, 2010d), based on need and accreditation from GCTNI. All teaching programmes are subject to inspection by ETI.

Circular 2010/03 (DENI, 2010d) prescribed minimum entry requirements for admission to both BEd and PGCE courses, including qualifications in English and Mathematics. The Circular also detailed seven criteria for suitability for entry onto an ITE course, including the lack of a criminal background that might prevent applicants from working with children, and that they "have the appropriate qualities and aptitude to develop professionally as teachers and to exemplify the core values of the profession" (DENI, 2010d: 4).

The curriculum offered is determined by each institution but must align with the requirements of Circular 2010/03 and enable pre-service teachers to develop the requisite professional competences. Those pre-service teachers following a primary course are generalists, but are prepared to teach in Early Years, KS1 or KS2. Those studying for a post-primary course follow a subject specialism related to the NI Curriculum.

In England, in particular, there has been a change to proliferation of school-led teacher education routes since 2011, by a government who saw teacher education as a 'policy problem' (Mutton et al., 2017). While partnerships between HEIs and schools were assumed (DfE, 2013), in many cases teachers are learning to teach through school-based programmes which have no HEI involvement whatsoever (Mutton et al., 2017: 20). George and Maguire (2019) conceded that other non-HEI routeways have allowed people to enter the profession who might have found it difficult otherwise, but queried "… what [that] diversity and flexibility might mean in terms of teacher quality" (2019: 32).

In Northern Ireland in 1993, there was a proposal for a different kind of HEI/school partnership which might have heralded a move in the direction since taken in England (DENI, 1993). This would have involved giving schools training school status and them taking on significant responsibility for developing pre-service teacher competences. The option was rejected by most NI schools, as there were concerns about the contractual obligations it might entail (McMahon, 2000, cited in Smith et al., 2006). In consequence, it was not made obligatory. HEIs continue to take the responsibility for developing pre-service teacher competences, and relationships with schools remain key to the success of a student's experience in a ITE programme although ITE providers in NI "have to tread carefully and exercise sensitivity, given that schools resisted formal contractual commitments" (Smith et al., 2006: 154).

There are no school-led routes into teaching in NI. A proposal for a movement towards school-based models was rejected by schools in the past. The partnerships between HEI-based ITE and schools are key to success but must be handled with sensitivity. Programmes are accredited by GCTNI and provision is inspected by ETI

3.2.10 The role of education in supporting the mental health and well-being of our children and young people

A recent survey in NI with 11–16 year olds found that 35% of young people have had concerns about their mental health (NISRA, 2016). There is growing evidence that the most common years in which people are most vulnerable to poor mental health is in adolescence and early adulthood. Khan (2016) pointed out that 75% of adults with a diagnosed mental health issue developed this before they were 24 years old. If not addressed in the young, poor mental health can cast a 'long shadow' of illness into adulthood. This emphasises the benefits of promoting wellbeing, trying to prevent mental health problems and implementing early intervention measures as soon as possible. Some young people are particularly vulnerable including children who have been, or are, in the care system and those living in poverty or in economically deprived areas. Also vulnerable are children who are young carers, those who have been in contact with the criminal justice system or who have a parent in prison, those affected by the Troubles (including those exposed to trans-generational trauma) or those with a long-term disability or illness and those exposed to poor parental mental health. Certain groups such as Roma, Gypsy and Traveller children, those belonging to Ethnic Minority Groups, migrant children and LGBTI children are also at particular risk (NICCY, 2018: 23). Harland and McCready (2012) also single out adolescent boys and young men as potentially vulnerable.

People with a diagnosed mental health problem have been found to be at a higher risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviour. Suicide rates in NI are particularly high (18.6 suicides per 100,000 in 2018, compared to 10.3 in England) and have grown (from 144 deaths by suicide in 2004 to 307 in 2018) (NIA, 2019) with worrying rates in young people, prompting the issuance of Suicide Prevention Guidance in 2016 (DENI, 2016b).

The Department of Education and the Department of Health jointly launched the Children & Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education Framework

in 2021, recognising that educational settings "play a central role in creating the optimum environment for the development of their personality, abilities and talents, supporting their disabilities, promoting their wellbeing and identifying and responding to children's mental health difficulties" (DENI/DoH, 2021: 1). Established with the broad context of United Nations Conventions, the framework also builds on local initiatives such as the Children and Young People's Strategy 2020-2030, the Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015, the Protect Life 2 – A Strategy for Preventing Suicide and Self Harm in Northern Ireland 2019-2024 and the Mental Health Action Plan. Also, it builds on NICCY's (2018) report on mental health.

The Framework recognised that, while family and community are key to the wellbeing of children and young people, education, too, has a central role in providing ongoing support throughout the educational journey starting at pre-school level. Schools can help to develop and sustain self-esteem, self-confidence and success which will contribute to good health and wellbeing. There is a recognition that pupils who do well at school and who achieve qualifications tend to develop healthy lifestyles and to find employment, and they also tend not to engage in risk-taking behaviours. Schools can support this, and also model and develop strategies that promote physical, social and emotional wellbeing in schools, and also in families and communities (DENI/DoH, 2021). The framework provided a self-assessment audit tool for schools, and a checklist to assess what measures school already have established, alongside examples of good practice and the steps that can be taken to ensure that those support structures are as effective as possible.

It is too early to gauge the effectiveness of these strategies.

Mental health is an enduring issue in Northern Ireland and early intervention and support is necessary to avoid long-term challenges. The Department of Education alongside the Department of Health have set out a framework to help schools play their part in addressing these issues.

3.2.11 The meaningful participation of parents, children and young people in decision-making about schools

There are considerable advantages reported in increasing parental engagement in schooling. Aston and Grayson (2013), in their guide for teachers, pointed to better outcomes from increased parental engagement which include improvement in academic performance and the development of relationships between parents, teachers and schools. Particular emphasis has been placed on parental engagement in early years and through primary school. Desforges (2003) stated that:

> "In the primary age range the impact caused by different levels of parental involvement is much bigger than differences associated with variations in the quality of schools. The scale of the impact is evident across all social classes and all ethnic groups" (Desforges, 2003: 4-5).

Moore (2019), in her research with principals of primary schools in NI, reported widespread agreement about the importance of parental engagement, with more than 73% of respondents prioritising it in their school development plan. Nevertheless, much research is cautious about terminology regarding parental participation, with Moore (2019) for example, recommending that there should be an agreed definition of such engagement. Clarifying the terminology is a challenge not specific to NI. The Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau in Australia (2011), for example, distinguished between 'engagement', which they interpret as more active participation, and 'involvement' which they saw as less active on the spectrum of parental participation. They cited Pushor and Ruitenberg's (2005) ideas about 'engagement' which suggested that it is

> "... enabling parents to take their place alongside educators in the schooling of their children, fitting together their knowledge of children, teaching and learning, with teachers' knowledge. With parent engagement, possibilities are created for the structure of schooling to be flattened, power and authority to be shared by educators and parents, and the agenda being served to be mutually determined and mutually beneficial" (2005: 12-13).

Moore (2019) recommended that, in NI, parental involvement should be specified in the inspection framework. Further she recommended that this involvement should be a teaching and a leadership competency and covered in ITE. 'Parents' are mentioned on 30 occasions in Teaching: The Reflective Profession (GCTNI,

2011), largely in competences 10 (in relation to strategies for communicating effectively with parents, 23 (related to contributing to the development of the school through collaboration with parents) and 27 (liaising orally in writing with parents about a learner's progress). Even in ITE, pre-service teachers must "Understand the importance of collaborating with parents and exploiting all opportunities to do so" (GCTNI, 2011: 39), and those skills should develop through a teacher's career phases.

Besides, Moore (2019) made the observation that "parental engagement will help realise the aspirations of professionals, policymakers, regulators and most importantly parents" (Moore, 2019: 46). She also recommended the involvement of parents, particularly those living in poverty, and national parenting organisations in the development of a cross-departmental strategy and implementation plan, led by the Department of Education. Moore particularly called for mandatory training on parental engagement for early years practitioners.

There is some evidence that parents of children with SEN feel that they are not involved in decision making. A survey untaken by NICCY (2020) found that almost half of the parents surveyed were either 'not very involved' (32%) or 'not at all involved' (14%) in the development of their child's Individual Education Plan (IEP), particularly if their child was without a statement. Additionally, NICCY reported that only 35% of parents had been told that they had a right to be present at any interview, test or any other assessment involving their child, despite that being set out in SEN guidance materials. Around one in ten parents/carers reported not having received copies of the written reports completed about their child (NICCY, 2020: 106). When it came to appeal disputes and resolution feedback, parents/carers stated that they rarely feel that they are 'partners' in the process, and many reported a lack of trust in them as parents/carers by the school staff, health professionals and the EA, citing instances of being accused of being overly protective or of exacerbating behavioural difficulties (NICCY, 2020: 106).

Children, too, can be isolated from decision making in schools. The Department of Education published a Circular on pupil participation in decision making in 2014

(DENI, 2014d), but NICCY (2015) asserted that "the findings of this report have shown that a circular is clearly not enough and we are calling for a policy to be put in place that enshrines young people's voices in every aspect of school life" (NICCY, 2015: 3). Pupil voice is also advocated in the context of local and global citizenship in the NIC but its potential has not been realised except in the form of School Councils in a few schools.

Often the establishment of a School Council may be the method of hearing the pupil voice and engaging them in decision making in a school. Harland and McCready (2012) suggested this as a mechanism to encourage boys to play a full and active role in the life of the school, and further recommend that they be involved in co-constructing the 'shared space' that teachers and pupils occupy together in the day to day running of schools. They also recommended involving pupils in developing and revising disciplinary policies, sanctions and rewards, setting a positive behaviour policy within a restorative context (Harland and McCready, 2012: 88). All of this would help to challenge their potential alienation from the school and increase their sense of belonging.

NICCY (2015) noted the importance of having an elected School Council and highlighted its importance in demonstrating that the school is democratic and representative. They also highlighted the potential of School Councils for personal and skills development for young people, bolstering self-confidence for those who become involved. They are seen to encourage participation which can also extend beyond school, promoting a wider civic engagement, and NICCY report that young people who had engagement in School Councils were more likely to engage within their community and wider society, including political engagement and civic leadership.

Similarly, Connolly et al. (2013) recommended that the Department of Education should require all schools to establish School Councils, contending that it is a stipulation of Article 12 of the UNCRC. They argued that these should be fully representative of the school body and all year groups in the school, that they provide a mechanism for children and young people to have a say on all school

matters that affect them, that children and young people should be supported in forming and expressing their views and that appropriate mechanisms should be established for these to be considered and given due weight by the school (Connolly et al., 2013: 119). The final point about giving agency to children and young people through School Councils was also echoed by NICCY (2015).

NICCY's (2015) research suggested that most young people knew who was on their School Council (83.8%), or how to get onto it (71.1%). However, only 66.9% knew how to raise an issue with the School Council and less than half (44.7%) knew whether it had made a difference in their school. While NICCY acknowledged that much had been achieved in terms of pupil engagement leading to a greater sense of ownership of the school among pupils and improvements to provision for learners, they call for more training and support for teachers, principals and Boards of Governors, as well as developing training and networking opportunities for School Council members. They also recommended that schools take steps to establish direct links between the School Councils, the senior management and Boards of Governors, and that the School Council should be timetabled. Also, they argued that UNCRC/rights education should be integrated into the curriculum. They further recommended that all schools should establish a School Council. While these have an important role to play in pupil participation, NICCY encouraged

> "… a school culture that allows all pupils the opportunity to participate in school life and to have a say on issues that affect them. This should include ensuring opportunities/ support for young people, who experience barriers or, who have been excluded from the process, to be involved in school councils" (NICCY, 2015: 27).

Recommendations from NICCY (2015) to DENI include the need to review and strengthen the Circular on pupil participation (DENI, 2014d), as well as working with ETI to include pupil participation within the inspection process, and providing more opportunities for support, training and networking for teachers to promote more pupil participation. As well, NICCY (2015) called for DEL to ensure that pupil participation and its links to UNCRC, should be included in Initial Teacher Education.

The Children's Law Centre (2020b) also found that pupil participation is inadequate. While this is not limited to schools, and they noted the UK and NI Government's

lack of child participation in legislation around Brexit and responses to COVID-19, they noted that Article 12 of the CRC gives children the rights to express their views and for those to be given weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. They noted that children report not being involved in planning and delivery of child-friendly services, including in education policy and practice (Children's Law Centre, 2020b: 11). They called for a Youth Assembly to provide "…a structure for meaningful participation of children, including younger and disadvantaged or vulnerable children, in the development of laws, policies and services" (Children's Law Centre, 2020b: 36). Lundy et al. (2013) also noted that

> "Section 75 of the NI Act (1998) imposes a duty on public bodies to consult with a number of identified groups, including children and young people, and 'persons with dependants'" (Lundy et al., 2013: 43).

They found that it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which children and their parents have been engaged in these processes due to a lack of clarity in the information available from government departments, and they gave details on eight policies with a spectrum of child and parent consultation being overtly demonstrated – in some very clear consultation has been demonstrated, in others, it is not clear whether or to what extent such consultation was undertaken (Lundy et al., 2013: 47-48). In the 2009 policy, Every School a Good School: Supporting Newcomer pupils, for example (DENI, 2009a), Lundy et al. noted that there had been presentations in ten schools and the attendance of over 200 newcomer parents and pupils at these events. However, they commented that it is not clear to what extent the children and young people were directly engaged. Lundy et al. concluded their report stating:

> "… there is significant scope for the DE to adopt a human rights-based approach to its policy reform, including a recognition that (a) education is a human right to be enjoyed by all on an equal basis and (b) that parents and students should be engaged meaningfully in the processes of change and reform" (Lundy et al., 2013: 50).

Henderson et al. (2020) noted that the agency of children and young people is often not developed in schools in decisions around, for example, constraints on subject choice due to timetabling decisions and the examination specification chosen for them to follow. They commented that "pupils identified the failure to

take their views into account in making decisions about assessment as having potential implications for their future educational chances" (Henderson et al., 2020: 24). Decisions taken at higher levels than within the school, such as by examining authorities in relation to reform of assessments with implications for changes to content and the ending of tiered examination entries, also seem not to take account of the views of young people.

In 2018, the Department of Education launched "Give your child a helping hand" (https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/helping-hand), a campaign using television, social media, radio and billboard advertisements to provide information and support to parents on how they can help their child(ren) with their education, thus promoting parental engagement. This has evolved into a booklet for parents of children aged 0-4, launched in February 2019 (DENI, 2019d).

There are examples of good practice where children and young people have been involved in decision making about schools. However, sometimes it is not clear that this has happened, and there are those who suggest that children and young people should have the opportunity to actively participate in decisions affecting them to allow them to express their views and for those views to be considered appropriately.

3.2.12 Learning from the experiences of children and young people during the COVID-19 disruption especially in terms of remote learning and the role of technology in education delivery

The World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak to be a pandemic on 12th March 2020. Within one week, 107 countries had implemented national school closures (Viner et al., 2020: 397) and towards the beginning of April, 1.59 billion students were affected by the COVID-19 virus [91.3% of the total student enrolment] (UNESCO, 2020). Schools in NI closed for most pupils on 20th March 2020, although some Special Schools had closed a week earlier. A few schools in NI stayed open to cater for vulnerable children and for younger children of key workers, where alternative arrangements could not be made, although this accounted for less than 2% of school-aged children across the

UK, mostly in the primary sector (Hall et al., 2020). Nonetheless, all schools were still required to be 'virtually' open by providing remote teaching and learning opportunities using various synchronous and asynchronous online platforms. Schools reopened for face-to-face teaching from September 2020 with COVID-19 mitigation measures in place but following a surge in cases across the community, closed again in December 2020. This precipitated a second extended period of home learning for most children and young people until April 2021.

A range of surveys have been conducted concerning the impact on schools, teachers and parents in NI during the pandemic (Walsh et al., 2020; O'Connor-Bones et al., 2020; Roulston et al., 2020; Purdy et al., 2021; McCaffrey-Lau et al., 2021). Four focus on the effects of the first lockdown.

McCaffrey-Lau et al. (2021) concentrated on the impact on teachers, finding that work-life balance was negatively impacted, particularly for those who had family, health or caring responsibilities. Teachers reported that their transition to online learning was challenging, requiring them to acquire or develop new skills around digital content. Most respondents (90%) reported not using videoconferencing facilities to teach synchronously; reasons cited included safeguarding issues and both learner and teacher privacy. Teachers reported some loss of learner engagement and the report notes that "learner participation in online remote learning classes was mixed, with the most common teacher response being that between 41-60% of learners participated daily" (McCaffrey-Lau, 2021: 7). Teachers also voiced concerns over the vulnerability, isolation, emotional wellbeing and levels of stress experienced by their pupils. In terms of teacher support, they reported that they mostly relied on work colleagues. However, qualitative responses in the survey suggested that support available from outside school, including education support organisations, was less useful. A positive message was that teachers' attitudes to online learning and digital skills seemed to indicate some change with 76% of teachers (n=464) reporting that, as a result of involvement in remote learning, they were now more likely to engage with online learning and 93% (n=569) reporting that they more likely to advocate for professional digital skills training for teachers.

Also reporting on the first lockdown in 2020, Walsh et al. focused on the impact on parents and carers. They found evidence of differences in engagement in home schooling by parents, dependent upon education level, with those parents who were educated to degree level being more likely to be engaged in their child(ren)'s learning. They were also more likely to be working from home during this period. Essential workers, they found, were less able to be involved in home-schooling. They reported that "the strongest expressions of frustration and desperation came from within this group, struggling with physical exhaustion, fear of infection, an inability to spend as much time with their children to support their learning, and, in several cases, a resulting sense of guilt and anger" (Walsh et al., 2020: 4). There was a call for more resources to support home-learning, and parents/carers also wanted more live interaction with teachers. The researchers also found that the effects of lockdown on children was individualised, although older learners tended to miss the school environment more than younger ones. While responses indicated that most parents/carers found no change in their child(ren)'s wellbeing (63.69%), the report concluded that "the area where children are most likely to have benefited is in their emotional well-being where around 1 in 5 parents claim that there has been an improvement" (2020: 92).

O'Connor et al. (2020) targeted parents whose children were learners in primary, post-primary or special schools. Their findings demonstrated varying confidence levels reported by parents depending on subject matter. Most also reported that schools had provided sufficient materials to support learning. However, while online resources were popular choices for most parents, there was evidence of a clear digital divide between households, with reports of no or limited internet access and a lack of sufficient devices for children to use in some instances. This was exacerbated in the cases where parents themselves were having to work online. It was reported that, in general, schools kept close contact with parents, although there was variation which was particularly clear to those parents who had children attending different schools. A substantial number of parents used social media to network with other parents and found that very supportive. This study was carried out quite early in the lockdown (between the middle of April 2020 and the middle

of May 2020) and, in that timeframe, some parents expressed pleasure in having more time with their children. However, the majority found home-schooling to be stressful and challenging. Parents with children who had Special Education Needs (SEN), or who had to manage their own work alongside home-schooling found this period particularly difficult. Indeed, parents of children with SEN in mainstream schools tended to experience difficulties in all aspects of home-schooling, and parents of children attending special schools were more likely to identify challenges in home-schooling. There was, throughout, a close relationship between FSME and other factors such as parental confidence, the use of resources to support learning, access to the internet and managing health, wellbeing and household budgets. This report concluded that the move to emergency home-schooling was highlighting aspects of education which should be improved, and thus could act as a catalyst for educational transformation. Key messages included developing effective school-parent partnerships in an overall framework of advice and training, developing the skills, particularly the digital skills, of teachers in ITE and CPD, further recognising and addressing the digital divide to remove inequity through the renewal of an ICT strategy, providing particular support for those learners with SEN, re-evaluating the position of assessment in the education process, creating a sustainable, affordable and inclusive education system, and building on educational research to produce evidence-based change. The report specifically found that parents whose child(ren) attended special schools were more likely to identify the challenges of home schooling and recommended that re-opening special schools should be prioritised. It was parents of these children and young people who felt most stressed by home schooling, as their child(ren) missed "the regularity of a school day and access to various therapeutic support [which brought] valuable educational, social and psychological advantages" (O'Connor et al., 2020: 37).

Roulston et al. (2020) also centred on the impact on parents but combined their findings with the survey results from parents in the Republic of Ireland. Their findings were similar to the other reports discussed. Their recommendations were also similar, in that, they emphasised the need to tackle the digital divide more vigorously. Further, they stressed the need to develop digital skills in learners as well as teachers and called for a coherent set of quality indicators which would

indicate what constitutes effective remote teaching and learning. The authors recommended that efforts should be made to "… design and deliver a digital future that delivers for learners, teachers and parents … aligned with teacher professional learning that is strategically directed, policy-informed and peer-supported" (Roulston et al., 2020: 45).

Purdy et al. (2021) considered the second lockdown. They found that the experience of that period was much more challenging in terms of children's mental health and wellbeing, and their behaviour and social skills. Physical health also declined. However, there was evidence that schools were much more prepared than for the first lockdown and that they used educational technology more effectively in 2021 than they had previously. However, live online teaching was still not universal and was generally confined to older learners and particularly pupils in Voluntary Grammar and Irish Medium schools. While the digital access for learners had improved, they reported that a digital divide remained.

> "… there was a slight increase from 2020 in the number of digital devices available to children, and a reduction in the percentage of parents reporting that they had no printer (18% in 2021, compared to 23% in 2020), [but] children from households in the lowest income band were three times more likely to have no printer than children from households in the highest income band (30% vs 11%) and their parents/carers were considerably more likely to feel that the costs of printing (in terms of paper and ink) prevented them from using their printer (25% vs 3%)" (Purdy et al., 2021: 2).

Children from low-income families were also more likely to have to share a device and to have to wait to get access to the Internet.

Some recent research (Farrell, 2021) in the Republic of Ireland suggested that the pandemic and the responses to it by schools and Initial Teacher Education institutions brought some benefits. The relationships between schools and ITEs were strengthened as they formalised structures to support pre-service teachers on placement, moving away from an *ad hoc* university-school cooperation measures. COVID had provided an opportunity to rethink and reset aspects of ITE (Darling-Hammond and Hyler, 2020). The situation also emphasised that "all stakeholders

in education, including student teachers, are resilient and adaptable to change" (Farrell, 2021: 6).

Over the two periods of school closure, considerable efforts have been made by the Department of Education to address the unprecedented and fast-evolving pandemic. These included new arrangements for free school meals, providing direct payments to families, a series of guidance papers on topics such as social distancing, assessment and school reports, School Development Planning for 2020/21, vulnerable children and young people, and evolving updates on school closures. The Safer Schools App which gave safeguarding guidance and resources for teachers and parents/carers was launched in May 2020.

There were also efforts to provide education technology equipment to learners who needed access to assist with remote learning. In early February 2021, in answer to a question in the Assembly, the Minister of Education reported that almost £7 million had been spent during that financial year helping pupils in need to access additional IT equipment. This included supporting bandwidth expansion, procuring additional learning applications to support remote learning, the purchase of 8,000 tablets and 3,664 laptops, and establishing a voucher scheme for Wi-Fi and Mi-Fi for disadvantaged or vulnerable learners. In addition, it was noted that a further 17,000 devices had been procured and would soon be available. In all, 12,509 devices were reported to have been distributed to pupils from 479 schools across Northern Ireland at that point (NIA, 2021). Children were given the loan of a device according to published criteria with priority currently in key year groups (Years 11, 13, 6 and 3) and categories (FSME, SEN 1-5, Newcomer target groups - Asylum Seeker, Refugee and Roma children), LAC and those who are considered vulnerable (DENI, 2020e).

These are commendable interventions, but Purdy et al.'s (2021) findings suggested that a considerable gap persisted, and it is too early to evaluate how much the efforts by government mitigated the potential damage that COVID wrought on vulnerable individuals and marginalised communities. The UN Special Rapporteur noted that, across the globe, the pandemic has amplified poor quality housing,

digital exclusion, economic precarity and hunger. Additionally, she highlighted that disabled children were left behind when schools closed, with no or little alternative significant provision put in place in most countries (Human Rights Council, 2020: 8). In Northern Ireland too, the pandemic shone a light on deficiencies and inequities in our system and indicated structural weaknesses exacerbated by socio-economic imbalances.

COVID-19 caused the cessation of face-to-face teaching in schools. Many learners faced problems of isolation; access to learning was hampered for some by the lack of access to devices and connectivity, only marginally improved in the second shut-down. The crisis highlighted skill deficiencies amongst teachers and learners and structural weaknesses in some home-school partnerships.

3.3 Support for schools and settings

3.3.1 The range of pupil support services, including SEN, provided for pupils and the current level, quality and consistency of service provision across each of these services. The experience of pupils with Special Educational Needs and disabilities, and the pathways provided

A complete review of SEN categories was undertaken in 2017/18 and a new listing was introduced in 2019 which comprised a SEN Register and a Medical Register. Previously, some children with a medical diagnosis, such as diabetes, but no SEN, were placed on the SEN register. These learners are now placed on the Medical Register and some conditions previously classed as SEN, such as Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), are now categorised in the Medical Register. The numbers had been rising; in 2005/06 there were 16% of pupils registered with SEN, rising to 22% in 2015/16 (Perry, 2016b), although the review of SEN categories makes it difficult to judge prevalence over time. In 2020/21, following the change to the registers, the prevalence was 19.3% across the entire school population (DENI, 2021c: 12), accounting for nearly 67,824 learners – the same proportion as in 2019/20. There were 5.8% of pupils with a statutory statement, and the proportion of pupils at Stages 1-4 pupils was 13.5%, slightly down on the 2019/20 figure (13.8%). The new Registers for SEN and Medical Conditions represent a potential baseline to monitor the profile and outcomes of pupils, but it is too early to gauge the extent to which changes to the

categorisation system will affect the recording of SEN, although preliminary data provided by the NI Audit Office (NIAO, 2020) already indicated a significant decrease in the numbers of such pupils at Stages 1-4. The Audit Report (NIAO, 2017) also indicated that SEN prevalence in NI is higher proportionally than in England.

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 – the SEND Act – included provisions to require each child with SEN to have a personal learning plan, required EA and Health and Social Services Boards to cooperate in identifying, assessing and providing for children with SEN, providing a right to appeal where EA does not change a statement after annual review, and an increased child participation in decision making. A Revised Code of Practice was anticipated (Perry, 2016b: 2) which will set out new protocols and provisions for SEN, including a new Code of Practice that proposes a 3-stage approach (instead of the existing 5-stage). There is to be a regional plan for Special Schools, so that their development should have a common structure and a remit to support learners with significant and/or complex needs, provision of pre-school provision at all special schools and a requirement that pupils should be able to attend their nearest special school (Perry, 2016b: 5)

Purdy et al. (2020) highlighted some failures in provision for SEN learners. There is not yet an *independent* body to identify children's educational needs, for which support would be paid for by the EA – rather the body which will pay for the needs to be met is also assessing those needs. It is also argued that there is an undue focus on *where* children with SEN are educated and integrated rather than how effectively they are included. There still seemed to be some focus on the "'the mechanics of exclusion' within the deep cultures of schooling in NI" (Smith, 2014), although it is important to note that DE completed a review of special schools in 2015, acknowledging that they had a particular role to play and identifying their potential as centres of expertise. Finally, Purdy et al. noted that there is continuing confusion and misuse of the term 'special educational needs' as some incorrectly interpret it as denoting a homogenous group of children, failing to see that it is the identification of individual needs which is the first step towards the provision of

appropriate support. In NI, in Purdy et al.'s view, there had been a series of significant failures in SEN policy in terms of its economic effectiveness and its inability to meet the individual needs of children. Education reform in this area has been slow and hampered by the collapse of political institutions – SEN policy development in NI was characterised by them as 'tortuous'. An issue articulated is that

> "… there is a conflict between the protection offered by the individual needs approach to meeting special needs …and the resources that accompany them, and contemporary views of good practice in educating all students" (Smith, 2014: 398).

However, recent reports (NIAO, 2017 and 2020) suggested that the educational achievements of children with SEN are improving (NIAO, 2020: 45) although they highlighted the growing cost of reviewing over 17,000 statements each year, currently around £6 million. However, this is dwarfed by the overall spend of £217 million for SEN by EA in 2015-16 (NIAO, 2020: 2). It is also noted that there are often delays in providing statements and that, in 2015-16, 79% were not completed inside the statutory 26 weeks (NIAO, 2020: 25), despite early intervention being recognised as key to making a difference to life chances and reducing overall spend in meeting a child's additional needs as they grow up.

Some of the shortcomings in policy can be seen in studies of individual conditions. NI has higher rates of Autism Spectrum Disorder than other parts of the UK. McConkey (2020) found higher rates among those living in areas with greater social deprivation, among girls and in pupils of eight years and older. He reported a risk that pupils are still classed as having ASD when it is no longer an appropriate or necessary classification for these children. Improvements in practice and greater equity in support for schools and pupils with ASD are needed to improve identification of this condition, although he accepted that the impact this might have on cost-effectiveness would be difficult to disentangle without further research.

Growth in the number of children with SEN in both mainstream and special schools has been accompanied by an exponential increase in the number of Classroom

Assistants employed to provide support to these pupils. The recent impact reviews of SEN by the NI Audit Office (2020; 2017) identified the majority of spend in supporting children with a statement of SEN in mainstream schools is on adult assistance (which includes classroom assistants, general assistants and supervisory assistants). The report identified that, *of the £95 million spent on adult assistance in 2019/20, £76 million was spent on classroom assistants* (NIAO, 2020: 34), a figure that has almost doubled since 2011/12.

In this context, the conclusion that current funding of SEN services is financially unsustainable and that a fundamental review of spend is required, will have implications for resource allocation. Whilst the role, status and deployment of CAs in schools is clearly a pivotal consideration in provision for pupils with SEN, thus far, research on this workforce has been limited, creating a significant knowledge gap that spans mainstream and special school provision (O'Connor et al., 2020; O'Connor and Hansson, 2012; Abbott et al., 2011).

Beck et al. (2017) considered policy and practice in relation to dyslexia provision in NI since the 2002 Task Group Report and examined the extent to which recommendations have been met in the intervening years. Their results suggested that there were pockets of good practice, but this had not been consistent. While DENI promote and fund a significant and replicable model of teacher education and monitor its efficacy, some concerns remain:

- the optional nature of training,
- the maintenance of the discrepancy model of dyslexia identification,
- the need for early multi-disciplinary identification,
- whole-school policy development, and
- post-primary provision.

There are also concerns around the sustainability of funding. Additionally, it was recommended that parents' voices need to be heard more, and more transparency for parents is advocated (Beck et al., 2017). There was increasing concern over the lack of places for pupils in special schools (BBC, 2020), most acutely felt in schools in the Greater Belfast Area.

The NI Children's Commissioner (NICCY, 2020) heard from Principals and SENCOs that schools were under considerable strain with insufficient capacity or resource to meet the growing numbers of learners with SEN in mainstream schools. Their report highlighted the vulnerability of children with SEN and/or disability, and their higher propensity than other learners to be suspended (almost twice as likely as children without SEN) or expelled (almost half of expulsions since 2015-16 are children with SEN). This was often attributed to the fact that "schools are specifically lacking in the knowledge, skill and capacity to effectively support children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties" (NICCY, 2020: 76). It also chimes with the recommendation from NIAO that

> "The Department, the EA and schools should ensure that all teachers, including those studying for their teaching qualification, receive appropriate training so they are able to identify children with SEN and take the necessary action to provide support to them" (NIAO, 2020: 50).

There is a higher proportion of pupils designated as SEN in NI than elsewhere in the UK – among these an increasing proportion have been diagnosed with ASD. This has created financial pressures on the education budget and policy has not kept pace with developments on the ground.

3.3.2 An assessment of the range of support services provided for education settings, teachers and school leaders.

Purdy et al. (2020) pointed out that the 1978 Warnock report remains highly influential in challenging assumptions around exclusion and in articulating common educational aims for all children. Following Warnock, a statutory duty was placed first on the ELBs and later on EA to identify and address the learning difficulties of children including those with the most severe and complex needs.

Responsibility for the provision of Pupil Support Service across schools in NI lies with the Education Authority (EA) who provide seven discrete services:

- Autism Advisory and Intervention Service,
- Literacy Service,
- Sensory Service,

- SEN Early Years Inclusion Service,
- Language and Communication Service,
- SEN Inclusion Service, and
- Transition Service.

In 2018, the multidisciplinary Regional Integrated Support for Education (RISE) service was created. RISE aims to enable collaborative working practices between the health and social care and education sectors, RISE seeking to identify and recognise barriers to earning early and to work with parents, teachers and school leaders to provide integrated interventions.

The creation of RISE was largely in line with the demands for greater co-operation and early intervention that were contained in the NICCY (2017a) paper on educational inequalities and inclusion although a later paper from the same organisation (NICCY; 2020) suggested that too little was being done and called for a systemic review of the structure and effectiveness of EA in making provision for children with special educational needs. NIHRC (2020) called on providers to adopt a rights-based approach and emphasised the importance of early intervention while the Children's Law Centre (2020a) called for a greater focus on inclusion of children with SEN and more coherence and accountability in multi-disciplinary working, in line with the requirements of the Children's Services Co-operation Act (Children's Law Centre, 2020a).

Early and multi-agency approaches may reduce the need for more complicated and expensive interventions for learners in later life. Teachers and school leaders need this support if they are to deliver the best outcomes. There is a need for further roll out of multi-disciplinary practices.

3.3.3 The structural organisation of initial teacher education (ITE)

Responsibility for the administration and funding of initial teacher education in Northern Ireland lies with the Department for the Economy which also appoints members to the Boards of Governors of both University Colleges. It is, however, the Department of Education (DE) that oversees student intake allocations and the

delivery and content of ITE and other teaching courses (3.2.9 deals with the how the ITE providers prepare teachers).

ITE is currently provided in four institutions in NI. Stranmillis and St Mary's are both University Colleges under the auspices of Queens University although they are financially and organisationally separate and independent of each other and of their parent university. A recent book by Farren, Clarke and O'Doherty (2019) provides a history of teacher preparation in NI. It details the many attempts to reform ITE. The most recent review began in 2011 when the Department of Employment and Learning commenced a review of the financial models underpinning teacher education. In its initial phase the review identified that educating a teacher in NI was considerably more expensive than elsewhere in the UK. The review singled out the education of primary school teachers in separate colleges as being particularly costly and proposed that this was due, at least partially, to the payments of premia to St Mary's and Stranmillis. Nevertheless, the review concluded that, in the absence of an agreed strategy on ITE and clear, agreed outcomes from policy makers, it was difficult to determine accurately whether the current arrangements represented value for money.

The second phase, an investigation by an international panel of experts led by Professor Pasi Sahlberg, reported back to the Assembly in 2014 and highlighted issues of fragmentation and duplication (Sahlberg, 2014). The team noted that there was potential for greater cooperation and collaboration between ITE providers and proposed four alternative models:

1. a collaborative partnership between ITE institutions,
2. a two-centre model within a Belfast Institute of Education,
3. a federation of ITE providers, and
4. a single NI Institute of Education.

The report was met with vocal (and effective) opposition – particularly from supporters of St Mary's who argued that the closure option would impact negatively on employment levels in an area that was recognised as suffering from particularly high levels of social deprivation. The proposals have progressed no further.

A joint research paper by a staff member from St Mary's UC and another from Stranmillis UC (Hagan and Eaton, 2020) framed the separation of the University Colleges and the inertia in relation to responding to the changes proposed by Sahlberg as being a 'Wicked Problem'. They drew attention to the fact that the department which commissioned the Sahlberg review – the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) – was, at the time, run by an elected member of the Alliance party (advocates of an integrated model of education) while the Department for Education was led by a Sinn Féin representative (who favoured a system of separated education predicated on parental choice). Thus, the situation was made intractable by the micro-political issues that are inherent within the consociational model of government and the structure of educational administration in NI (Hagan and Eaton, 2020).

Many would-be teachers from NI choose to apply to ITE institutions elsewhere – often with the ultimate intention of returning after qualification. Around one-in-five of teachers currently working in NI schools have gained their professional qualifications in GB (Milliken, Bates and Smith, 2020).

The Alliance party made specific reference to ITE in their manifesto for the 2019 general election and proposed that, the existing "fragmented teacher training provision" requires rationalisation and that "teachers should be educated and trained together" (APNI, 2019b). In contrast, under the title "Pledge on education", the SDLP website prominently featured a photograph of a 'Save St Mary's' protest outside Stormont although the party made no explicit comment or commitment on ITE (SDLP, 2019a).

ITE has traditionally reflected the division in school sectors. A review of the system in 2014 identified that the current configuration of providers was costly and proposed a number of alternative models. The proposals did not attract the necessary cross-party support and the review has not been implemented.

3.3.4 In-service Tutor Education in the School and Further Education sectors respectively, and consideration of how education leaders and practitioners are empowered to fulfil their potential and share excellent practice

Newly qualified teachers (or Beginning Teachers) are supported by Teacher Tutors through a three-year programme of Induction and Early Professional Development (EPD). This is aligned with the Teacher Competences and Code of Values and Professional Practice, set out in the General Teaching Council publication 'Teaching: the Reflective Profession' (GTCNI, 2007). Beginning teachers are supported by the Education Authority's EPD team. This practice has been developed following ETI's Evaluation Report on the Induction Programme for Beginning Teachers (ETI, 2011) and in line with the 'Every School a Good School' guidance document (DENI, 2009a). There have long been concerns about the effectiveness and continuity of the early stages of teaching careers (Abbott, Moran and Clarke, 2009) and there was considerable disruption to the processes which support this during the upheavals which surrounded the creation of the Education Authority.

The Department of Education has also produced 'Learning Leaders: a strategy for Teacher Professional Learning' (TPL) (2016) which aims to "empower the teaching profession to strengthen its professionalism and expertise to meet the challenging educational needs of young people in the 21st century" (2016c: 10) by providing a structured framework for teacher professional learning, developing the leadership capacity of teachers and providing practice-led support within communities. A ten-year roll out process has been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and there are concerns that insufficient funding is provided to underpin the development of TPL in the ways which are detailed in the strategy. Post-graduate leadership courses are provided in a number of the ITEs, but teachers must fund course fees themselves. EA and CCEA also provide a range of targeted TPL courses.

Teachers and lecturers in Colleges of Further Education (FE) are required to be in possession of a recognised teaching qualification, although prospective applicants may still be eligible to apply for employment in an FE College, on the understanding that they will undertake an in-service PGCE (Further Education) qualification (Department for the Economy, 2012).

The 2016 'Strategy for Further Education' proposed that FE colleges would work collaboratively in order to deliver their services to learners and that, under Policy Commitment 15, they would share best practice, and learn from each other. The strategy also noted the excellent partnerships that have already been created across the world to share best practice and made a commitment to continue international placements and exchanges in order to enhance the learner experience, and the professional development and knowledge of their staff (DEL, 2016a).

Both Niens and Reilly (2010) and the Department of Education's CRED Policy (2011) – which all schools are required to observe – drew attention to the need for teachers and school leaders to acknowledge and engage with increasing diversity in the classroom and wider society, as well as with the inter-connectedness of global and local issues.

There are a range of opportunities for career development in education. Over recent years in-service training for beginning teachers, serving teachers and school leaders has been focused on school improvement and the DE Learning Leaders Strategy for TPL arises from this. However, there are concerns about the lack of funding for TPL across a teacher's career.

3.3.5 The roles and responsibilities of school leaders and teachers, at all levels, in the 21st century

School leaders and teachers have a considerable range of roles and responsibilities. They are responsible for delivering the curriculum and for the pastoral care of the pupils in their classes. They are expected to become reflective and activist teachers, considering their values and attributes. They should develop a sense of professional autonomy, continue to develop professional knowledge to improve pedagogic skill and embed best practice throughout their careers. There are 27 Teacher Competences and 11 core values (GTCNI, 2011; GTCNI, 2018) which teachers must have regard to, although the GTCNI document does take pains to stress that the list of these competencies, in *Teaching: the Reflective Profession*, is not intended to be reductive: "the reality [is] that it is concerned with values and professional

identity as much as knowledge and competences" (GTCNI, 2011: 13). Nonetheless, these competences cover

- Professional Values and Practice,
- Professional Skills and Application, including
  - Planning and Leading,
  - Teaching and Learning, and
  - Assessment.

As teachers pass through various phases of their professional development, from ITE through to Continued Professional Development, different Phase exemplars are provided suggesting how competences might be demonstrated.

This is not the first competence framework for teacher education in NI, as there has been one since 1998 (NITEC and CEPD, 1998). While the competences developed by GCTNI reflect a view of teaching which seems to take account of the values of the profession, an approach which is valued, some aspects of addressing the competences in practice have been critiqued. Hagan (2013), for instance, noted that "the promotion of reflective practice… is difficult in a policy culture underpinned by accountability, school improvement and raising standards" (Hagan, 2013: 66).

Career-long teacher education and professional development in NI is supported by three key documents, namely, the Teacher Education Partnership Handbook (DENI, 2010c), Teaching: the Reflective Profession (GTCNI, 2011), and Learning Leaders: a Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning (DENI, 2016c). The first of these provided guidance for pre-service teachers, beginning teachers and teacher tutors, while the second has been discussed above. Learning Leaders aimed to develop a professional learning framework for teachers. This was

> "… based on revised teaching and leadership competences and linked to improved outcomes for pupils. It also promotes collaboration and sharing of best practice through professional learning communities and strengthening leadership capacity in schools, and requires training providers to ensure ITE programmes enable students to meet the required professional competencies" (EURIDICE, 2019b: para. 12).

Career-long teacher education and professional development is an expectation of teachers and teacher leaders. It comprises four competence-based stages: Initial

Teacher Education (ITE), Induction, Early Professional Development (EPD) and Continued Professional Development (CPD). This structure was developed following a review of the ITE provision between 2011 and 2014. *Aspiring to Excellence*, the final report of the review, often called after the Review Panel's Chair, Pasi Sahlberg, (Sahlberg, 2014), recommended the strengthening of links between ITE and CPD. It is obligatory for beginning teachers to complete both induction and the early professional development (EPD) stage of development. The report also made a case for a substantial investment in CPD for teachers leading to GCTNI-endorsed Master's level awards (EURIDICE, 2019b). GTCNI is also working with DE and key educational stakeholders, and engaging with the wider education sector, to develop proposals for a competence framework for leadership at all levels. It is planned that this new framework on leadership competences will align with the existing teaching competences and the Department of Education Learning Leaders Strategy.

Learning Leaders (DENI, 2016c) built on Every School a Good School (2009a) in recognising the importance of leadership for raising standards in schools, and the importance of providing professional learning opportunities to teachers. The articulated vision was that "every teacher is a learning leader, accomplished in working collaboratively with all partners in the interests of children and young people" (DENI, 2016c: 10). Its supporting objectives were to provide a structured framework for teacher professional learning in which the leadership capacity of teachers can be developed and supported within communities of effective practice. There are some arguments for strengthening the leadership competences in ITE and Induction (King et al., 2019). In that research, a comparative study of leadership learning in ITE and Early Career Teachers in Scotland, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, they found that leadership learning tended to be implicit, when it needed to be explicit in order to develop teachers' professional identity and self-efficacy.

The important role of education and educational leadership in a divided society emerging from conflict is recognised "…as having the capability to develop collaborative working within and across schools, building networks with the potential to heal the fractures within ethnically divided societies" (Gallagher, 2021:

147). It may need some further work to embed leadership skills across the system. The ETI evaluation of Teacher Professional Learning (2016a) reports that very few schools are 'well developed' in this area, more are 'aspirational' and there are a few schools where "while couched and presented in terms of the conceptual language of the DE strategy, do not represent any radical change" (ETI, 2016a: 6).

Elsewhere, ETI stresses that "shared values and beliefs underpin the resources: in a highly effective school, improvement is best advanced in an integrated and holistic way, rather than through fragmented efforts" (ETI, 2019: 1), but there were some that see structural contradictions that may impede progress. While Woods et al. (2021) viewed the encouragement of collaborative aspects to leadership in NI policymaking as partly designed to address the legacies of conflict through an encouragement of cross-community collaboration, for example through shared education, as well as raising standards, they noted a 'managerialist' construction of leadership which frames individuals as consumers and an emphasis on accountability and narrow academic outcomes. They were concerned that managerialism drives "…key leadership imperatives of rationalisation and financial control that are professed to be common sense priorities everywhere – which is in contrast to local identities and affiliations that have acted to divide educators and educational institutions" (Woods et al., 2021: 160).

Gallagher (2021) also noted the contradiction between collaboration and competition, arguing that

> "… school leadership – where the focus is on improving the learning experiences of children – facilitates change and improvement at grassroots level, through innovative and genuine collaborative practices. However, in a divided society, there can also be elements of protectionism at school leadership level (Gallagher, 2021: 135-136).

There is a concern that a managerialist approach encourages school leaders "to focus on the school and its immediate problems, rather than seeing the current and historical political situation as relevant to policy" (Woods et al., 2021: 163). As Donnelly et al. (2020) said

> "School leaders are left in a difficult position of balancing requirements to create spaces for building intergroup relationships based on tolerance and

> respect both through the citizenship curriculum and through initiatives such as Shared Education within a political and policy context that instinctively relegates the value of relationships in favour of academic performance" (Donnelly, 2020: 12).

There was a concern that the narrow curriculum focus on academic performance will result in opportunities to address the challenges of divisions in society being lost (Woods et al., 2021: 165).

Competence frameworks have been introduced for teachers and a Learning Leaders strategy which promotes leadership at all levels across education provision. There may be a conflict between professional learning based around collaboration and cooperation and the pressures which cause school to be in competition.

3.3.6 The role of education inspection and school improvement services

School inspections in NI are conducted by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETINI). The main emphasis of an inspection and of the report generated after the inspection is the educational provision and the educational outcomes, as exemplified by the quality of the learners' achievements and the learning and teaching. The quality of leadership and management of the whole organisation, and the impact of this on improvement is also assessed. Inspections, which are undertaken across the education, training and youth sectors, are designed to stimulate standards of learning, teaching, training and achievement to be as high as possible throughout. The ETI's mission statement is:

> "… promoting improvement in the interest of all learners" (www.etini.gov.uk).

Inspection is seen as an important component of public accountability, but also continuous improvement with the learner's needs paramount. The Chief Inspector stated that "Inspection also provides an assurance to parents and carers that the education and training being provided for their children and young people is of good quality, as well as to government on the effectiveness of policy in practice" (ETINI, 2018a: 2).

There is research which has pointed to challenges related to school inspections, some suggesting that school inspections may not contribute to schools' self-understanding (Penninckx and Vanhoof, 2015). Introducing a self-evaluation component to inspection may go some way to changing this (Swaffield and MacBeath, 2005). In response to concerns around the "high stakes nature of school inspection; and the reported absence of consistency in the measurement of the value added by schools", the Committee for Education at the Assembly conducted an inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) in 2014. The inquiry made 16 recommendations. Many of these related to the promotion of a culture of self-evaluation in schools and the involvement of parents in the process of inspection. In response, the ETI published the Inspection and Self-evaluation Framework (ETINI, 2017). From 2017, this more streamlined Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework was applied in all phases of education and training. Alongside full inspections, short inspections (Sustaining Improvement Inspections) were introduced for schools deemed high performing, and Monitoring Inspections were introduced. The latter help ETI to decide on the timings of the next full inspection. Having a range of inspection types allows the resources of the ETI to be used most effectively and permits, with follow-up inspections, each provider to be reported on every three years. This provides "… parents/carers, the wider community of stakeholders and government with more regular and frequent assurances on the quality of education" (ETINI, 2018a: 3).

School inspections across Europe vary considerably. Some school Inspectorates employ,

> "… an evaluative low stakes approach of inspecting schools on a regular basis without sanctions and rewards (for example Ireland and currently Sweden) [while other] school Inspectorates us[e] directive and focused, medium/high stakes early warning analysis and customized inspections" (Ehren et al., 2014: 3).

Barber et al. (2010) sparked a debate about a lack of improvement in many education systems, arguing that, once a certain quality threshold was reached, education systems in many countries do not aim for further improvement and, in consequence, learning and teaching does not innovate further. They suggested that

one mechanism for making the change from merely 'good' to 'great' is through the creation of school networks. This can produce system change as "… the power of effective networks lies not only in their potential to improve teaching and learning in schools, but more importantly, in their power to become forces of positive change in entire systems" (Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan, 2016: 19). In consequence, polycentric network evaluation started to be used in some countries and regions, such as England and the Netherlands. NI has begun to experiment with polycentric network evaluations in area-based inspections, looking at the operation of education across Area Learning Communities. O'Hara et al. (2021) noted that polycentric inspections in NI stress "the importance of assessing quality in a developmental manner across a region or area rather than in the discrete community of an individual school" (O'Hara et al., 2021:4). There is growing evidence that this can lead to overall systems improvement (Brown et al., 2020). As Janssens and Ehren (2016) argued, in their appraisal of such inspections in Northern Ireland and Scotland,

> "… such evaluations are a mechanism by which practice based knowledge can be co-created by network practitioners, researchers and school inspectors, and then shared to improve the overall functioning of a polycentric education system" (Janssens and Ehren, 2016: 96).

The Committee for Education enquiry in 2014 also proposed the creation of a new "Northern Ireland Education Improvement Service" that would be statutorily independent from the Department of Education. The recommendation to create the Education and Improvement Service has not yet been progressed.

Moore (2019), acting for Save the Children, called for a DE-led cross-departmental strategy and implementation plan that includes best practice guidance on parental engagement, including their involvement in the ETI Inspection and Self Evaluation Framework. Milliken (2019) drew attention to the fact that Section 23 of the 1986 Education Order states that the Department is not to inspect religious instruction unless specifically called upon to do so by a school's Board of Governors. Clergy can carry out inspections although Richardson (2014) points out that, out of respect to teachers' professionalism, few clergy actually undertake them. As a

consequence, there is no consistent quality-control mechanism for the teaching of RE.

School inspection has evolved and continues to evolve to meet the needs of learners and for accountability purposes. Area based inspections seem to be offering further possibilities for systemic change. ETI has encouraged self-evaluation by staff, although this concept may not be being effectively applied with parents. Religious Education stands alone as being outwith the responsibility of the Inspectorate and therefore lacks the quality-control expected in other areas of the curriculum.

3.3.7 The distribution of funding to education settings and quantification of any potential funding gap

In line with the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, DE assigns Education settings an annual budget in line with the Common Funding Scheme (CFS) (DE, 2020a). CFS was reviewed in 2013/14 by a panel led by Lord Salisbury – the review noted that, "There are serious shortcomings in the practical operation of the current model of financial administration for controlled and maintained schools" and made 29 recommendations to create a "fairer, simpler and more transparent funding formula". This new funding model substantially reduced the additional financial support that had previously been available to small schools (Salisbury et al., 2013).

Concerns had long been expressed about small schools not providing a wide enough curriculum and lacking staff with specialist skills (CACE, 1967). Very small schools can leave teachers feeling isolated, being less able to exchange teaching ideas with other teachers (Smit et al., 2015). In small schools, staff have to adopt multiple roles, especially as teaching principals (Smith and DeYoung, 1988). They also may have composite classes with pupils of different ages being taught together. Some view such classes as "inferior to more homogeneous age grouping" Åberg-Bengtsson, 2009: 102). However, there are some voices which caution against an assumption that larger schools deliver the best and most effective education and, as NI is a largely rural community, the definition of sustainability may be different to that which would pertain in other parts of the UK (HoC, 2019c:39).

The House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee (2019c) saw that there was "a clear need to reduce duplication across the education sector" and called for "the consolidation of the school estate" (HoC, 2019c). They also observed that "the complicated structure of education in Northern Ireland meant that money was not being spent in the most efficient way" but noted that "achieving change will be challenging". This challenge is further complicated by the need for sensitivity in respect of wishes of communities to have "different types of education in Northern Ireland". They recommended that part of the public sector transformation fund in the draft NI Budget be spent running community consultations to stimulate these important conversations. They concluded that "…there is a need for fundamental transformation of the way education in Northern Ireland is organised, and reorganisation of the schools' estate. However, it was acknowledged that this would involve difficult conversations with parents, schools and communities" (HoC, 2019c: 35-36).

In 2018–19, DE's starting resource was just under £2 billion, an increase of 4.3 per cent on the 2017–18 baseline figure. During the 2017–18 monitoring round, the Department was allocated a further £80 million. This money represented a 0.6 per cent increase on the previous year's allocation - a reduction in real terms.

Two studies have estimated the financial cost of community division in NI - Deloitte in 2007 and the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre in 2016. Both arrived at similar estimates for the cost of maintaining parallel school systems and structures: a median estimate of over £57M per annum - £1 million every week (Cavanagh, 2021).

Roulston and Cook (2020) documented how small communities may have duplicate or multiple schools, each catering for 'their own' population. Using GIS analysis, they identified 32 such pairs of primary schools within walking distance of each other and quantified the additional costs. They aggregated funding for pairs of schools and compared this with unitary schools of comparable schools as in this example: two schools with a combined enrolment of 119 pupils would be entitled

to £510,000 p.a. under CFS whilst a single school with the same enrolment would receive only £386,000.

Sectoral divisions create additional difficulties and greatly increase financial costs. Choice and community division in education has also been seen to have significant environmental costs.

3.3.8 The resourcing requirements of education settings, with modelling and quantum of funding of individual schools and settings (including further education)

Individual schools in Northern Ireland receive funding under the Local Management of Schools (LMS) funding arrangements, and the Education Authority is required to pass on the calculated share directly to its schools. This, it is claimed, maximises the delivery of available resources to the classroom (EA, 2020b). The delegated budget is allocated to Boards of Governors, and this is used to meet the on-going costs of running their school. This enables them to "plan and use resources to maximum effect in accordance with their school's needs and priorities" (EA, 2020). While voluntary grammars and grant maintained integrated schools has received their funding directly from the Department of Education, this responsibility was transferred to the EA from the 2017 financial year.

There have been budget deficits in some schools. In 2017, for example, almost 400 schools in NI were said to be in budget deficit, and EA pointed to a fall in the education budget below the rate of inflation as a contributory factor. The Chief Executive claimed the overall budget had fallen in real terms by 10%, around £200 million, between 2010 and 2017. Further, there was an estimation that, by 2019-20, the EA would require £2.19bn to meet demand from schools which, if funding were not increased, would leave a gap of £350 million. (BBC, 2017). These funding pressures continue with , Derek Baker, the Permanent Secretary to the Department of Education (NI), telling the House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee in 2019, "We have had a combination of a perfect storm over about a decade: flat cash, rising costs and rising service demands" (HoCNIAC , 2019c: 18). In marked contrast Lord Salisbury, who had chaired the 2013 Independent review of the common funding scheme, said that there was

clearly enough money in the system but that historic structures and the nature of the schools in Northern Ireland meant that the money had to be "spread too thinly" (HoCNIAC, 2019c: 19). Whether the apparent funding shortfall is due to insufficient funding being allocated to education, or the funding having to be spread across a divided system, the impact on education seems severe. Chris Lyttle, now the vice-chair on the NI Assembly Committee on Education, is quoted as saying

> "I have been inundated with contact from school principals, teachers and parents about the serious impact the school funding crisis is having on our children's education. This includes excessive class sizes, reduced range of subject choices, inadequate Special Educational Needs assistance and poor building maintenance" (BBC, 2017)

Nonetheless, there has been some funding available for schools and, in January 2020, the Education Minister announced a £45 million investment, the latest tranche of money through the School Enhancement Programme. This paid for capital schemes for 12 primary schools, 5 post-primaries and a special school. This is third tranche of money through this programme, and 74 schools have or will benefit from the scheme. There are 58 schools currently being progressed through it, although there were fears that COVID-19 restrictions could hamper progress (TheyWorkForYou, 2020).

Further Education providers have also benefited from some capital funding delivered through conventional procurement alongside public-private partnerships and programme allocations. Since 2003, the Department for the Economy, have provided £340m of capital developments across the entire sector. This was designed to address weaknesses in the FE estate and "to create state-of-the-art learning environments which encourage the continuing development of links between colleges and local businesses and support the delivery of high quality learning designed to strengthen the local economic base" (DfE, n.d.: para. 3).

Further education (FE) colleges in Northern Ireland receive recurrent funding for the provision of further and adult education from the Department for the Economy (DfE) in the form of a block grant. A new funding model was introduced in line with

the draft PfG and the Further Education Means Success strategy (DfE, 2016). This model focuses more on impact and is intended to:

- support colleges to deliver the strategy and to work with other providers of further and adult education in delivering it,
- support a sustainable further education sector, and
- align with the funding models for other DfE programmes, in particular apprenticeships and youth training (EURYDICE, 2020)

That there remain funding issues in education is exemplified by union action about pay levels in the FE sector in March 2021. In the FE sector for example, the DfE Minister can state that she (Ms Dodds) has no direct role in any dispute, as the sector itself are the employers. However, the University and College Union, who represent many of the FE lecturers, claim that the Department for the Economy had have failed to increase FE college funding sufficiently to allow the employers to increase staff pay. They are quoted as saying that the offer that has been made is "barely better than pay restraint and fails to adequately compensate for the years when lecturers received no cost-of-living increases at all" (BBC, 2021). This follows a long-running pay and workload dispute for teachers in schools which lasted until April 2020.

Resourcing requirements continue to increase in schools and colleges. More research is required to evaluate the changing requirements of all sectors

3.3.9 Provision for newcomer pupils, Traveller and Roma Children and FSME

NI underwent rapid demographic change at the start of the 21st Century, resulting in an increasingly multicultural and multilingual school population. This presented new opportunities and new challenges for schools. In 2010, DENI introduced guidelines to provide schools with information on best practice in accommodating 'newcomer' pupils and guidance in accessing additional support for pupils who require additional language support (DENI, 2010b).

Jones (2015) identified challenges that this new demographic posed in respect of relationships between the school and the family, between the teacher and child, and between the child and their peers. The research concluded that although schools have made progress in adapting their pastoral needs for newcomer pupils, their families and their teachers tend to be overlooked.

Nehring (2020) saw linguistic and ethnic diversity as a potentially valuable lens through which pupils' identities can be explored in the classroom and thereby lead to deeper understanding and acceptance between Protestants, Catholics, and newcomers. The research made two recommendations for school policy and practice:

1. Focus less on types of schools and more on increased diversity across all school types, and
2. Acknowledge and celebrate diverse cultures, engage with the school's diverse communities beyond the school's walls, and actively address inter-cultural issues, all while promoting individual student identity formation.

Collen (2020) considered how teacher educators can better understand how to prepare pre-service teachers for teaching pupils who have English as an additional language. Qualitative methods were used to allow student teachers in the middle of their pre-service course in NI to present about their experiences of teaching newcomer pupils. The results show that student teachers have an underlying pastoral concern for the emotional well-being of newcomer learners. The pre-service teachers actively practise taught strategies in actual classroom situations, but they are critical of the lack of provision in ITE for teaching newcomers. Despite various calls from charities and government to improve provision for newcomer pupils, a lot of work remains to be done. Responses of pre-service teachers show that they are unclear about what works well in the classroom and they do not always see the relevance of content taught in university or the link with potential practice.

DENI established the Taskforce on Traveller Education in September 2008 to assist in developing an action plan on Traveller Education. In 2010, DENI produced circular 2010/15: guidance on the education of children from the Traveller

community and on the inclusion of the Traveller community in schools, and subsequently produced "Traveller Child in Education Action Framework" (DENI, 2013).

The regional Traveller Education Support Service (TESS) was established in April 2013 to support schools, Traveller children and young people and their families. It is funded by DENI through the Education Authority. The Intercultural Education Service which is managed within EA helps schools to meet the additional educational needs of pupils from the target communities: Traveller; Newcomer; Asylum-Seekers; Refugees and Roma.

These groups are more likely to be affected by poverty. Moore and Campbell (2017) contend that there is growing evidence across the UK and internationally that there is a strong link between poverty and cognitive outcomes in the early years. While not specifically linked to newcomers and other groups, the evidence shows that the gap in attainment between children growing up in poverty and their peers starts early and lasts through school.

Pupils whose parents' net earnings are below a threshold figure are entitled to receive free school meals (FSME) - FSME is, as a consequence, frequently used as a proxy for deprivation. DENI (2020b) recorded in 2019-20, that 37.8% of all pupils attending non-selective post-primary schools received free school meals as compared with only 13.7% of those attending grammar schools. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) argues that this raises, "clear structural challenges to equity" (Shewbridge et al., 2014).

The chances of "…young people entitled to free school meals not achieving the basic standard of five GCSE A*-C passes at 16 are three times higher than other young people in England, and this figure rises to being four times higher in Northern Ireland" (Connolly et al., 2013: xxii). While the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2018) noted some improvement in the educational attainment gap at age 16 between FSME and non FSME pupils, although there was still a sizeable difference. The impact of poverty on achievement seems to fall harder on some groups rather than

others "Protestant FSME boys are close to the very bottom, just above Irish Travellers and Roma children" (Nolan, 2014: 97). The Equality Commission (2017) noted lower persistent and hard to tackle under-attainment amongst Traveller and Roma children, and Protestant boys.

In 2017, the Children's Commissioner called for early intervention and greater investment to mitigate the risk of educational underachievement among traveller children, those from ethnic minorities and those with FSME (NICCY, 2017a). Harland and McCready (2012) proposed that one possible approach to addressing this could be by supporting teachers to adapt youth work methodologies and that positive teacher-pupil relationships should be at the heart of schools' ethos and approach to learning. It is notable that Travellers "…have lower achievements in education, are largely absent in secondary education, have low access to pre-school, out of school and leisure activities" (Hamilton et al., 2012: 505). Hamilton et al. also go on to describe effectively segregated education for Travellers at primary school level. St Mary's Primary in Belfast was established in 2000 after a previous school for Traveller children closed. This school is open to all children but, despite attempts to widen the intake, settled children do not attend and thus, at least at the time this research was undertaken, it has become a school only for Travellers. This makes the transition at 11 years old to a more mixed (Traveller and settled children) post-primary school more challenging for these learners and, with bullying and discrimination much reported, this can lead to high dropout rates (Hamilton et al., 2012: 513).

In spite of a number of interventions, educational underachievement is visibly prevalent among Travellers, Roma and New arrivals – it is also notably manifest in the examination performance of boys and particularly those from a Protestant background.

3.3.10 The existing model of education governance in schools and options for new models

The role of the Board of Governors (BoGs) is to manage the school with a view to providing the best possible education and educational opportunities for all the pupils

(DENI, 2019a). Together with the Principal they set the plans and policies of the school, appoint school staff, manage the spending of the school budget and set and monitor standards within the school, all with the aim of driving school improvement (DENI, 2020g).

The current composition of the BoG in each of the various types of school in the NI system was laid down by the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986, and the Education (NI) Order 1997. Members represent the interests of:

- those who originally *founded* the school i.e. foundation governors (e.g. (Protestant) Transferors or Catholic Trustees),
- those who fund the education system (taxpayers) i.e. Education Authority (EA) and DE governors,
- the pupils enrolled at the school i.e. parent governors, and
- the school staff i.e. teacher governors.

Consequently, a board is likely to be comprised of members of only one side of the community and have significant clerical/church influence. The Integrated Education Fund has called for wider community representation in the current composition of school governing bodies (IEF, 2018). Topping and Cavanagh (see DENI, 2017c) documented how integrated schools strive to have a mixed BoG that is capable of engaging with social, political and religious debates in an inclusive manner. In the Topping and Cavanagh panel's public call for evidence 39% felt that opposition from the BoG was a major obstacle to the transformation of schools to integrated status. They proposed that school Governors required greater training.

Milliken (2020a) pointed out that training for governors is voluntary and is provided for all sectors by EA. The training currently on offer relates only to compliance with legislation (GDPR - Data Protection, Bullying in Schools Act) or policies (Area Planning) and procedures (Staff Recruitment). There is no mechanism for auditing the training needs of BoGs and Milliken proposed that, if governors are to fully understand and fulfil the responsibilities of their role, mandatory training is essential.

Boards range in size - from eight to 36 members - in respect of the relative size of the school that they govern. In the smallest schools, a BoG can have more

members than teachers in the school. A three-teacher maintained rural primary, for example, may have a BoG with nine or ten members. Notably, research in GB showed that the size of a school's governing body is unrelated to its effectiveness (Balarin et al., 2014).

In April 2015, the DE published Circular 2015/15 (DENI, 2015e) providing guidance for key stakeholders considering a proposal to establish jointly managed schools, that is, a grant-aided school providing shared education with a Christian ethos managed by a Board of Governors with balanced representation from both the main communities including Catholic Trustees and Transferors.

The system of school governance described above is not the only possible model – different regions and different nations have adopted different approaches. Alternative models have also been proposed for NI although not all of these have been tested in the real world. One such model is that of a school-community partnership where health, community and other agencies and concerns are represented in the management of schools and the school thereby serves as more than simply a place of education from 9:00 to 3:30. This model would, potentially, be in line with DE's Extended Schools Programme (DENI, 2010d) where schools develop additional activities that support learning, raise school standards and promote healthy lifestyles. Under this system schools would provide education in a broader sense and, at the same time, serve as community hubs. Research has shown that the interagency relationships fostered in similar networks can exert a 'multiplier effect' where all partners benefit substantially from the collaboration (Valli et al., 2018).

An Assembly research paper on school governance was produced in 2011 (Perry, 2011b). This paper identified the potential of federal models to "share responsibility and accountability in new ways". These could take the form of either *Hard Governance* (as a single governing body, shared by a number of schools linked together in a common federation), or *Soft Governance* (where each school within the federation has its own governing body overseen by a joint governance committee).

Parental involvement in the management of schools in Scotland is particularly strong. The 2006 Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act replaced school boards with Parent Councils. Significantly, the act also allows for a single Parent Council to manage more than one school.

In almost total contrast to the system here, schools in Finland are not required to have governing bodies. Municipal bodies are responsible for funding schools. They appoint head teachers and arrange schooling to meet local circumstances. Central government provides legislation, top-up funding and guidance on what should be taught, and how.

The composition of Boards of Governors in NI varies according to school size and sector. There are reserved places for church representatives on most. This contributes to systemic school separation. There are other models operating elsewhere, in particular a federal model has been proposed for NI but this has not been progressed.

3.3.11 The physical infrastructure of the education estate

The issue of the sustainability of schools was a central element of the Bain Report (the Independent Strategic Review of Education) which was published in December 2006 (Bain et al., 2016). The report identified the burden placed on public finances by the patterns of education provision in NI and advised that a policy should be developed to ensure the sustainability of all schools in receipt of state funding.

In response, the Department of Education produced "Schools for the Future: a policy for sustainable schools" (or, the Sustainable Schools Policy – SSP) in 2009 (DENI, 2009b). SSP placed the quality of the educational experience firmly in the foreground:

> "[The] aim is to have strong viable schools which provide our children with a high-quality education for their benefit, and for the benefit of society as a whole" (DENI, 2009b: 1).

SSP drew attention to the fact that NI has a higher proportion of small schools than England, Scotland or Wales, and that ensuring the effective delivery of the curriculum "presents particular challenges and difficulties" (DENI, 2009b: 7). Economies of scale also mean that, when cost per pupil head is calculated, smaller schools are generally more expensive to run than those with a larger number of pupils. The policy proposed that, in order to be classified as being "fit for purpose", schools needed to ensure that education is provided in as *cost effective* a manner as possible.

Assessment of any school's sustainability is based on six qualitative and quantitative criteria. Each criterion is further broken down into a list of associated indicators.

1. Quality Educational Experience,
2. Stable Enrolment Trends,
3. Sound Financial Position,
4. Strong Leadership and Management by Board of Governors and Principals,
5. Accessibility, and
6. Strong Links with the Community.

In order to be classified as *sustainable*, primary schools require a minimum of four teachers and should have no more than two composite year groups; furthermore, rural primary schools should have a minimum of 105 pupils. One third of NI's primary schools (274 from 817) do not meet these enrolment criteria and 15% (122) have fewer than four teachers (EA, 2020a).

Roulston and Cook (2020) identified duplication of school provision in many rural communities and pointed out that many of these schools fell short of the sustainability criteria. They suggested that economic costs may drive difficult structural change and that there may well be less tangible but even more important costs to future social cohesion should separation continue.

Developments at one school (or in one sector) can have an impact on the sustainability of neighbouring schools. A process of Area Planning has been introduced in line with guidance issued by the Department of Education. The aim of Area Planning is to "establish a network of viable schools that are of the right type, the right size, located in the right place, and have a focus on raising standards" (EA, 2020a). EA works alongside CCMS and engages with all other

school sectors to review education provision, on a whole system basis, in any given area.

There are complexities around school ownership in NI which compound the challenges of reform. Each sector has different arrangements in regard to ownership: Catholic maintained schools are owned by the Trustees, while some Grant maintained schools are owned by the Trustees or the Boards of Governors. Controlled and Controlled Integrated schools are owned by Education and Library Boards, now the Education Authority, while Voluntary Grammars are owned by the Trustees or the school's founding body. The current complicated pattern of ownership of the school estate has emerged over many years. Many of the schools that have been managed within the Controlled sector since the 1920s had been transferred from auspices of Church of Ireland, Presbyterian or Methodist authorities – many of these remain bound by enduring legal covenants (e.g. stipulating that the property must be used for educational purposes). In addition, although EA is responsible for the disposal or repurposing of closed Controlled schools any monies eventually raised from a sale must be returned to DE and not EA. Consequently, a Controlled school that has been deemed to be unsustainable and closed, can rarely be simply sold in the open market. EA has no incentive to monetise these potential assets and DE has no role in pushing for a sale. This byzantine combination of legal binds, management responsibilities and property ownership in combination with the impact of the sustainable schools policy have contributed to a proliferation of boarded up and abandoned "ghost schools".

Maintained schools, GMI schools and Voluntary Grammar schools are less constrained and, although there may also be some legal hurdles to be overcome, if property is to be sold, any monies accrued may be passed to the school's managing authority directly. For schools in these sectors, vacant properties and sites can therefore be moved-on comparatively swiftly and often profitably.

In the Republic of Ireland there has been a growing demand for non-denominational or multi-denominational schools, and the main owners of schools there, the Catholic Church, have shown a willingness to divest patronage of some

schools (Perry, 2012: 11). While there is little evidence of movement of this kind in schools in Northern Ireland, the decision around Seaview Primary (see 3.2.8) might suggest some movement on this.

NI has many small rural schools. While this is not necessarily a bad thing, it can prove to be expensive and many of these are considered unsustainable. Many villages have two schools of different management types only a short distance apart. Rationalisation in such instances to ensure that an area retains one shared school has proven problematic.

3.3.12 The digital infrastructure of the education estate and the role of technology in education to support learning, pedagogy and qualifications

DENI introduced their first policy on Education Technology in 1998, with Information Technology becoming a cross-curricular theme, following a survey which identified shortcomings in ICT equipment and limited staff competence in using ICT (Austin and Hunter, 2013: 184). This policy was followed by A Strategy for Educational Technology in Northern Ireland in 1998. This was revised in 2004 by the emPowering Schools document.

Educational ICT provision in NI is "based on a managed service which provides broadband connectivity, hardware and software off a single platform for every one of its 1200 schools, giving 330,000 pupils access to a common core of ICT services" (Austin and Turner, 2020: 183). Austin and Hunter (2013) set the political context for the development of that infrastructure underpinning technology use in NI's schools. There appeared to be a combination of factors which led to considerable development in Educational Technology. Tony Blair's Labour Government came into power in 1997 on a mantra of 'education, education, education' and a modernising agenda. Northern Ireland was under Direct Rule at that time, so local political wrangling would have little impact. It has also been suggested that a regionally provided managed solution "…applied only in Northern Ireland, possibly because 'direct-rule' ministers regarded it as a social laboratory for testing innovative approaches to social policy" (Austin and Hunter, 2013: 185). While there were roots of good practice in ICT already present, which assisted any impetus to enlarge

the role of ICT in education, Austin and Hunter (2013) believed that the steady move towards compulsory assessment of ICT in the curriculum was the most crucial development in its embedding in the curriculum. The contract with Classroom2000, eventually termed C2k, provided a managed service for ICT technology and connectivity, allowing "classroom teachers [to] focus on the pedagogical applications of ICT. In terms of alignment of policy, this was right on target" (Austin and Hunter, 2013: 185). As a result of the establishment of C2k, a reliable and dependable technology service is available to teachers. Thus, it can be considered that "… project delivery of ICT in Northern Ireland schools lives up to expectations and teacher satisfaction with access remains high" (Marshall and Anderson, 2008: 468). C2k also made available a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) for all learners, alongside training opportunities for teachers. While schools can use a range of online environments to support learning and teaching, a regional VLE is still being widely used (Austin and Turner, 2020). Networked mobile devices such as iPads are being employed in some schools for learning and teaching, but also for staff development (Clarke and Abbott, 2016: 1062).

Despite a considerable head start in the use of ICT in schools, the drive to harness digital technologies effectively in schools seems to have abated. No education technology strategy has been produced in NI since 2004, nor was that one updated, although one is now in preparation ahead of renegotiated contracts with suppliers. There has been a baseline DIGIskills survey (Galanouli and Clarke, 2019). While this study was in mainstream primary schools only, it does provide useful baseline data about the following areas of digital education in primary schools: leadership in school, teacher professional development, pedagogy and assessment, equality of access and the learner experience and, finally, parental engagement. There were a range of recommendations in the report. In pedagogy and assessment, a need was identified for skill development and a fresh approach to understanding how technology can benefit from new pedagogical approaches. Experience of home-schooling in the pandemic has reinforced this need (McCaffrey-Lau et al., 2021; O'Connor-Bones et al., 2020; Purdy et al., 2021; Walsh et al., 2020). Particularly there was a recommendation that DENI and educational agencies, such as ETI, EA, GCTNI and CCCEA should review their roles in relation to supporting teachers.

Galanouli and Clarke (2019) also recommended that teachers' continued professional development in using digital education, and keeping up to date with the rapidly changing technologies, also needed consideration. Among other recommendations in this area, they suggested that ITE providers should review their preparation of pre-service teachers in ICT skills, a shortcoming identified in other research (Roulston et al., 2019). Galanouli and Clarke also made recommendations about school leadership and inequalities in access to technologies is also highlighted. Parental engagement also generated a number of recommendations including the need for further ICT training for teachers so that they are better equipped to engage with parents, both those who are experts in the area of ICT and also those parents who needed support.

The ParentingNI survey (ParentingNI, 2020) found that over 80% either strongly agreed or agreed that social media and smartphones/tablets have a significant impact on the wellbeing of their children, and a similar proportion of parents reported that they found technology difficult to monitor, especially social media. Schools and other educational settings were reported as a major source of support for technology (around 28%), and this was where most parents rated as the best place to receive support (44%). However, parents also made clear that support in general in relation to ICT was insufficient.

The learning that came as a consequence of emergency home schooling in 2020 and 2021, precipitated by the pandemic, has been detailed elsewhere (3.2.11). The sudden move to online learning exposed skill deficiencies in some teachers and in some learners in relation to using technologies, and also underlined the well-known and researched, but resolutely persistent, digital divide within and across communities. Structural change to address this may not be possible for schools, but steps can be taken even at school level to mitigate some of the worst inequalities impacting on learning for some vulnerable groups.

NI at one stage was a leader in Educational Technology and there is considerable good practice and innovative uses of technology across the system. However, the lack of an up-to-date educational strategy from 2004 to the present has undermined progress in this area. This, and the digital divide, has been exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.3.13 How innovative practice in teaching, governance and leadership can be harnessed and shared across the wider system

Back in 2007, the OECD (Fitzpatrick, 2007) identified a need for schools in NI to build capacity by developing their own leaders. While their focus was largely on the identification and support for aspiring principals, the need for leadership development more widely is still present. Fitzpatrick noted the challenges of harnessing and sharing leadership skills in NI. He noted that this is,

> "… a system that is both complicated and complex. It is complicated in that there are many component parts, areas of responsibility, policy and influence, that impact on current schooling and future perspectives for education. It is complex in that although the system works and is generally held to do so in a way that has produced a high level of public confidence; it has within it a number of tensions or even contradictions" (Fitzpatrick, 2007: 88).

He argued that the tensions and contradictions which impact on leadership in NI schools emanate from the history and the fragile state of government in NI. These challenges remain.

There has been a movement to increase autonomy for schools and choice for parents in an agenda which can be traced back to political changes begun in the UK in 1979 (Hughes et al., 2016). Schools, while nominally freer of government control, are 'steered at a distance' (Hudson, 2007) in an increasingly marketised and heavily accountable system. Greany and Higham (2018) conducted research across England, examining the idea of a 'self-improving school-led system' (SISS), one of the government's initiatives in England. In it, schools are supposed to have more control over their development and to experience less bureaucracy. In practice, Greany and Higham found that, while there may have been some increase in autonomy, this was more than counterbalanced by increased accountability, and interventions and coercion from central government were noted. Schools were reported to be in local status hierarchies and all schools in the research were trying to move up the hierarchy, increasing the notion of 'winners and losers'. Schools that have collaborated were increasingly competing instead. These researchers saw dangers in increased centralisation, and a possible loss of local agency.

Reducing agency for schools is potentially challenging if innovative practice is to be harnessed and eventually shared. Some view schools as potential 'learning organisations' that may be contained within 'learning communities', developing their practice and sharing approaches to learning and teaching and leadership within and between schools. As Harris and Jones (2018) put it, "The school as a learning organisation is a potent concept that has informed and continues to inform school improvement practices within and across schools, in many different countries" (Harris and Jones, 2018: 352). While they caution that learning inevitably incurs change which can be disruptive, they asserted that, if significant organisational development is to occur, then change will be a necessary component of that learning. While not without its critics (see Field, 2018), viewing schools as learning organisations and clusters of schools as learning communities might be a powerful mechanism to encourage the development and sharing of good practice. In NI, Area Learning Communities (ALCs) might form the basis of these, with the use of various ICTs allowing even larger communities to develop. However, the tension between a system in which schools are being encouraged to compete despite the greater school-specific and system-wide benefits which would seem to occur from a more collaborative arrangement.

Preparing teachers and encouraging the continued development of their skills is also considered key to having an effective education system (OECD, 2011). Darling-Hammond (2017) identified a range of approaches and practices which appear most successful in the countries she studied. These included well developed recruitment policies, including financial subsidies to entice applicants into Initial Teacher Education, training schools which support and develop good practice and using professional standards to focus attention on learning. Further, she recommended the creation of teacher performance assessments, and the establishment of robust induction processes, designed to support newly qualified teachers. She also recognised the importance of capacity building through the sharing of research and good pedagogic practice. In other areas of the public sector there are research roles, such as Research Nurses or Research Midwives, who support research-based development of practice. Such a role, shared perhaps across an Area Learning

Community, might support teachers in improving their research literacy and in enhancing their practice.

In some countries, leadership has been delivered through centralised organisations, such as the National College for School Leadership in England, a major funder of research on various aspects of leadership (Bennett, 2005). Established under a Labour government in 2000 to provide training opportunities leading to professional qualifications for school leaders, this body was rebranded as National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) in 2013. However, it was 'repurposed', effectively dismantled, in 2018 with its duties taken over by the Department for Education and the Teaching Regulation Agency. Some have criticised NCLT as delivering "school leadership agendas derived from neoliberal logics …[minimising] spaces for resistance, emancipatory activism and producing exemplars of what leading, and leadership, might contribute to and achieve" (McGinity and Fuller, 2021: 36). Nonetheless, the National College did considerable work to raise the profile of leadership in schools, building capacity and developing leadership theory (Southworth, 2004). While conceding that it had pursued scale in its training of school leaders, rather than depth, and developed training programmes which emphasised practice over theory, Bush (2006) argued that,

> "… in its short life, it has fundamentally changed the landscape of leadership and management development by establishing a suite of impressive programs, developing a notable electronic platform, and becoming a major sponsor of school leadership research. Its overall conception, scale, and execution have been called "a paradigm shift," and the college is now the dominant influence on school leadership development and research" (Bush, 2006: 508).

In Northern Ireland the closest equivalent to the NCTL was the Regional Training Unit (RTU) which offered the Professional Qualification for Headship programme. First offered in 1999, over 1600 teachers had achieved Professional Qualification for Headship (PQHNI) by 2012 (McGuinness, 2012). This was not a mandatory qualification for Principals and DENI did not intend it to become mandatory until the PQH provision was reviewed (DENI, 2009a). The Education and Training Inspectorate conducted a review of PQHNI (ETINI, 2013). In it they concluded that

> "…while the school system has increasing numbers of principals who hold PQH NI, there is no significant increase evident in the quality or

> effectiveness of the principal in leading school improvement from 2006-2012. However, in post-primary schools, inspected between 2009 and 2012, the data indicate both that only a minority of principals in the most effective schools hold the PQH NI qualification and, at the same time, a significant minority of principals of schools in formal intervention hold the PQH NI qualification" (ETINI, 2013: 14).

While this is a damning indictment of this course, and not dissimilar to some of the criticisms of aspects of the National College for Teaching and Leadership provision, this does not mean that such organisations might not have some part of play in disseminating innovative practice through the education system. In the Republic of Ireland, for instance, the Centre for School Leadership (CSL) continues its work. This began in 2015 on a partnership basis between the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN), the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals and the Department of Education and Skills.

> "It was the shared objective that the Centre would become a centre of excellence for school leadership. The CSL's responsibility now extends across the continuum of leadership development commencing with pre appointment training through to induction of newly appointed principals to continuous professional development throughout the leader's career. The Centre also advises the DE on policy in this area" (CSL, 2018).

The Centre for School Leadership has been independently evaluated and found to be

> "…an important initiative in the wider context of policy reform and development aimed at improving school performance, and one with a highly important agenda and potentially far-reaching impacts on the development of primary and post-primary education. Over its initial years it has fulfilled its mandate, and it should remain and be further developed" (Fitzpatrick Associate Economic Consultants, 2018).

Murphy (2020) has called the establishment of the Centre for School Leadership "a significant development" in the promotion of leadership preparation (Murphy, 2020: 7).

The PQHNI model in NI was closely based on the PQH offered in England and Wales, which was criticised for being too reliant on a competency system (Brundrett, 2000), being too straightforward to obtain (Bush, 2006) and being based on a normative, standardised model of leadership (Brundrett et al., 2000). However, the success of CSL would suggest that a leadership centre with a different focus may have a place in the harnessing and sharing skills in leadership across NI.

3.3.14 IME Education

The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 placed a requirement on DENI to *encourage and facilitate* the development of Irish-medium education (IME) and made provision for funding to be made available to support the creation of an arms-length body to support the sector. In 2000, Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG) was brought into being to provide assistance and advice in the establishment of schools, to promote good practice standards in schools and to foster their interests, and to represent the views of other bodies with a view to developing Irish-medium education.

In 2006, the Bain Report recommended that DE should develop a comprehensive and coherent policy for Irish-medium education. The resulting review of IME Primary in 2009 made 24 short-, medium- and long-term structural and operational recommendations.

A further review, this time focussing on post-primary IME was conducted in 2014 – the advisory group to the review made a total of 33 recommendations, relating broadly to three key themes: a need for a strategic approach to planning for IME by the authorities; a pathway for development at post-primary level; and recommendations to help obviate the constraining factors which hinder the continued development of IME at post-primary level.

Following these reviews, special measures were undertaken to strengthen the sector's governance framework. DE is working with CnaG to ensure their implementation of these and to support the development of a system that is flexible, sustainable, of high quality, all-ability and co-educational, and an integral part of education in Northern Ireland.

Quinn (2014) compared and contrasted the experiences of young people in NI who had attended an IME institution throughout the whole of their school career and those who attended an IME primary school before transferring to English Medium Education at post-primary level. A deep-rooted connection with

the language was identified regardless of educational setting; this connection was further cemented through cultural identity and socio-historical factors. The research suggested that positive, immersive experience of Irish language education at an early stage resulted in a deep personal connection with the language.

McKendry (2017) observed that there had been historical opposition to the use and development of the Irish language on the part of the NI State and unionism – that there was no teaching of language in controlled schools and little in Integrated schools. Nevertheless, despite a general decline in the number of language entries at GCSE, Irish remained the 3rd most popular language studied and 45% of Irish entries at A-level in 2015 came from pupils attending non-Grammar schools. This was mostly due to the high number of entries from the non-selective Irish-medium schools. A significant drop in uptake of A-level Irish was identified in English medium schools; it was suggested that this may be a consequence of the allocation of limited resources to the language in such schools.

There are currently 28 stand-alone IME primary schools and seven IME units in primary schools – together these serve a total of 4,604 pupils (DE 2020b). The CnaG (DRAFT) Strategic Plan (2020) documents an increase in IME primary enrolment from around 1.5% of the total number of primary pupils to nearly 2.5% over the last ten years.

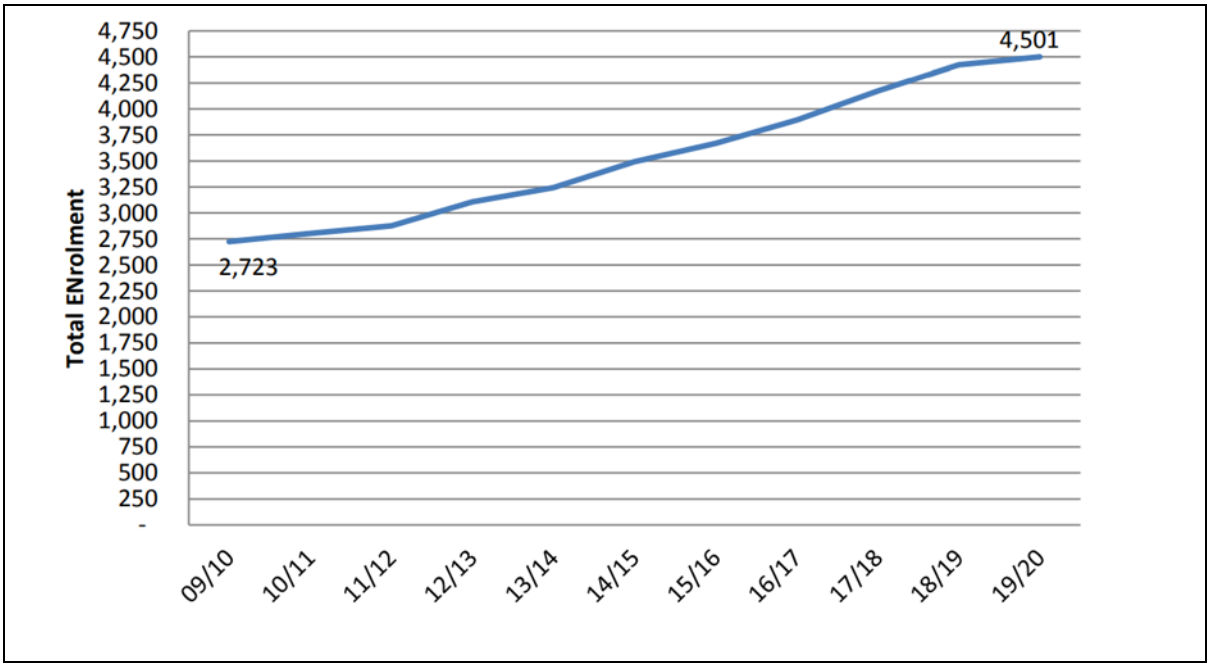

Figure 2 Increase in IME Primary school enrolment (CnaG, 2020).

There are also two IME post-primary schools and four IME units in Maintained post-primary schools – together these serve a total of 1,511 pupils between years 7 and 14 or 1% of the total post-primary school-aged population (DE, 2020b).

Many IME schools have started from scratch and have built up pupil numbers year on year (see Figure 3) – nevertheless a significant proportion still struggle to meet the SSP requirements for enrolment.

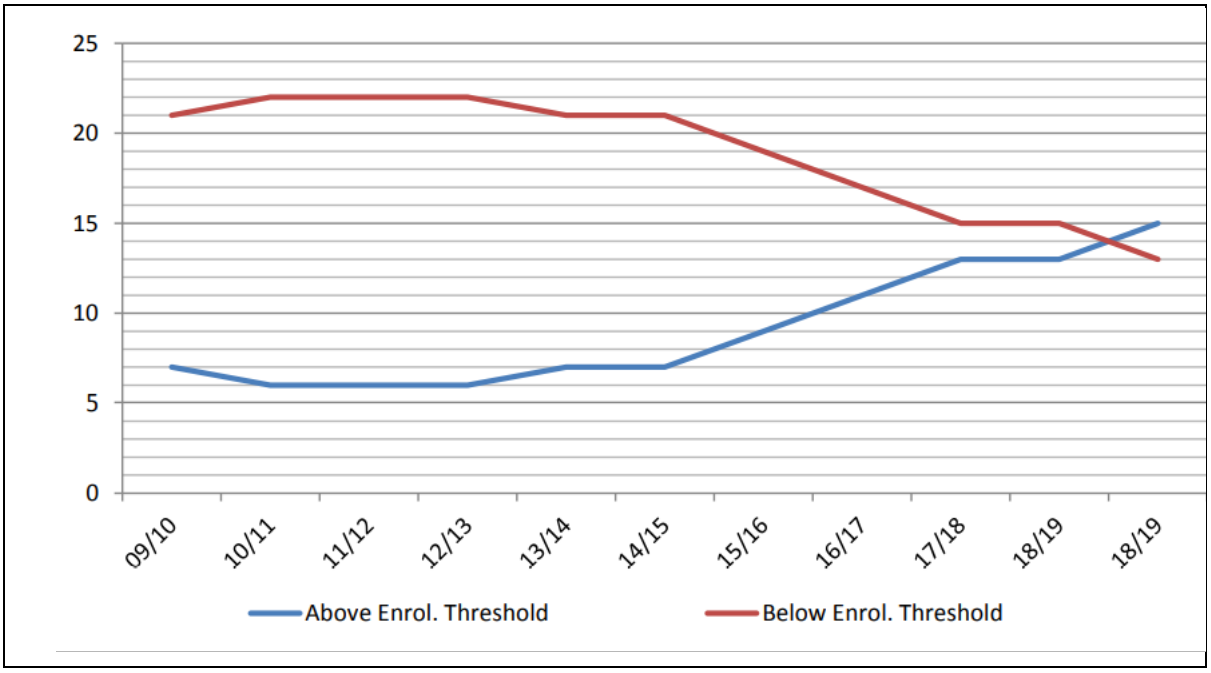

Figure 3 Sustainable IME schools (CnaG, 2020)

The proportion of IME schools under the sustainability threshold has attracted particular attention from unionist politicians, particularly the TUV and DUP – both of these parties have expressed strong opposition to IME in their manifestos. In 2016 the DUP called for the "preferential treatment" of Irish medium education to be tackled while the TUV manifesto claimed that:

> "The shortage of funding and the imbalance between sectors is hitting the controlled sector particularly hard - an Irish Language school can be funded with just a dozen pupils, but some rural controlled schools are threatened with closure" (TUV, 2019).

The Irish medium sector has grown since its creation twenty years ago but still only accounts for a small proportion of pupils – it has however been the focus of much political acrimony.

3.3.15 Employment Mobility of Teachers

Hansson and Smith (2015) documented how the potential movement of teachers across the traditional, sectoral divide was limited by the convergence of three inter-related dimensions of the education system. Firstly, there is the delivery of undergraduate ITE at two separate University Colleges; one of which (St Mary's) predominantly provides teachers for the Maintained school sector whilst the other traditionally provided teachers for Controlled schools. Secondly, there is the exception of teachers from the Fair Employment and Treatment Order (FETO) 1989, meaning that Boards of Governors can legally use religion to discriminate between applicants for teaching jobs. Thirdly, there is the occupational requirement for all teachers in Maintained primary schools to be in possession of a (Catholic) Certificate of Religious Education (CRE).

Although there is recent evidence of greater sectoral permeability for teachers – particularly for those employed in grammar schools (Milliken et al., 2020a) – community consistent patterns of teacher deployment in Maintained and Controlled schools mean that pupils are unlikely to be taught by someone from the 'other side'. Thirty-eight percent of teachers in Controlled primaries and 48% in Maintained primaries were identified as being *culturally encapsulated* – having had no engagement with 'the other side' at any stage of their education or career.

Related research undertaken by Milliken et al., (2020b) showed that Protestant teachers who had completed the CRE course did not feel that it equipped them adequately to provide Catholic religious instruction. It was noted that a similar course to the CRE is offered to prospective teachers in a number of English teaching colleges – around half of the teachers employed in Catholic schools in England are non-Catholic.

A small proportion of teachers have crossed between the community-defined sectors – their experiences have been varied, from highly negative (suffering sectarian victimisation) to highly positive (using their 'otherness' to provide their students with new insights) (Milliken et al., 2021).

It had been argued that the FETO exception acts a counterbalance to the CRE requirement in Maintained schools. There is little evidence of the exception being actively called upon in appointment decisions. A number of political parties in Northern Ireland have explicitly called for the repeal of the teacher exception. The Alliance Party have long lobbied for the exception to be repealed, a demand echoed by the Ulster Unionists who condemned the teacher exception as "outrageous". The DUP document, "The Next Steps in an Education Equality Agenda" calls for the 'Catholic Teacher Training Certificate' (*sic)* to be *abolished*, and for an end to exemption for teaching from Fair Employment.

At their *ard fheis* in 2020, Sinn Féin, who had called on a joint 'petition of concern' alongside SDLP to veto a previous vote on the subject in 2016, revised their position to call for the exception's repeal. There is no documentation to suggest that SDLP have followed suit.

Traditionally Catholic schools have employed Catholic teachers and Protestant teachers have worked in state and non-denominational schools. This pattern is preserved by policy and practice and may not help to prepare children to live in a shared society.

3.4 System-level design and delivery

3.4.1 The roles and responsibilities of those who deliver and administer education, including the Department of Education and Department for the Economy, their relevant Arm's Length Bodies and sectoral bodies. To include consideration of the number of these bodies and areas of duplication

The education system that was inherited by Northern Ireland's first Minister of Education, Lord Londonderry, in 1921 was already divided. Education at the time of partition was characterised by a pattern of denominational schools under clerical control. Londonderry set up a commission to design a new system. This Commission was chaired by the editor of the (strongly pro-union) Belfast News Letter, R.J. Lynn. The Catholic authorities were invited to take part in the process but the bishop of Armagh, Cardinal Michael Logue, declared the committee to be "an attack… organised against our schools" and boycotted the proceedings (Flemming, 2001). The legislation that emerged (the 1923 Education Act) proposed that the existing array of schools would be brought under a single, unified, non-denominational system and that all elementary/primary schools would be placed in the control of the state. Religious 'instruction' was not to take place during school hours and the churches were to play no part in teacher appointments. Any school that chose to remain outside this new system would still receive state funding, but the less control the government had over its administration the smaller that level of support would be.

The legislation was unpopular with churches on both sides of the divide. The Protestant churches were dismayed by the Act's perceived secularism and the Catholic church, already mistrusting the new state, saw the Act as a direct attack on the schools that they managed. They considered the funding system to be discriminatory and felt that their ethos could only be guaranteed if they were able to keep complete control of their schools.

In the face of this opposition, the non-denominational aspirations of the Lynn Committee were eroded and eventually abandoned. Revisions to the Education Act

in 1925 and 1930 overturned significant aspects of the 1923 legislation: these amendments *required* schools to provide Bible instruction and guaranteed church representation in the management of schools and the overall education system. Schools were also expressly permitted to use religion as a factor in the appointment of teachers. In return, almost all of those schools that had previously been managed by the Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian church and Methodist church were transferred into state control. The Transferors' Representative Council (TRC) is the current educational advocacy body for these three denominations.

The Catholic church opted to keep those schools under their auspices outside of the state-*controlled* system; their teachers were, nevertheless, still paid out of the state purse. In 1989, under the Education Reform (NI) Order (ERO), responsibility for those primary and non-selective post-primary schools managed by the Catholic church but *maintained* through state grant aid, was assigned to the Catholic Council for Maintained Schools (CCMS). CCMS is responsible for the promotion and planning of school provision in the Catholic Maintained sector and the employment of teachers in these schools.

Northern Ireland is also home to a number of self-governing schools that had been set up in the Seventeenth, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. Most of these 'Voluntary Grammar schools' declined a past offer of greater levels of state funding in return for retaining a higher level of autonomy, something they retain.

In 1981 Lagan College became the first school in NI to be established by a group of parents who expressly wanted Catholic and Protestant pupils to be educated alongside each other. Lagan and subsequent schools that were specifically conceived and established to be integrated, are self-governing, and are classified as Grant Maintained Integrated (GMI). The NI Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) was established in 1987 to support the development of integrated schools. The 1989 ERO had also introduced a duty on the Department of Education (DE) to "encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education". Both Controlled and Catholic Maintained schools are eligible to transform to integrated

status and can opt to become either Controlled Integrated or Grant Maintained Integrated.

The ERO commitment to integration reappeared in the Good Friday Agreement some nine years later. However, in a subtle but significant reframing of these commitments, the 2014 Education (Northern Ireland) Act that introduced the Education Authority (EA) placed a requirement on the Authority to "encourage, facilitate ***and promote*** shared education".

In addition, the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 had placed a duty on DENI, "to encourage and facilitate the development of Irish-medium education". In 2000, DENI set up Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG). The 2020 NDNA document included a proposal to develop legislation to place a legal duty on the Department of Education to "encourage and facilitate" the use of Ulster Scots in education.

There are also a very small number of Independent schools that receive no state funds and are not required to follow the NI curriculum; these Independent schools must, however, register with DE and are subject to state inspection.

Under devolution, education is a transferred matter; meaning that it is under the direct control of local ministers and the Assembly. Four ministers have held the office of Education Minister since the Stormont Assembly was established – three from Sinn Féin (Martin McGuinness: 1999-2007, Caitriona Ruane: 2007-2011 and John O'Dowd: 2011-2016) and one from the DUP (Peter Weir: since 2016).

The Minister's work is advised, assisted and scrutinised by the Committee for Education who also play a key role in the consideration and development of legislation. To balance the potential for sectarian partisanship in policy-making processes, it has been custom and practice for the Chair of the Education Committee to be aligned with a political bloc other than that represented by the Minister.

The primary statutory duty of the Department of Education is to "promote the education of the people of Northern Ireland and to ensure the effective implementation of education policy". It has responsibility for:

- pre-school education,
- primary education,
- post-primary education,
- special education,
- the youth service,
- the promotion of community relations within and between schools, and
- teacher education and salaries.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) is a section within DE that evaluates and reports on the quality of pre-school, primary, post-primary and special education. ETI also inspects further education colleges, Initial Teacher Education providers and the non-formal education provided by the statutory and voluntary youth service.

The 1998 Education Order revised the remit of the body responsible for the regulation of qualifications taken by learners in NI and created the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA).

The 1998 Order also set up the General Teaching Council of NI (GTCNI) to establish and maintain a register of teachers, approve qualifications for the purposes of registration, regulate the teaching profession and provide advice to DE and employing authorities. GTCNI's governing board includes representatives of the Catholic Schools' Trustee Service (CSTS) and the TRC.

The advent of a more stable society in the wake of the 1998 Good Friday/Belfast Agreement was accompanied by calls for the restoration of responsibility and powers to more locally accountable bodies. In 2005 a vision of a single Education and Skills Authority (ESA) was proposed. This new body would incorporate all of the responsibilities of the ELBs and CCEA, take on the front-line support functions of CCMS, CnaG and NICIE, and become the employing authority for all teachers

and other support staff employed in grant-aided schools (including voluntary grammar schools). There were to be no places reserved on the board of ESA for CSTS or TRC representatives.

In March 2006, an independent strategic review of education, led by Professor Sir George Bain, was tasked with examining "education funding, and the strategic planning and organisation of the schools' estate, taking particular account of curriculum changes and demographic trends". Bain et al. (2006), highlighted how the complexity of administration and multitude of school types had contributed to the range of "inefficiencies manifest in the system".

The establishment of ESA was politically contentious and disagreements between the parties involved in the power-sharing coalition in Stormont ultimately led to a significant diminution of the aspirations for ESA (Armstrong, 2017). Political disagreement was fuelled by transferors' resistance to their loss of influence and lobbying by the Voluntary Grammars who wanted to ensure that their autonomy was retained. ESA had been conceived as a body that would reduce the complexity of educational administration and thereby save the public purse millions but, by the time that it was eventually abandoned, ESA had cost the taxpayer £17 million (BBC, 2014). Under the 2014 Education Act NI a compromise body, the Education Authority (EA), was established. CCMS, CCEA and the voluntary grammar sector were left intact. In spite of the bold aspirations for ESA, EA was, in essence, little more than a merger of the five ELBs.

EA is a non-departmental public body sponsored by DE. It is responsible to DE for ensuring that efficient and effective primary and secondary education services are available to meet the needs of children and young people. It is also legally delegated to administer student finance on behalf of the Department for the Economy (DfE). EA is the employing authority for all staff at Controlled schools and non-teaching staff at Catholic Maintained schools; it is also the funding authority for Voluntary Grammar and Grant Maintained Integrated schools.

In addition to EA, the Department is also responsible for eight other Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs) – five of these are pivotal in supporting the delivery of education in mainstream schools:

- General Teaching Council of NI,
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment,
- Catholic Council for Maintained Schools,
- NI Council for Integrated Education, and
- Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta.

There are also a range of other bodies aligned with each of the various sectors. The oldest of these, the Governing Bodies Association (GBA) was established in the 1940s. GBA provides policy information, advice and support for its 50 constituent Voluntary Grammar schools as well as representing their views with politicians, policy makers, media and other educational stakeholders.

The Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 allowed for the creation of a support body for Controlled schools and, in September 2016, the Controlled Schools Support Council (CSSC) came into existence. DE defines CSSC's functions as being: "to provide a representative and advocacy role for Controlled schools, including advice and support in responding to consultation exercises, developing and maintaining a collective ethos for the sector, working with the Education Authority to raise educational standards, participating in area planning and building co-operation and engaging with other sectors, in matters of mutual interest" (DENI, 2016a).

Similarly, the purpose of the Catholic Schools Trustee Service (CSTS) is to professionalise the contribution of the Catholic Trustees to area planning and shared education on behalf of the whole Catholic-managed sector, including Catholic grammar schools.

A number of independent charitable organisations also exist to access additional funds for models of education that reflect their core philosophy. The Integrated Education Fund (IEF) was set up in 1992 as an independent funding body for the furtherance of integrated education and Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta (InaG) was established in 2001 with the aim of providing a financial foundation for Irish Medium education.

The current pattern of ALBs is more extensive than had been the case prior to the initial proposals for rationalising the administration of education through ESA. Grants for on-going operational costs are provided to *professionalise the contribution* of the GBA and CSTS. CSSC was set up with a grant from DE and does receive an annual funding allocation. The TRC receives no funding from DE but is represented on Area Planning structures.

This proliferation of ALBs and Sectoral Bodies creates additional expenditure – the sums awarded to Non-Departmental Public Bodies (including CCEA, CCMS, CnaG, NICIE and GTCNI) amounted to around 1.2% of the total DE resource budget in 2019-2020 (DENI, 2020d).

The cross-party House of Commons NI Affairs Committee commented on the impact of this proliferation of administrative bodies:

> "The complicated structure of education in Northern Ireland meant that money was not being spent in the most efficient way" (HoCNIAC, 2019c: 3).

There are a large number of bodies delivering and administering education in Northern Ireland, alongside Arm's Length and sectoral bodies. This is largely a consequence of fragmentation of the system due to academic selection and duplication along community grounds.

3.4.2 How the Department of Education and the Department for the Economy (and its Partners) works collaboratively with other Government Departments, Arm's Length Bodies, Initial Teacher Education and In-service Tutor Education providers to support education outcomes, and specifically the interaction between providers of secondary and further education

The OECD Skills Strategy project (OECD, 2020) provided Northern Ireland with an insight as to how it is performing in relation to other parts of the world and makes recommendations for improving this. One opportunity that should be developed, they recommended, is in starting the development of a culture of lifelong learning early in life. This will involve the development of the compulsory curriculum, in the light of megatrends to focus on the development of digital and data literacy skills" (OECD, 2020: 30), which is the remit of the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA). CCEA could also, they suggested, change

GCSEs to have a wider range of diverse assessments, moving away from a model which is based on a relatively small number of summative assessments. It is recommended that DENI should develop professional development of new and existing teachers in technology-friendly pedagogies, working alongside HEIs and University Colleges. DENI are also recommended to consider strengthening support for vulnerable children and their families. OECD also recommend addressing adults' motivation to learn and this is largely the remit, they suggested, of Department for the Economy, with some responsibility given to the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. This suggested some fragmentation across government departments with different departments having to try to address different aspects of skills which do not neatly fall into one area.

The Department of the Economy (DfE) have, as some of their responsibilities, the operation of a range of employment skills programmes and oversight and funding of further and higher education, including Initial Teacher Education. However, teachers are the responsibility of the Department of Education. Numbers accepted for ITE courses are set by DENI, usually annually, but funding for ITE is from DfE. The Departments have a history of working together, although the division of responsibilities is not always easily managed. Gardner, for example, noted their shared, even if ultimately unsuccessful, attempts to integrate ITE provision.

> "Under the devolved government structure, the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) [now the Department for the Economy] had responsibility for funding higher education, including teacher education, and in consort with the Department of Education (with responsibility for schools) it renewed efforts to unify teacher education" (Gardner, 2016: 352).

Their joint document, "Teacher Education in a Climate of Change" (DENI/DEL, 2010) illustrated collaboration, even if it was written at a time when the Education and Skills Authority was anticipated. More recently work has gone on to address the need for Careers Education (DEL/DENI, 2016b), again illustrative of cross departmental working.

Further Education is also within the remit of the Department of the Economy. It consists of six regional colleges operating across 40 campuses, which are widely

spread across NI. They employ 4000 staff, have a turnover of around £250 million annually and are the main providers of vocational and technical education and training in NI (Irwin, 2019: 267). While an important component of educational provision, including for young people, this sector is funded by a different department from that which funds schools. Additionally, FE colleges are an important component of Area Learning Communities and are vital in helping to deliver the Entitlement Framework. This has provided some challenges and "… the extent to which FE colleges were involved in course provision varied from one area to another and initial evaluations suggested that the resources of the FE sector were not being fully exploited by schools" (Irwin, 2019: 271). On the ground, strong and well-established partnership linkages have been made in ALCs, but this may be complicated by governance arrangements. It could be speculated as to whether it would be easier to address some of these cross-cutting aspects of educational provision if they were all contained within one Government Department.

There are clear and understandable demarcations between the responsibilities of government departments. Not all parts of 'education' are contained within the Department of Education, but there is evidence of collaboration. More research is required to fully explore the linkages, connections, and disconnections between Government Departments.

3.4.3 The better alignment of education provision and funding, at all levels, with NI Executive priorities

The Northern Ireland Executive launched a consultation on a new draft Programme for Government (PfG), which closed at the end of March 2021 – the responses are currently being analysed.

The PfG Draft Outcomes Framework suggested a number of proposed goals which could impact on education, such as providing "our children and young people [with] the best start in life", developing "an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect" and "everyone can reach their potential" (NIE, 2021a). At a top level, there is an aim to develop "a shared and strategic vision for the future which aims to improve wellbeing for all" (NIE, 2021b), which is consistent

with the New Decade, New Approach document. There is an aim to cut across departmental boundaries to address societal problems, such as those in education, using an outcomes-based approach.

The Outcomes Delivery Plan has 49 indicators, a number of which are based around educational outcomes, and there are others whose impact may also affect education. One aim (Outcome 10) is to increase the percentage of care leavers who, at the age of 19, were in education, training or employment. We have already seen the relatively low outcomes for this group, particularly in relation to education (Section 3.2.5). Other priorities (Outcomes 11 and 12) target the attainment levels of school leavers, with Outcome 12 aiming to reduce the gap between non-FSME school leavers and FSEM school leavers. Outcomes 13 and 15 are still under development but consist of the proportion of schools deemed good or better and the proportion of children at an appropriate stage of development in their pre-school year. Important for education, as we have noted elsewhere is a target (Outcome 19) which aims to monitor the percentage of the population living in absolute and relative poverty. While that measure is currently showing a positive change, the figure for relative poverty is not significantly below where it was in 2002/03 and, in 2018/19, was at the same level as 2002/03 (19.0%).

There are other targets concerning access to broadband (Outcome 24) and an increase leisure centres, libraries and shopping centres in people's areas being considered 'shared and open' spaces (Outcome 31), a measure of the employment rate (Outcome 32) and a reduction of greenhouse gases (Outcome 29) and an increase in biodiversity (Outcome 45), all of which will be vital to shaping the future of children and young people (NIE, 2021c).

The priorities of the Northern Ireland Executive are being drawn up with a new PfG but there is evidence of a move towards a more strategic alignment of priories with regards to some educational imperatives. More research may be required when the responses to the draft PfG, and the Government's decisions concerning these, are published.

3.4.4 The review of school management type and assessment of the consequences of the current model

NI has a wide range of school management types, each with its own form of governance. The current model supports these various types and the additional costs of such division and duplication will be discussed more fully in Section 3.4.11. There is also an additional cost in often duplicated support structures and managing authorities for each management type (Milliken, 2020b; 2021). The costs of having a range of management types are more than financial and many have pointed out the social cost that the current model of provision appears not to ameliorate, at best, and may contribute to exacerbating. These divisions are by social class, and this has been said to be partly a consequence of academic selection (Henderson, 2020: 6). It is also argued that they result from segregation by community background (Smith, 2001).

The potential cost to society in the long term is feared to be considerable by some researchers (Gorard and Siddiqui, 2018: 913). Others feel that operating Shared Education within the existing structures and ameliorating any difference between those who attend schools of different management types is a positive step, which is more likely to find favour with parents and will still have lasting positive, social outcomes for the individuals involved and more widely in NI society (Gallagher, 2016).

The wide range of school management types in NI causes duplication and has financial, social and environmental costs.

3.4.5 An analysis of areas of duplication, segregation or fragmentation in the current system and an assessment of the impact of such issues on delivery, costs and outcomes

NI's education service is fragmented by divisions along community lines and, in post-primary schools, by selection at 11. This leads to duplication of provision across the province in primary schools and in post-primary schools.

Perhaps the most obvious example of duplication is in small settlements which have two primary schools serving different communities and research had indicated 64 such schools in 32 pairs across NI (Roulston and Cook, 2020). In some instances, neither school was sustainable, at least measured by enrolment numbers alone. Some communities could sustain a primary school, but many cannot maintain two. There is a danger, as the schools are managed by separate bodies, that rationalisation might lead to the closure of both. Even if closure was not imminent, there can be an impact as small schools may lack the specialist staffing that larger schools can provide (Smith and DeYoung, 1988). While there is conflicting evidence of the impact of school size on educational outcomes (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2009), there may be benefits in economies of scale in some instances. Sustainability of educational provision in an area will certainly be improved. Savings to the whole system were such schools to find alternative arrangements and offer education jointly from a single site are difficult to calculate, but the savings from having fewer small schools, and thus less additional small school supplement to be paid, have been calculated for these 32 pairs of small primary schools as £2.3 million per year (Roulston and Cook, 2020: 6). This does not take account of the other potential savings in staffing, accommodation and running costs.

Much the same argument could be made for larger settlements with pairs of post-primary schools offering a duplication of services and yet delivering the same curriculum with teachers with similar qualifications and with learners sitting identical external examinations set by the same examining board. Gardner argued that

> "… the duplication of schools, or indeed triplication in instances where an integrated school competes with local controlled and Catholic schools, underpins an economic argument against such national-scale segregation" (Gardner, 2016: 352).

Estimating the additional cost of duplication and division is difficult but all of the evaluations point to substantial additional expenditures: one survey put it somewhere between £16.5 million and £95 million (Ulster University Economic Policy Centre, 2016) and politicians have recognised that the current system is not sustainable (UK and Irish Governments, 2020: 43). In terms of schools, the costs are not just the obvious ones of duplication of the costs of teaching and ancillary staff, of having two buildings where one might do and so on. There are also less

obvious costs. School transport costs are very high in NI, providing free transport for learners who live a certain distance away from a school to get to the school of their choice, but often following a route which passes schools which offer the same curriculum. The Department of Education stated that they "… currently fund daily transport assistance to around 84,000 pupils at an annual cost of approximately £81 million per year" (DENI, n.d.). Part of this travel is due to community segregation in education and part due to academic selection. If religious segregation of schools were to end, and pupils instead attend their nearest selective or non-selective schools, this would result in a "huge decrease in the numbers receiving fully subsidised home to school transport, generating substantial savings for the school transport budget" (Smyth and Kelleher, 2011: 12). Similarly, if academic selection were to be ended, total mileage would decrease by 54% and the proportion of pupils eligible for free home-school transport would fall by up to 49%. If NI's education system were to move away from both academic selection and segregation by religion, total school mileage would fall by 74% and only 4.3% of pupils would require support for free home-school transport support (Kelleher, Smyth and McEldowney, 2016: 11). The costs are more than just greater efficiencies in home-school transport – there are considerable environmental costs to all of this additional travel. One calculation (Roulston and Cook, 2021) suggested that pupils in post-primary schools in NI were travelling an additional 130,177,5216 miles by not attending their local post-primary school but instead going to a school of their choice, often because of community segregation or academic selection. These additional and unnecessary journeys produce a hidden cost to the environment and yet another to the effective working of business – Belfast is one of the most congested cities in Europe currently and it has been forecast that congestion will cost the NI economy £800 million by 2025 (Belfast Telegraph, 2016).

It has been suggested that another outcome of the division of educational provision through selection ay 11 has been academic underachievement in some groups (Gardner, 2016; Kelleher et al., 2016; Henderson, 2020) (see 3.2.2). While considerable research suggested that Protestant males suffer disproportionately from underachievement (Equality Commission, 2017; Borooah and Knox, 2015b),

some other research does not corroborate this (Early, 2020). As noted, a working party on educational underachievement is to report in May 2021, and its findings will be of considerable interest.

Duplication, fragmentation and division are a common feature of NI's education provision. The literature would suggest that there is a considerable cost to such division, but the exact figure is difficult to calculate.

3.4.6 How outstanding recommendations, where appropriate, from the Independent Review of Integrated Education (2017), and any other relevant previous reports, might be advanced in the context of this wider Review

The Report of the Independent Review of Integrated Education was published in 2017 (DENI, 2017c). In all, Topping and Cavanagh and their panel made 39 recommendations. Three (Recommendations 1, 2 and 3) advocate for legislative change to amend the legal definition of Integrated education to be more appropriate for changing demographics in NI, and to add 'promote' to the current duty on DENI, EA and all other Arm's Length Bodies to 'encourage and facilitate' Integrated education, bringing it in line with the legislation on Shared education. They asked that the new legislation should require a report to the Assembly every two years, as is the case with Shared education. These legislative changes have not yet been made.

Currently, DENI consider, among other factors, how likely it will be for a school proposing transforming to integrated status to achieve a religious balance. The school has to provide evidence that it will have at least 10% of its intake from the minority population in their area, and that this is likely to increase to 30%. The Independent Review suggested that this should be revised (Recommendation 4) noting that few schools have chosen to transform, and suggest that this is due to, among other reasons, a lack of knowledge of how to transform, a cumbersome process and insufficient financial incentives for doing so. A range of recommendations are associated with this. Financial disincentives to transformation should be removed (Recommendation 13), and clear guidance and a funded

support package should be available for schools who wish to transform (Recommendation14). Step by step advice is also requested in Recommendation 17 and, subsequently, DENI produced guidance on schools considering transformation to integrated status (DENI, 2017b) which provides details on sources of advice and funding. A "robust business case" (DENI, 2017b: 32) can be made to DENI for the following financial year, and for up to five years after a school has transformed. Additionally, funding can be sought from the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) or the Integrated Education Fund (IEF), a charitable organisation which supports integrated education. EA can provide advice and support to schools wishing to transform.

Other proposals suggest changes to area planning. The report recommended that, where there is clear demand, pre-school provision linked directly to an integrated primary school should receive funding and additional places, even if pre-school places are available from other providers in the area (Recommendation 6). Additionally, EA should work pro-actively to increase places in the integrated sector (Recommendation 7), that an audit of demand for integrated places should be conducted (Recommendation 8), that a principle of the audit should be that demonstrated preference for integrated education should be met, regardless of places available in other sectors (Recommendation 9), and that the audit should serve as a basis for growing the integrated sector (Recommendation 10). Connected is Recommendation 11, which advocates that any development plans made for closing or amalgamating schools should demonstrate that an integrated, jointly managed or shared solution has been meaningfully considered. Indeed, such outcomes should form the basis of a strategy of local community engagement for area planning (Recommendation 12), it was argued. Some progress has been made on this recommendation as DENI consider engagement with the Community Conversations initiative (bates and O'Connor-Bones, 2018), although

> "… there has been a conspicuous lack of formal mechanisms that give parents parity of voice on the issue of school places and Area-Based Planning. Area- Based Planning has largely been conducted on a sectoral basis by the Education Authority and Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, respectively" (Bates and O'Connor-Bones, 2021: 45).

Other recommendations included the need for centralised support services to grant-maintained integrated schools (Recommendation 22) and the establishment of an integrated professional learning community for school leaders (Recommendation 21), neither of which have been realised.

Other recommendations concerned the building of integrated schools. Recommendation 24 is that major capital projects from all existing integrated schools should be taken forward by DENI – some progress has been made in this and some schools previously in temporary buildings now have permanent structures – and that potential future growth in integrated provision should be considered in planning capital projects (Recommendation 26). To combat the challenges of starting a new integrated school, it is recommended that (Recommendation 27 and 28) funding for temporary buildings is provided swiftly and in a timely fashion while permanent buildings are constructed and, where a Development Proposal is approved for a new integrated school, modern modular school buildings should be provided from the outset. The report argued that Fresh Start Capital funding should be used in innovative ways to ensure maximum impact on the uptake of integrated education to transform our education system (Recommendations 31, 32, 33 and 39), and an 'Open and Welcoming' kitemark should be established (Recommendation 34, 35 and 36) for schools to demonstrate their openness to enrolment across community divisions.

Recommendation 37 concerned initial teacher education and the report advises that all student teachers should have "substantial, meaningful, cross-community, professional training including cross-community contact, that will prepare them to work in any publicly-funded school in Northern Ireland" (DENI, 2017c: 8), and Recommendation 38 noted the Fair Employment Exception and its impact on schools having a cross-community staff group. Recommendation 38 has not yet been realised but there is now an acknowledgement from the main political parties that change is required, and growing pressure from Teacher Unions and others to repeal this legislation.

Of the 39 recommendations made in this Independent report, very few have been realised. Some appear to be being accommodated slowly, but others do not yet seem to have precipitated any legislative or policy movement.

3.4.7 An analysis of areas of best practice, innovation, sharing and collaboration in the current system and an assessment of their potential for broader application

The Bain Review (Bain et al., 2006) recognised the need for greater sharing and collaboration between schools – particularly with regard to the need to rationalise the schools' estate. The Burns Report (DENI, 2001), shortly followed by the Costello Report (DENI, 2004), both advised a change of culture for post-primary schools away from competition and towards collaboration. Both had the vision of clusters of nearby schools working together to meet the requirements of the Entitlement Framework by such strategies as shared classes at A-level and GCSE (McGuinness, 2012).

Embryonic cross-sectoral collaboration had, though, already been a dimension of education for years - most notably through the Schools Community Relations Programme (Perry, 2011a). Collaborative practice between schools was, however, brought even more sharply into focus with the introduction of shared education legislation, DE policy and associated funding in 2015 (Gallagher, 2021) (see Sections 3.1, 3.2.5, 3.2.7).

Between 2010 and 2015, the Shared Education Learning Forum (SELF) received support from Atlantic Philanthropies to bring bodies and individuals together in order to lobby ministers, politicians and policy makers to advance shared education. SELF also organised a number of practice sharing conferences for teachers.

A range of initiatives which promote sharing and collaboration between schools have been instituted, and Area Learning Partnerships and shared education initiative have brought many schools closer together.

3.4.8 An assessment of resource intensive services within education delivery and identification of priority areas for further investment

The NI Audit Office (2018) revealed that there had been a 9% decrease in the funding available for education in real terms between 2012-2017 and that school deficits amounted to £32m. They determined that pressure on the financial resources was the product of two main issues: an increase in pupil numbers and the number of schools facing sustainability issues and concluded that "the system is coming close to a tipping point and action needs to be taken as a matter of urgency" (NIAO, 2018; 3).

In January 2020, Peter Weir indicated that the education system required an additional £150m to cover a teachers' salary rise and £50-60m for School Budget shortfalls. He also drew attention to the additional costs required by resource intensive services like Special Education (£75m) and the £40-90m that would be required for the further development of pre-school education (Meredith, 2020).

In a context of shrinking budgets, schools are finding particular challenges in meeting their needs. Further development of pre-school education and special education are particularly costly, and school budget shortfalls are high.

3.4.9 An analysis of the current network of education settings and its long-term viability and sustainability

Following an investigation in 2015, the NI Audit Office concluded that:

> "Delivering sustainable schools in Northern Ireland is extremely difficult. The implementation of the Sustainable Schools policy is constrained by the fact that responsibility for the delivery of education is dependent on a number of different providers: Controlled schools; Catholic Maintained schools; Voluntary Grammar schools; other Maintained (including Irish medium) and Integrated schools" (NIAO, 2015: 3).

Furthermore, they identified that the system was plagued by 'confusion' and a 'lack of clarity', and that the prospect of ensuring a network of sustainable schools was further complicated by policy that gives priority to parental preference for choice across all of these sectors. Papers produced by the Ulster University's Transforming

Education initiative identified that, in many instances, parental choice was illusory (Roulston and Cooke, 2020).

Sustainability of school provision has been made more difficult by the cost of duplication and the multiplicity of providers. Parents are provided with 'choice' but that inevitably leads to additional costs also and the choice is sometimes illusory in any case.

3.4.10 Consideration of appropriate measures and indicators to determine performance of the education system

Traditionally, the performance of the education system has been assessed by examination results – unlike in England, DE does not publish league tables but instead releases statistical bulletins for examinations taken at Year 12 and Year 14. These are analysed by journalists to produce unofficial school 'league tables' for local newspapers – most notably the Irish News, and the Belfast Telegraph.

Researchers have concluded that the breadth of the curriculum in England has been skewed by schools having their performance measured purely by these results – in a competitive market there is an incentive, for example, for a school to discourage pupils from entering pupils for exams in what are perceived to be "hard" subjects (e.g. foreign languages and sciences) for fear of depressing the proportion achieving passes. There is also a concern that some schools may over-concentrate their efforts on raising "borderline" pupils so that they can achieve a C grade, notionally a 'pass', at the expense of those striving for top grades or those struggling to attain a D (Goldstein and Leckie, 2008). Given that, at GCSE, around one third of all candidates fail to achieve a Grade C, the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL, 2019) questioned whether we should "retain an assessment and examination system that year in, year out creates 'the forgotten third'…?" (ASCL, 2019: 11) and speculated as to whether the current high-stakes accountability still has validity. In NI, the Governing Bodies Association remarked about GCSE that "our examination system guarantees that underachievement is thus a self-fulfilling prophecy" (GBA, 2020: 2) and pose a question for the Minister

of Education in NI: "Do a third of candidates have to fail their GCSEs so that two thirds can pass?" (GBA, 2020: 5).

In 2019 the Northern Powerhouse Partnership noted that the current system in England penalised those schools that had higher proportions of pupils from underperforming groups. They published an Index that uses a contextual progress score that takes pupils' backgrounds into account. Using this schema, faith schools and grammar schools were seen to have provided less added value for pupils in areas of deprivation than conventional methods of measurement might have assumed (Roberts, 2019).

The Northern Ireland Curriculum aimed to develop skills, infusing them within and across subjects. These are lifelong skills but cannot easily be assessed using traditional examinations, and yet it is these the traditional measures of success that continue to be used at GCSE and A Level. Assessment bodies are subject to competition, and this may actually reduce innovation in assessment. As Winter (2009) has argued

> "… awarding bodies are not designed to develop the curriculum, nor is it in their short-term interests to do so – why innovate content and assessment methods, thereby running the risk of losing entrants and examination fees to competitors who retain more conservative approaches?" (2009: 671).

Over the last two years measures have had to be introduced in response to the absence of examinations as a consequence of school closures due to COVID-19 lockdowns. It is too early to find comprehensive academic research on the impact of predicted grades and other responses to the lack of public examination in 2020 and again in 2021. However, preliminary research indicates many misgivings about the outcomes. Dixon (2020) found a high level of discontent among the Classics teachers in her study, and a concern for the wellbeing and academic achievement of the learners. Similarly, Bhopal and Myers (2020) find a high level of dissatisfaction with the predicted grade process, particularly from disadvantaged students who felt that external examinations would have been fairer. They quote one student respondent:

> "We're Travellers. The school doesn't think much of us. This should be my chance of university but maybe it won't happen now" (2020: 6).

However, in contrast, Rudd (2020) found that "teacher judgements provided to be statistically reliable" (2020: 26), although he conceded that prior attainments, on which teacher judgements are inevitably based, exclude the possibility of future improvements.

With COVID-19, there have been none of the usual unofficial league tables in NI. While no full analysis of the impact of teacher-assessed grades is available, there is no evidence that it has suppressed the recruitment of pupils for grammar schools, for example.

The measures currently used to assess performance of the education system are largely based on examination results. While these are an important metric, an overreliance on this type of measure, particularly if not 'value-added', risks missing important components of the wider outcomes of education, as envisioned in the Northern Ireland Curriculum

3.4.11 Defining what a "single education system" means and would entail in practical terms, assessing the costs / benefits of such an approach

Academics have identified two main political structures that have been introduced to mitigate conflict in divided societies:

- Consociational – which encourages an elite-led coalition government and the creation of parallel social institutions (such as educational structures) to protect distinctive identities and thereby privileges difference (Lijphart, 1968), and
- Integrationist – which encourages common/unitary social and civic institutions and therefore privileges commonality (Horowitz, 1985).

Gallagher (2021) noted that although consociational arrangements can enable leaders of different communities to transcend ethnic differences – they can also initiate weakness, by heightening and deepening social divisions. The systems of Government and education in NI provide archetypal examples of consociational arrangements.

This review of literature has identified that duplication and division are endemic at every level of the education system in Northern Ireland. Ninety-three percent of pupils in mainstream education attend schools that have either a British/Protestant or a Catholic/Irish heritage and identity (NISRA, 2020). These school sectors are overseen by separate administrative authorities. Boards of Governors are comprised of members that have been appointed to maintain and safeguard the ethos of each school; they are likely to be drawn from only one side of the community and may be heavily influenced by clerics.

Teachers are required to be in possession of an additional, faith-specific, Religious Education (RE) certificate in order to teach in Catholic primary schools, and they are not protected by fair employment laws that workers in other professions can take for granted. Many school teachers are prepared to teach in Catholic Maintained schools in one teaching college, whilst another college provides teachers mainly for the state Controlled primary sector.

As a consequence, many teachers have been almost wholly separated from their neighbours from the other community as they passed through each stage of education. Yet these are the same professionals who are now required to contribute to longer-term peacebuilding and societal reconciliation by leading inter-school, cross-community, Shared Education programmes. Others feel that parental and community choice should be retained, and that their traditional values would be at threat in a single system of education.

Education systems need to be able to embrace all members of our society in some form. There are those who believe that any system which 'excludes' does little to prepare pupils for the society that they will eventually enter. Others feel that the existing schools are already welcoming and open to all Whatever the outcome of the Independent Review, NI needs an education system which is fair, which delivers for all and which society can afford.

Literature Review

Summary of the Challenges

4. Summary of the Challenges

A number of issues have been made explicit in this literature review that will need to be addressed in the Review of Education if it is to make a significant and lasting impact. The list that follows is not exhaustive and there are many other issues which the panel may encounter but, from a consideration of the literature, the following key challenges are suggested.

Education in NI did not start with a blank sheet in 1921. There was a National School system in place which, by the turn of the century, was already largely divided along denominational lines (Farren, 1995). Partition was unable to sweep away deep divisions and, despite efforts to establish a single, common, non-denominational system of education, this was quickly derailed by the intervention of powerful vested interests. The already divided system of educational provision became more complex as it expanded to serve more learners. Developing a system which allows choice and variety for learners and parents will inevitably involve an increase in complexity. However, the degree to which the interests of diverse factions has been accommodated within education has produced a system which is particularly convoluted. As Gallagher noted, "Northern Ireland has the smallest school population in the United Kingdom, yet its structural design is amongst the most complex" (Gallagher, 2021: 147).

The current configuration of multiple management structures, support organisations, representative bodies, and arm's-length bodies adds to the challenges in achieving change. The system is divided by social class, as an outworking of academic selection, as well as by community background. There are also single sex schools, predominantly for post-primary pupils, which add a degree of division by gender. There is also an expanding proportion of integrated schools and Irish Medium schools funded from the public purse and a small number of self-financing independent schools. All this choice, complexity and separation, attracts additional costs.

CHALLENGE 1

How can a system be devised which provides for the needs of all learners and the varied aspirations of their parents within a single system of

education – a system that caters for all abilities and all communities and provides a range of cultural and sporting activities?

There is duplication throughout NI's education provision. This is most clearly seen in the case of small villages and hamlets, many of which have two primary schools, often only yards apart, one serving each community. In many cases each school is unsustainable, or on the brink of it. While the surrounding population might be sufficient to support *one* flourishing primary school, there is a real possibility that both might be lost, separately. The challenge of combining schools should not be underestimated – often these primary schools have been attended by parents and grandparents of the current pupils and they form part of the fabric of each community. However, the alternative is bleaker, and many small settlements without any primary school will struggle to maintain a healthy population and a thriving community. While these isolated pairs of schools may be the most obvious illustration of duplication, there are many other examples throughout education in NI: school buildings, teachers, school leaders, ancillary staff, support organisations and even in Initial Teacher Education. The cost of this duplication is consequently notoriously difficult to calculate but, by any measure, it is considerable.

CHALLENGE 2

At a time of stretched budgets, and with the twin fiscal pressures created by Brexit and COVID-19 creating a further threat to funding levels, how can politicians and decision-makers be encouraged to take brave decisions and move towards rational, area-based school provision which eschews separation and duplication and, instead, enjoys the savings that a single system will provide, while simultaneously embracing the reconciliation possibilities, which are beyond monetary valuation?

In the past, it would have been safe to assume that, in most cases, Initial Teacher Training prepared teachers to gain employment in schools serving their *own* communities. With an increasingly diverse population, what appears to be a widely

shared desire to repeal the FETO exception, and Shared Education classes and other contacts across Area Learning Communities, this can no longer be assumed as a universal truth. As teachers increasingly face diverse classrooms, which include newcomers or children from a different tradition in NI, they require skills additional to those needed in the past. Considerable research indicates that most teachers in NI are not comfortable with addressing contentious issues. These tend to be avoided in a 'whatever you say, say nothing' approach which is commonplace in this divided society. This may avoid the more obvious, immediate manifestations of conflict and may reduce the chance of offence being given or taken. However, arguably, schools should be the very places where it is safe for learners to articulate and explore these ideas and it is vitally important if a greater shared understanding of the 'other' is to be developed. This is delicate work which needs to be approached with care, and teachers will require support, a resource base and skill development.

Those teachers whose curriculum includes controversial issues require specific preparation and support in addressing these in classrooms in effective ways, and that can be further developed and resourced. However, *all* teachers need opportunities to develop the skills necessary to allow them more easily to address the challenges of teaching in a divided and diverse society. These could be built into ITE and also made accessible in funded opportunities for in-service training for practising teachers. While using 'avoidance' as a strategy can sometimes have short-term benefits in social situations outside school, in a classroom setting, particularly when opportunities arise to explore ideas and to challenge misconceptions, teachers need the confidence and skills to create and respond to situations where contentious issues can be raised and discussed safely. This is just as important in integrated schools as it is in schools which have an enrolment drawn predominantly or exclusively from just one community. Increasingly, it can be expected that as NI's demography changes, all classrooms will become more diverse. Addressing other issues of intolerance, including racism and homophobia, will require similar attention.

CHALLENGE 3

How can a system be developed that equips pre-service and practising teachers with the skills and confidence to create

opportunities for engaging with, raising and discussing contentious issues within a positive and educative learning environment?

NI is one of the poorest areas of the UK and has many areas with high levels of multiple deprivation. It also has higher levels of children with SEN, a proportion which is showing steady growth. There is a widespread 'tail of underachievement' which is proving hard to address. Looked After Children fare comparatively badly, on average, in the education system here. The Department recognises that Traveller children, children from ethnic minorities, children with a disability, children with additional needs and children from disadvantaged backgrounds (such as children on FSME) are all at significant risk of underachieving.

Early multi-agency intervention has been shown to make the biggest difference to educational outcomes for children, at a fraction of the cost of having to intervene later and with much better results. While further investment in Early Years provision and staffing is required, other aspects of educational provision can also be considered, including addressing the digital divide, supporting children from socio-economic disadvantaged backgrounds, encouraging schools to have enrolments with a mix of socio-economic groups to help to address social mobility, and tackling the causes of suspension and exclusion which are disproportionately experienced by some groups of children.

CHALLENGE 4

How can a system be created that requires and enables government departments, including the Department of Education, to act in concert to tackle the problems of child poverty in NI and address the underachievement which is endemic among certain groups of children?

All of those involved in the compilation of the literature in this document were familiar with much of it beforehand. However, in revisiting policy documents and reading some unfamiliar sources, a common thread has emerged; the renewed realisation that many

carefully considered and well-evidenced recommendations have been made in the last 20 years and more, but have not been implemented. Also, it is clear that technology has not been incorporated as effectively as it might have been in schools, nor have the skills of teachers in using these technologies to support learning and teaching been enhanced enough.

The evidence exists, and has been presented multiple times, that aspects of our education service can be improved if certain reforms are enacted, and yet there is often delay and/or inactivity. The stop-start nature of the political process over the last twenty years has not helped, and the consociational form of government may make decision making difficult. Additionally, Burrell and Heenan's (2013) comment about the 'salience of communalism' often rings true. Unfortunately, decision-makers and particularly politicians appear rarely to be trying to make the best decision for all or looking to ensure the maximum gain for most people. They seem instead to be looking over their shoulders at 'their' electorate and, as a result, making sub-optimal decisions that they feel will play to their constituencies.

CHALLENGE 5

Can an education system fit for the 21st century be developed which incorporates technology effectively? More widely, how can the recommendations arising from the Review of Education inspire courage among decision-makers to look beyond their sectional interests to make decisions that benefit all children, the whole education system and social cohesion in NI?

Literature Review

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Literature Review

Glossary

Glossary: list of abbreviations and acronyms

AEP	Alternative Educational Provision offers alternatives to mainstream schooling for disaffected pupils.
APNI	The Alliance Party of NI is a political party that is aligned with neither the Catholic/Nationalist nor Protestant/Unionist blocs.
AQE	Association of Quality Education: the body that supervises one of the two non-statutory Transfer Tests to determine whether or not a pupil may enter a Grammar school.
ALC	Area Learning Communities
ASCL	Association of School and College Leaders: the professional organisation that represents many of the principals of NI Grammar schools.
ASD	Autistic Spectrum Disorder – includes include both autism and Asperger's syndrome both conditions are regarded as being points on a spectrum.
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
BoG	Boards of Governors are present in every school in NI. They work alongside the school Principal to ensure that the educational needs of the school pupils are met in a secure and safe environment.
C2K	Classroom 2000 is an initiative managed by the Education Authority and that provides the infrastructure and services necessary to support the enhanced use of ICT in grant-aided schools across Northern Ireland. C2K has ensured that every teacher in NI has a unique, personal email address.
CCMS	Council for Catholic Maintained Schools – the body manages grant aid provided by the Department of Education in order to maintain the 370 Primary and 64 Post-primary schools that are under the administration of the Catholic church.
CFS	Common Funding Scheme

CI	Controlled Integrated schools have 'transformed' their status to recognise the diversity of their pupils but have opted to remain with the Controlled de facto Protestant sector.
CnaG	Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta is the body that was established in 2000 to represent those grant-aided schools that deliver education through the medium of the Irish Language; this includes 27 stand-alone Irish-medium schools and 12 English-medium schools with Irish-medium units.
CPD	Continued Professional Development
CRE	Certificate of Religious Education
CRED	The Community Relations Equality and Diversity policy was introduced in 2011 and requires all educational institutions receiving grant aid from the Department of Education – including schools and youth work settings – to 'contribute to improving of relations between communities'.
CSSC	Controlled Schools Support Council was brought into being in 2016 and is the advocate for Controlled schools. It supports and represents the interests of Controlled schools in ethos, governance, school achievement and planning.
DE/DENI	Department of Education/Department of Education, Northern Ireland.
DEL	The Department of Education and Learning had responsibility for further and higher education, it was established in the NI executive in 1999 and dissolved in 2016.
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party – currently the largest party in the NI Assembly. The DUP is aligned with the Protestant/Unionist bloc.
EA	The Education Authority was established on 01 April 2015 as a non-departmental body of the Department of Education, Northern Ireland – it has responsibility for education, youth work and school library services

	throughout Northern Ireland with a headquarters and five regional offices.
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care is the generic to term applied to the phase before primary education that aims to provide the foundations for lifelong learning and development.
ELBs	Education and Library Boards – the five ELBs (Belfast, North-Eastern, Southern, South-Eastern and Western) were introduced in 1973 and served a similar function to EA, which replaced them in 2015.
EMU	Education for Mutual Understanding: a cross-curricular theme introduced in the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 in order to "contribute to the improvement of relations between the two communities".
EOTAS	Education Other Than At School includes all forms of education that take place outside of the formal school environment – it includes educational provision for children with social, emotional behavioural, medical or other issues.
ESA	Education and Skills Authority. This was the body recommended by Bain et al. (2006) which would incorporate many of the education support bodies. Eventually a slimmed down version – the Education Authority – was created instead.
ETI	Education and Training Inspectorate – is part of the Department of Education. Its role is to provide independent inspection services for all education settings and policy advice.
EPD	Early Professional Development is a three-year period of enhanced support for beginning teachers.
FE	Further Education – formerly technical colleges.
FETO	The Fair Employment and Treatment Order – the most recent version of this became law in 1989.

FSM/E	Free School Meals Entitlement - Pupils whose parents' net earnings are below a threshold figure are entitled to receive free school meals.
GB	Great Britain. This term denotes the eastern British Isle which contains England, Scotland and Wales. GB specifically does not include Northern Ireland.
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education – state examinations generally taken by pupils across a range of subjects at age 16.
GDPR	The General Data Protection Regulation is the legal framework that sets guidelines for the collection and processing of personal information from individuals who live in the European Union.
GL	The Granada Learning test, which is used by the Post-primary Transfer Consortium to assess pupils wishing to transfer from a Primary school to a Grammar school.
GMI	Grant-Maintained Integrated schools consciously and deliberately seek to bring together the various traditions present in NI. They differ from Controlled Integrated schools in that their staff are employed directly by the BoG and not EA.
GTCNI	The General Teaching Council of Northern Ireland is the statutory independent body for the teaching profession in NI – all teachers seeking employment in NI are required to be registered with GTCNI.
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IEF	Integrated Education Fund: an independent charity supporting the growth of Integrated education in Northern Ireland.
IEP	Individual Education Plan
IME	Irish Medium Education
ITE	Initial Teacher Education is the term that has largely replaced the concept of Teacher Training.

KS	Key Stage - the curriculum operated in NI schools is divided into five Key Stages: Foundation Stage (P1 and P2), Key Stage 1 (P3 and P4), Key Stage 2 (P5, P6 and P7), Key Stage 3 (Post-primary Years 8, 9 and 10) and Key Stage 4 (Years 11 and 12).
LGC	Local and Global Citizenship became part of the statutory curriculum for all learners in NI with effect from 2007.
MAG	The Ministerial Advisory Group on advancing shared education. It was established in July 2012 by the Minister of Education; its findings set the foundations for the Shared Education Policy.
MLD	Moderate Learning Difficulties.
NDNA	New Decade, New Approach is the agreement that was negotiated in 2020 between the British and Irish Governments and the NI political parties to restore the NI executive following a three-year hiatus.
NI	Northern Ireland – the state that was brought into existence under the terms of the 1920 Government of Ireland Act on the 3rd May 1921 following, and in response to, the setting up of the Irish Free State.
NICCY	The NI Commissioner for Children and Young People's primary role is to ensure that children and young people have access to the rights enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in their day-to-day lives.
NICIE	Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education is a Voluntary organisation that was established in 1987 to promote and support the development of Integrated education in Northern Ireland.
NIHE	The Northern Ireland Housing Executive is the public housing authority for the region and its largest social housing landlord.
NIHRC	The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission was established under the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement in 1998 – it is funded by the UK Government but is an independent public body.

NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency is an executive agency within the Department of Finance. It is responsible for the collection and publication of statistics related to the economy, population and society of Northern Ireland – including the Census.
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher – a teacher who has successfully completed their ITE but has yet to complete their statutory induction (generally twelve months employment as a full-time teacher).
OFMDFM	Office of the First Minister (and) Deputy First Minister (or The Executive Office) is the devolved government department that has overall responsibility for the running of the NI Executive. The First Minister and deputy First Minister of the NI Assembly have joint responsibility for the department.
PfG	Programme for Government is the NI Government's schedule of agreed priorities and targets for the mandated period between elections to the Assembly.
PGCE	Post Graduate Certificate in Education.
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PPS	Post-primary School – the generic term for mainstream schools that educate children aged between 11 and 16 or 18. The term includes both non-selective schools and Grammar schools.
PPTC	Post-primary Transfer Consortium as a group that co-ordinates the assessment of pupils who are seeking entry to 34 of NI's 72 Grammar schools.
PS	Primary School – the generic term for mainstream schools that educate children aged between the ages of 4 and 11.
QUB	The Queen's University Belfast is the oldest of the two universities in NI. It received its initial charter in 1845.

RISE	The multidisciplinary Regional Integrated Support for Education service was created in 2018 to enable collaborative working practices between the health and social care and education sectors,
RoI	The Republic of Ireland officially came into being in August 1949. The Act that established the new Republic removed the remaining elements of British sovereignty that had been retained when the Irish Free State was created in 1921.
RTU	The Regional Training Unit provides support for the professional development of leaders and senior managers in all schools in NI.
SDLP	The Social Democratic and Labour Party is a political party in the NI Assembly aligned with the Catholic/Nationalist bloc.
SELF	Shared Education Learning Forum was established in 2011 to bring the practitioner voice to the debate on shared education in NI.
SEN	Special Educational Needs can include a specific learning difficulty, a recognised disability (such as hearing impairment), or emotional/social difficulties.
SLD	Severe Learning Difficulties
SSP	The Sustainable Schools Policy was produced by DE in 2009.
STEM	A broad term used to group the academic disciplines of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics.
T:BUC	Together Building a United Community was introduced in 2013 to accompany the 2011-15 Programme for Government. It replaced the NI government's previous community relations strategy, CSI.
TESS	The Traveller Education Support Service supports schools, Traveller children and young people and their families. It is funded by DENI through the Education Authority.
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

UK	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; UK is comprised of four separate nations (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) with varying degrees of political autonomy.
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UU	Ulster University was established as the New University of Ulster in 1968 – in 1984 it merged with the Ulster Polytechnical College and dropped the epithet 'New'. UU covers four campuses: Magee, Coleraine, Jordanstown and Belfast.
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment
YCNI	The Youth Council for Northern Ireland is an 'arm's length' advisory body of the Department of Education – it was established to provide leadership and independent advice on youth work.
VOYPIC	The Voice of Young People in Care is a charity that was created in 1993 to promote the rights and voice of children in care and care leavers.