



Education and Training Inspectorate

An Evaluation of the Quality Assurance of

Community Relations Funding

in a range of

Formal and Non-formal Education Settings

June 2009

Providing Inspection Services for
Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This evaluation focuses on the extent to which those who administer the various strands of funding for Community Relations (CR) on behalf of the Department of Education (DE) monitor and assure the quality of provision at the different management levels.

BACKGROUND

1.2 The DENI Circular 1987/47 launched the Cross-Community Contact Scheme (CCCS) which was designed to encourage schools and youth groups to bring together young people of different community backgrounds and to foster the development of positive, cross-community relations. Participation in the scheme was, and remains, a voluntary process. In 1989, as part of the Education Reform Order, the promotion of cross-community understanding was formalised in the school curriculum through the introduction of the cross-curricular (later educational) themes of Education for Mutual Understanding and Cultural Heritage.

1.3 The requirement for schools to promote the development of young people as active citizens was mainstreamed by the Education Order 2007. The key curriculum objectives are to develop the young person as an individual, as a contributor to society and as a contributor to the economy and the environment. The introduction of Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU) in the primary sector and Local and Global Citizenship (LGC) in the post-primary sector has provided more opportunities to develop the pupils' awareness of the need to respect and value the views of others. In the current Northern Ireland Curriculum (NIC) the emphasis on fostering attitudes and dispositions such as community spirit, concern for others, tolerance, respect and openness to new ideas, supports the development of the young person as a citizen. The acceptance and understanding of others is a core principle of youth work, a principle which is supported by the emphasis on the promotion of Equity, Diversity and Interdependence (EDI).

1.4 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 underpins the creation of a shared society within which each person is valued. In the Programme for Government for 2008-2011, the Executive's over-arching aim is to build 'a peaceful, fair and prosperous society'. One of the five key strategic and interdependent priorities is to 'promote tolerance, inclusion and health and well-being'. The Executive recognises that economic growth cannot be taken forward in isolation from determined efforts to transform our society and enhance our environment. Building up trust and confidence in communities is a central tenet of CR work.

1.5 With an annual budget of £3.5m each year, there are four strands of funding: the Schools Community Relations Programme (SCRCP), which is administered by the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs), accounts for one-third of the funding; the Youth Service Community Relations Support Scheme (YSCRSS), which is administered by youth personnel in the five ELBs, accounts for almost one-quarter of the total; the Community Relations Youth Service Support Scheme (CRYSSS),

which is administered by the Youth Council for Northern Ireland (YCNI), receives £162,000; and 26 core-funded groups, which are administered directly by the Youth and Community Relations Branch (the branch) in DE, receive one-third of the funding.

1.6 Since the introduction of the CCCS in 1987, DE has had responsibility for the initiative. In 1996, the SCRP and YSCRSS schemes were assigned to the ELBs with DE maintaining an overview and liaising regularly through the two inter-board panels. Department of Education retained responsibility for the other strands.

METHODOLOGY

1.7 The evidence for the evaluation is based on discussions with DE officials within the branch, ELB officers with a CR remit, teachers and school leaders, representatives of core-funded organisations, youth workers, and informal discussions with young people. Inspectors also visited a representative range of CR activities in a variety of formal and non-formal settings.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

- There are over-arching aims for the CR funding provided by the branch, but there is no coherent policy framework which outlines clearly what is required of the education system at the various key stages in terms of its contribution to the improvement of CR.
- There is inadequate monitoring and evaluation of the quality of provision because of an absence of a coherent framework for progression and agreed quality indicators against which both the branch and the organisations which it funds can evaluate their work and progress. It is, therefore, impossible to make a valid assessment of the standards achieved or to have a definitive overview of how successful such work has been.
- The use of self-evaluation to review provision and effect improvement varies greatly. Success is often judged by the enthusiasm and enjoyment of participants, and the development of personal and interpersonal skills, rather than by CR objectives. There is some evidence of attempts to measure understanding and attitudinal changes through base-lining and post-programme evaluation. The development of such measurements is a priority which requires continued support.
- Existing criteria for the allocation of CR funding is restrictive, limits current practice, does not take account of demographic and societal change and does not encourage progression in CR work.
- The system of four separate funding strands is unnecessarily complex; there is little evidence of meaningful connections between the strands, which provide support for young people within the same communities. Annual funding is impacting negatively on CR provision.

- There are few connections between the CR work of the branch and that of other branches within DE. There is little evidence that the promotion and development of good community relations have been priorities within DE. It is appropriate that a review of the need for, and the best way of funding, CR activity is underway.
- Those officers in the statutory and voluntary sector who have a remit for CR work demonstrate a strong commitment to promoting better relations. They have worked with schools and youth groups to begin to build progression into the CR activities. It continues to be important that those who lead such work take account of local circumstances and plan with the participating groups to reflect local needs.
- There remains the need for more consistency in planning and provision between those officers who provide support for schools and youth CR work, and between CR officers and those working within other sections of the ELBs.
- There are limited mechanisms for the dissemination of good practice both within and across the various funding strands. The Community Relations Education Northern Ireland (CRENI) website could be used more effectively to provide case studies of good practice.
- There is insufficient in-service training (INSET) in the area of CR. Teachers reported that they had little training and needed Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in this area.
- There is evidence of core-funded groups working effectively with youth and school groups to achieve a range of well-conceived and clearly focused outcomes. Teachers and youth leaders prefer to use the expertise of core-funded groups in helping young people deal with difficult and sensitive issues. There is insufficient evidence of the initial auditing of needs by core-funded groups to inform the provision of CR activities and to build capacity within organisations.
- Those who organise CR exchanges manage the programmes well and, in all of the activities observed, within a safe and purposeful climate. There is too great a variation in the opportunities for learning, ranging from 'contact programmes' with a focus on personal and social development to more challenging CR work. The extent to which CR work is being linked effectively to the schools' or youth curricula varies significantly.
- Given that involvement is voluntary, the access for young people to CR work depends upon the interest and commitment of individual teachers and leaders and the parameters within which individual ELBs operate. There is, therefore, an inbuilt inequality in the access to CR education in the current structures.

- The introduction of PDMU in the primary sector has encouraged teachers to engage with CR issues. The links at post-primary level to LGC are often more tenuous and CR is perceived as an 'add-on' rather than integral to the curriculum.
- The longevity of CR projects and partnerships is due to the commitment of individual teachers and leaders. While realistic objectives and targets are set for the young people within the organisation, there is a variation in the targets set for improving CR within the wider community. There is a need for more connections between policy-makers, leaders of organisations and communities to increase the benefits of CR work.

2. MAIN FINDINGS

2.1 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The effectiveness of DE in providing for strategic leadership and clear direction to achieve high standard outcomes for CR.

2.1.1 Those officers who have a remit for CR funding within the branch, demonstrate a clear commitment to the principles and the work. There are overarching aims, but there is currently no coherent policy framework which outlines clearly what is required of the education system in terms of its contribution to the improvement of CR. The lack of clarity within government about the current status of documents such as 'A Shared Future' in supporting the development of departmental policies has resulted in the absence of a clear and shared vision and focus for the direction of CR work.

2.1.2 Existing criteria for the application for CR funding limits current practice and does not take account of demographic and societal change. Organisations are unable to address wider diversity issues and single identity work as a result of restrictive criteria, which are becoming increasingly outdated in a changing society. Schools, youth groups and core-funded groups feel that greater flexibility is needed to enable organisations to respond to the particular circumstances of their local communities.

2.1.3 There is inadequate monitoring and evaluation of the quality of provision and currently no assessment of the impact of CR funding to date. There is an absence of clear quality indicators against which organisations can evaluate their work and progress. The branch currently focuses on the administration of the scheme, not on the assessment of the quality of provision. Department of Education has a detailed knowledge of all grant payments and there are secure procedures for the administration of the funding.

2.1.4 The current system of four separate funding strands is unnecessarily complex; there is little evidence of meaningful connections between the strands, which provide support for young people within the same communities. Evidence indicates that the allocation of funding on an annual basis is impacting negatively on programmes; it does not allow participants to plan over a three-year cycle nor

encourage progression in CR work. Equally, organisations cited the limits placed on funding for areas such as residentials and transport as restricting their ability to develop their CR activity.

2.1.5 Department of Education requires bi-annual reports but not development or action plans for core-funded groups. There are inadequate processes for quality assuring the content and progression in the action plans and project evaluations of those who manage funding on behalf of DE. The branch has acknowledged the need for groups to engage in more rigorous self-evaluation, which will require clear, agreed quality indicators.

2.1.6 There are currently few connections between the CR work of the branch and that of other branches within DE. There is little evidence that the promotion and development of good CR have been priorities within DE. The branch recognises the shortcomings in the present system. It is appropriate that a review of the need for, and the best way of funding, CR activity is underway.

The effectiveness of those who manage CR funding on behalf of DE in providing for strategic leadership and clear direction to achieve high standard outcomes.

2.1.7 The ELB officers who have a remit for CR work demonstrate a good knowledge of, and a strong commitment to, promoting better relations. They have a wealth of experience and have worked together with the branch over the years to develop CR work and to encourage progress in thinking and in practice. For example, they have worked with schools and youth groups to begin to build progression into the CR activities. There are, however, different approaches to CR work within, on occasions, an overall ELB policy, and on other occasions, with a greater emphasis on international as well as local work. There needs to be more focused evidence as to how the different types of provision are supporting the promotion of CR work to the benefit of the children and young people within the ELB. It continues to be important that those who lead such work take account of local circumstances and plan with the participating groups to reflect local needs.

2.1.8 There are two inter-board groups - one for schools and one for youth - which meet regularly and which members of the branch attend. While there is evidence of the work of each group informing the other, there remains the need for more joined-up thinking and provision. An officer within YCNI has direct responsibility for promoting CR within voluntary youth groups, and for monitoring the work. A more direct link between the inter-board groups and the work of YCNI with voluntary youth groups would provide a more coherent overview of the progress being made in a given geographical area.

2.1.9 There are differences across the ELBs in the management and administration of CR funding. Within the ELBs, the CR officers work at different levels; some are located directly within the Curriculum, Advisory and Support Service (CASS) with CR as their main work; others are located in the youth service. In two of the ELBs the same officer administers both the schools' and the youth CR schemes. The variation in staffing levels and time available has resulted in differences in approaches and support levels.

2.1.10 It is inappropriate that there is a significant variation in the links that are made within ELBs between those involved in CR work and other sections within the ELB. In the best practice, the CR officer has developed worthwhile links with, for example, the Inclusion and Diversity Section or initiatives such as the Creative Youth Partnerships (CYP). Those who lead CR work in the future need to be strategically placed within the Education and Skills Authority, to streamline their approaches and to make more distinct links with other improvement strategies.

2.1.11 Schools and youth centres praised the support provided by ELB officers, particularly the assistance provided in aspects of administration, the development of suitable programmes, the liaison with CR facilitators (mainly, but not exclusively, core-funded groups) and the process of evaluation. There are variations in the nature and type of support provided and in the management of CR budgets, and in the management of substitute cover by ELBs. These variations have a direct impact on the equality of access of children and young people to CR experiences.

2.1.12 There are currently limited mechanisms for the dissemination of good practice both within and across the ELBs. The development of the CRENI website has been helpful in assisting the application process and the SCRP Guide to Effective Practice has provided useful ideas and support for schools. The website could be used more effectively to disseminate case studies of good practice in order to inform progression. The work of the voluntary youth groups has been shared through a series of useful documents to promote reflective practice.

2.1.13 Increasingly, it is being recognised that, while CR work is centred on bringing young people together, it needs to be embedded within the community. There are a few good examples of developing CR work through building the capacity of teachers and leaders, and parents. There is currently insufficient INSET in the area of CR for teachers and youth workers.

The effectiveness of core-funded groups in providing for strategic leadership and clear direction to achieve high standard outcomes for CR.

2.1.14 The majority of those who work for the core-funded groups are highly experienced, committed individuals with a good range of professional qualifications and experience. The majority of core-funded groups work effectively with youth and school groups to achieve a range of well-conceived and clearly focused outcomes, particularly with regard to the handling of sensitive and challenging issues. A few groups have tried to match their work to CR aims in order to access funding and to develop this part of their work. In the best practice, core-funded groups work alongside organisation leaders, parents and the wider community from the initial planning through to the final evaluation. In one programme observed, nursery schools in an interface area work effectively in partnership with a core-funded group and a range of external agencies. With the support of the ELB, they deliver a jointly planned and evaluated project, which provides worthwhile opportunities for the children and the parents to interact in a variety of settings. The core-funded group has actively encouraged the involvement of fathers and the wider community.

2.1.15 In the least effective practice, the opportunities to develop the skills and capacity of the teachers and leaders are under-developed. There were instances of teachers and leaders being observers of, rather than participants in, the CR activities. There is insufficient evidence of the initial auditing of needs to inform the delivery of CR activities and to build capacity within organisations. The core-funded groups need to ensure that they provide programmes which meet more adequately the defined needs of the client group.

2.1.16 All, including the Inspectorate, acknowledge the difficulty in measuring attitudinal change over time. There is some evidence of attempts to measure understanding and attitudinal changes through base-lining and post-programme evaluation. The development of such measurements is a priority which requires continued support.

2.1.17 There are variations in the approach to preparing aspiring teachers for CR work across the Higher Education Institutions. Positive developments in Initial Teacher Education include CR work across the areas of learning, student teachers broadening their experience through placements in schools of different management types, and peer leadership and residential courses organised and evaluated by the students. The useful mapping of CR work to the teacher competences develops and enhances the students' professional knowledge, understanding and skills.

The effectiveness of the management of those organisations which receive funding, in providing for strategic leadership and clear direction to achieve high standard outcomes for CR.

2.1.18 Much of the success and longevity of CR projects and partnerships is due to the dedication and commitment of individual teachers and leaders who work well beyond their contractual commitment. The high risk is that projects can be discontinued when individuals move on unless the CR activity is firmly embedded within the organisation.

2.1.19 Those receiving CR funding set targets for the young people within the organisation, although these need to be more closely linked to attitudinal change. There is a variation in the targets set for improving CR within the wider community. Teachers reported that CR work is highlighted in school magazines and reported to the Board of Governors. Many feel that there is a lack of recognition for this work at a strategic level and express a desire for greater ownership by the whole organisation. There are good examples of CR projects having a positive effect on the whole school community, and in a few instances, beyond the school into the wider community. As the review of this work continues, there is a need for more connections between policy-makers, leaders of organisations and communities to increase the benefits of CR work.

2.1.20 The use of self-evaluation to review provision and effect improvement varies greatly. Evaluation is currently based on the professional judgements of participating teachers, leaders and the views of the participants. Success is often judged by the enthusiasm and enjoyment of participants rather than by CR objectives. There is a lack of critical reflection on much of the work resulting in a failure to sustain continuous improvement and to raise standards.

2.2 QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

The effectiveness of planning at various levels in implementing CR objectives.

2.2.1 A significant amount of planning is required for CR programmes: the liaison with CR partners, young people and parents, arrangements with external providers, the organisation of transport and dealing with other administrative matters. Those who organise CR exchanges manage the programmes well, on occasions, within a limited amount of time.

2.2.2 There is variation in the importance which the CR programme is given in whole organisation planning, as a priority in the School Development Plan (SDP) or in the overall plans for a youth group. Consequently, the extent to which CR work is being linked effectively to the schools or youth curricula varies significantly. Community Relations work needs to be embedded more into strategic planning in order to provide a coherent experience and to support the progression in the development of young people's knowledge, understanding and skills. As part of such strategic planning, there is a need for an increased input by young people and their parents into the planning of programmes. There is little evidence of consistency in young people's involvement in planning, or of parents having a direct say about how the content of the CR programme meets the needs of their child.

The effectiveness of practice in meeting the needs and interests of young people.

2.2.3 There is too great a variation in the opportunities for learning, ranging from 'contact programmes' to more challenging CR work. Schools and youth centres report that involvement in CR programmes provides a vital mechanism to meet others from different communities. The programmes provide young people with opportunities to investigate issues that are relevant to their interests and their needs, help to foster values and encourage them to understand better their role as active citizens in the community. There needs to be a more overt link between CR work and the rest of the curriculum to provide a more coherent and progressive learning experience.

2.2.4 Teachers and youth leaders indicate that they prefer to use the expertise of the core-funded groups in helping young people deal with difficult and sensitive issues. There are examples of CR groups, who do not receive core funding from DE, providing support which the schools and groups consider relevant to their local needs. Most often, organisations stated their preference to be supported by groups who understood their particular setting.

2.2.5 The introduction of PDMU in the primary sector has encouraged teachers to engage with CR issues and with core-funded groups to the benefit of the children. Significantly there are a few instances when the CR work supports well the development of, for example, literacy. While there is scope for such links at post-primary level through, for example, LGC, the links are often more tenuous and too often CR is perceived as an 'add-on' rather than integral to the curriculum. There are good examples of innovative work through subject areas such as history. In one

activity observed, year 10 pupils came together to develop a shared understanding of the First World War through a series of active learning tasks which also promoted problem-solving and decision-making skills. Conversely, in another activity, the potential of a visit to a historically significant building to discuss difference was not fully exploited.

2.2.6 A diverse range of programmes is in operation, ranging from short-term projects and visits, to longer-term schemes involving young people, parents and the wider community. In the best, but less frequent, practice observed or reported, organisations are developing progressive longitudinal programmes that build upon previous work and that link to pertinent aspects of the curriculum. Through active learning and a variety of appropriate strategies, young people are encouraged to think about themselves and others, to interact and to develop meaningful relationships through a range of purposeful and suitable activities. Programme facilitators use judiciously both planned and unplanned learning experiences to engage the interests and to develop the understanding of the young people.

2.2.7 Too often there is an imbalance between the personal and social development of the participants and the development of their understanding of CR issues. Organisations need to consider whether such activities are equipping young people well enough to cope with difference and to deal with difficult issues.

The effectiveness of assessment in promoting high quality outcomes for participants in CR programmes.

2.2.8 Organisations reported that the assessment and evaluation of CR programmes is achieved mainly through the professional judgements of teachers and leaders and from oral and written comments by young people, parents and core-funded groups. It is acknowledged that, on occasions, the evaluations lack rigour and detail. There is variation in the nature of the assistance for evaluations and of the feedback from the ELBs; in the best, but less frequent practice, officers provide comprehensive written analysis. In the voluntary youth sector there has been good progress made in beginning to develop more reflective practice with accompanying documentation. There are significant inconsistencies in the manner in which CR work has been evaluated, with the result that there is no definitive overview of how successful such work has been.

The effectiveness of the various strands of CR in working with others.

2.2.9 The core-funded groups provide good support to the organisations with which they work in developing the understanding of the more challenging aspects of CR. There is, however, little collaboration or joint working to use the overall intelligence and experience of the groups to the benefit of those with whom they work. There is also insufficient evidence of a collaborative approach between the formal and non-formal education sectors. Community Relations work needs to be centred more clearly on the needs of children and young people; it needs to be linked more appropriately with other DE initiatives such as Extended Schools, Specialist Schools and other school improvement measures. As the Area Learning Communities develop and area-based planning becomes clearer, there is the opportunity for CR work to become an integral, and important, part of those developments.

2.2.10 Given that involvement is voluntary, the access for young people to CR work depends upon the interest and commitment of individual teachers and leaders. There is, therefore, an inbuilt inequality in the access to CR education in the current structures. 'Our Children and Young People - Our Pledge: A Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland 2006-2016' aims to ensure that all children and young people fulfil their potential by helping them to get the best possible start in life. The overall pledge is 'to deliver on a shared vision for all our children and young people' part of which is to help them to 'contribute positively to community and society'. Community Relations has an important role in ensuring that our children and young people experience the reality of 'living in a society which respects their rights'.

2.3 ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.3.1 The absence of a coherent framework for progression and agreed quality indicators against which to measure CR work means that it is impossible to make a valid assessment of the standards achieved.

2.3.2 In all the activities observed, the climate was safe, supportive, purposeful and well-managed. Staff worked effectively to ensure the welfare of participants. There is, however, a variation in the outcomes for young people. Teachers and youth leaders reported that the programmes provide tangible benefits such as the development of personal and interpersonal skills and the formation of friendships between young people from different backgrounds. In many instances the young people develop a better understanding of society, of similarity and difference, and an appreciation of their role as active citizens.

2.3.4 Education and Library Board officers reported some resistance to the movement from contact activities to more challenging and sensitive CR work. In the best practice, the CR project has clear objectives and develops over a key stage or there is a three-year project which allows for progression in the participants' understanding of CR. Less effective were activities with selected groups, often where young people are chosen at random and the make-up of a group may change as the class changes, with fewer opportunities for sustained contact or engagement outside the programme activities.

2.3.5 There are positive signs emerging from the programmes where parents have been brought together. Such work is either at an early stage of development or, on occasions, is highly sensitive and it is not yet possible to determine the benefits to the wider community.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 STRENGTHS

3.1.1 The strengths of CR work include:

- the commitment and dedication of those officers, teachers and youth workers who promote better CR;

- the good opportunities which the teachers, youth workers and core-funded groups provide for children and young people to meet and work in safe and managed environments;
- the examples of very good activities and innovative methodologies to help children, young people and on occasion their parents engage in real and purposeful ways;
- the commitment of the children and young people, as demonstrated through their interest, motivation and their positive engagement; and
- the expertise and high quality of the support provided by professionally-trained specialists in the majority of the core-funded groups.

3.2 AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

3.2.1 The areas for improvement include the need to:

- draw up and implement a clear, agreed policy together which includes more robust structures at all levels for the monitoring and evaluation of the quality of CR work;
- develop a more collaborative and consistent approach to CR work across the different strands of funding and the different sectors, with clear success criteria; and
- review the current arrangements to meet more effectively locally identified CR needs in line with area-based planning.

3.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Government departments need to recognise that there is a continuing need for CR work which reflects, at the same time, the diversity and changing needs of communities in NI, while retaining the importance of building bridges between the two main traditions.
- Department of Education needs to draw up a clear policy and framework which embeds CR work in the schools and youth curricula as part of the current revisions, and which includes agreed quality indicators to inform the rigorous monitoring and evaluation of CR work.
- Those who promote CR need to support a rationalised number of core-funded groups whose members have expertise and knowledge of local situations, reflecting the developments in area-based planning. They should use the work undertaken with schools and youth groups to build more effectively the capacity of teachers, youth workers and leaders.

3.4 Those involved in CR have carried out much good work since the inception of this programme. The investment in this area has yielded benefits, yet current structures do not ensure appropriate levels of progression and quality outcomes for all. As NI emerges from conflict and works towards the common purpose of building a 'peaceful, fair and prosperous society', it is essential that CR work is maintained and developed to provide the best possible outcomes for all of its children and young people and for the benefit of society as a whole.

ORGANISATIONS VISITED OR WITH WHOM DISCUSSIONS WERE HELD

Schools Community Relations Programme:

Edenderry Nursery School, Belfast
Holy Cross Nursery School
Play-A-Way Centre

Ballyoran Primary School
Drumahoe Primary School
Hart Memorial Primary School
Portadown Integrated Primary School
St Colmcille's Primary School, Derry
St Theresa's Primary School, Lurgan

Banbridge High School
Coleraine Seven Schools programme
Lisnagarvey High School
Magherafelt Five Schools programme
Newtownbreda High School
Omagh High School
St Cecilia's College
St Columba's College
St Patrick's High School, Lisburn

Community Relations Core Funded Scheme:

An Creagan
Childrens' Project
Corrymeela
Community Relations in Schools (CRIS)
Early Years Organisation
Forthspring
Glebe House (Harmony Trust)
University of Ulster (School of Education)
Verbal Arts Centre
Wetlands Trust

Youth Service Community Relations Support Scheme:

EDI OCN Course, SEELB
Peer Education Project, Newry
Phoenix-Black Mountain Action Group
Portrush Youth Centre
SEELB Berlin visit (preparatory work)
Youth Information Centre, Waterside
YMCA – Knightsbridge, Belfast

Youth groups funded by YCNI:

Ocean Youth Trust
Wheelworks

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