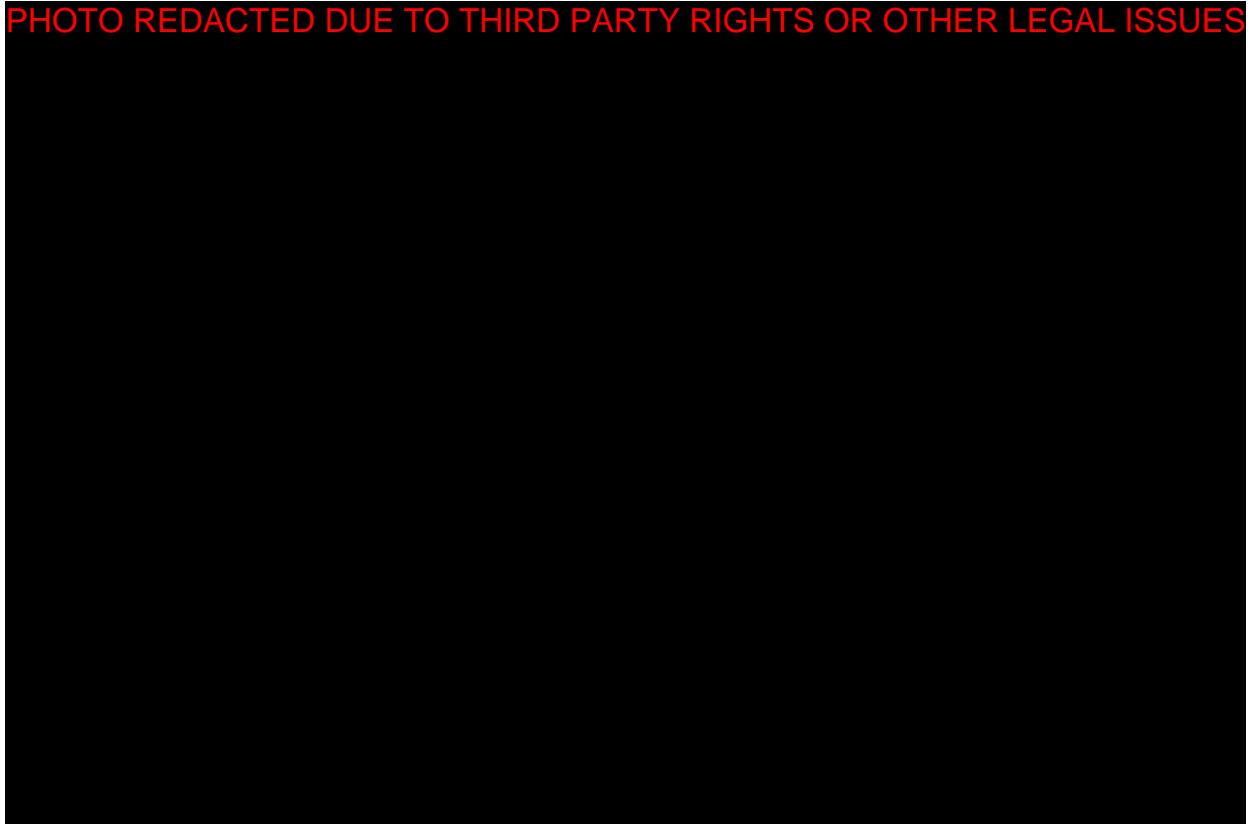


Integrated Education Act Strategy and Action Plan

Analysis Report on the Outcome of Public Consultation

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Summary

1. Attached below is an overview of the consultation process conducted for the Integrated Education (IE) Act Strategy & Action Plan. This report aims to provide an understanding of the consultation process, key themes, findings and insights gleaned from the various stakeholder engagement exercises to assist in formulating the final report.
2. The consultation process encompassed various methods to ensure a comprehensive representation of stakeholder perspectives. It involved engaging with a diverse range of participants, including representatives from the public, sectoral bodies, educationalists, and community organisations. The consultation methods employed included online surveys, focus groups, on-line events, and written submissions.
3. Throughout the consultation process, key themes emerged, reflecting the shared priorities and expectations of stakeholders regarding Integrated Education and the IE Act. These themes encompassed future orientation, equality and inclusion, shared society and reconciliation, parental choice and demand, ethos and values, economic prosperity, tolerance and respect, and the importance of political support. These themes underscored the stakeholders' emphasis on fostering a supportive and inclusive educational environment.
4. The consultation process provided an opportunity for stakeholders to express their perspectives on the practical implications of the Act, Strategy and Action Plan. Valuable insights were shared regarding increasing parental choice, enhancing education quality, effective resource allocation, addressing sectarianism, and promoting accountability in the implementation of the IE Act. Stakeholders emphasized the need for strong leadership, adequate funding, and ongoing monitoring to ensure the success of Integrated Education initiatives.
5. In summary, the consultation process for the IE Act Strategy & Action Plan demonstrated a wide and varied engagement of stakeholders, representing a range of perspectives and expertise. The collective input received reflects the stakeholders' commitment to creating an inclusive, equitable, and forward-thinking education system through Integrated Education.
6. This overview aims to provide an understanding of the consultation process and its outcomes. It is envisaged that the key themes and insights gathered throughout the process will be form the basis of the evidence required to draft a report on Integrated Education required by the Act and, shape further reiterations of the Strategy.

Introduction

7. The Integrated Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 became law on the 26 October 2022. This Act placed a duty on the Department of Education (DE) to prepare, publish and maintain a strategy for the encouragement, facilitation, support for and provision of Integrated Education. The Act aims to create a more inclusive and equitable education system that provides all students with the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their background or circumstances.
8. The Strategy sets out the actions the Department currently takes to encourage, facilitate and support Integrated Education. It highlights a range of further work that will be taken forward to implement the Act and as required by the Act. It sets out a Plan containing details and targets for the delivery of those actions by the Department and its delivery partners.
9. As part of the implementation phase, DE sought views on the Strategy and Action Plan through a short consultation questionnaire. The questionnaire was made available on the Department's website and all interested parties were invited to contribute.
10. In addition, as part of the consultation process for the Act, DE sought feedback from a wide range of stakeholders, including political parties and sectoral bodies. It provided an opportunity for participants to express their views, share experiences, and contribute to the development of an implementation strategy that aligns with the goals and aspirations of the Act.
11. Furthermore, the Department hosted two online events, which were conducted using a Mentimeter presentation to provide additional opportunities to gather views from a range of interested parties.
12. The Department would like to extend our sincere gratitude to all who participated in the consultation exercise, generously offering their time, insights, and perspectives. Their contributions have played an instrumental role in shaping this report and will contribute to the formulation of an implementation strategy that is inclusive, comprehensive, and responsive to the needs of our educational system.

Context

13. The Northern Ireland Assembly passed the Integrated Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 (the Act), updating the legislative framework that underpins Integrated Education in Northern Ireland with the intention of supporting future growth of the integrated sector. The Act obtained Royal Assent on 26 April 2022 following its passage through the Assembly. All provisions, unless otherwise specified, came into force six months after the Act received Royal Assent: 26 October 2022.
14. Section 1 of the IE Act provides a legal definition of Integrated Education which has been extended beyond that laid out in previous legislation around reasonable numbers of Protestants and Catholics to include the education of those from different cultures, differing socio-economic backgrounds and abilities.
15. Integrated Education, as defined by the Act, means the education together, in an integrated school, of
 - Those of different cultures and religious beliefs and of none, including reasonable numbers of both Protestant and Roman Catholic children or young persons;
 - Those who are experiencing socio-economic deprivation and those who are not; and
 - Those of different abilities.
16. Section 3 of the Act requires the Department to consult with any relevant body appearing to have as its objective the encouragement or promotion of Integrated Education when exercising any function relating to Integrated Education which is defined in Section 1 of the Act. The Department has designated Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) as the relevant body under the Act.
17. As required by the Act, the Strategy and associated Action Plan were published on 26 April 2023 and does not propose any new policy but rather is a description of existing departmental policy with respect to Integrated Education and the requirements of legislation as set within the Act. It also sets out the Department of Education's vision for Integrated Education which is to create;

'A vibrant and supported network of sustainable integrated schools providing high-quality Integrated Education to children and young people'.
18. The public consultation was launched on 31 August 2023 with a closing date of 30 November 2023.

Consultation Proposals

19. To ensure that as many stakeholders as possible would get an opportunity to contribute, DE used a variation of measures to elicit responses. These included the DE website and Citizen Space (an on-line platform) with the option to download the consultation. DE also held two on-line events to further encourage people to take part and have their say. For those stakeholders without ready access to the internet or a computer, hard copy documents were made available on request. Associated partners, such as the Integrated Education Fund (IEF) and NICIE were asked to promote the consultation to members and other interested parties and did so.
20. A total of 19 questions were posed to garner opinions on the IE Strategy and Action Plan. To ensure that a broad section of opinion was represented, questions 1 - 6 were asked to establish the role of the respondent and their educational background (parent/pupil/teacher) and if they were a member of a sectoral or community body.
21. For the remaining 13 questions respondents were asked to "Agree or Disagree" or to "Neither Agree nor Disagree" with a series of questions surrounding the Strategy and Action Plan. There was also provision made for the inclusion of free text. Some of these had a series of supplementary questions surrounding specific points relating to the Action Plan. Respondents were then given the opportunity to provide further comment regarding each of the Key Areas of the Strategy. Details of the remaining 13 questions and analysis of the responses received is available at Annex 1.
22. The consultation questions were constructed to reflect the key areas outlined in the Action Plan. These key areas can be broken down as follows:
 - Respondent Information
 - Requirements of the Act
 - Communication & Consultation
 - Demand
 - Measuring Progress
 - Integrated Ethos
 - Regulations.

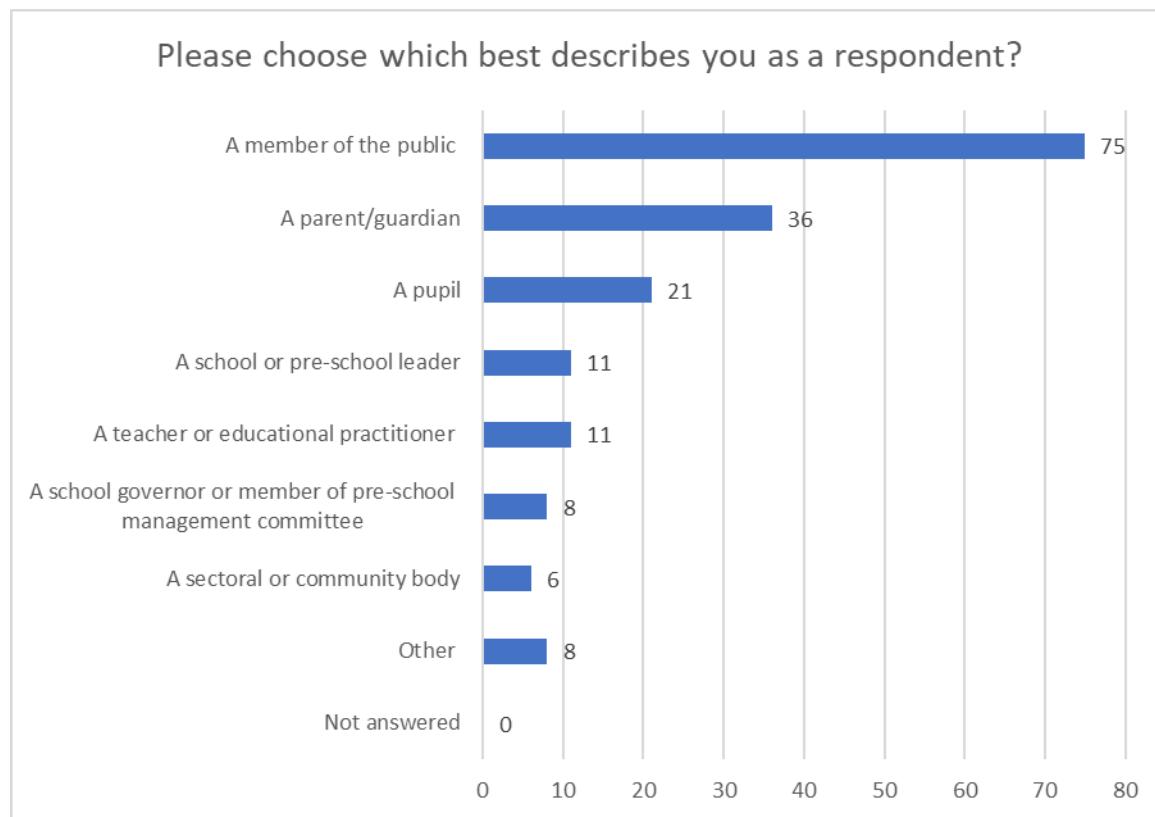
Summary of Responses

23. The following charts set out the responses to determine the background of the responders in detail and are summarised in the following paragraphs.

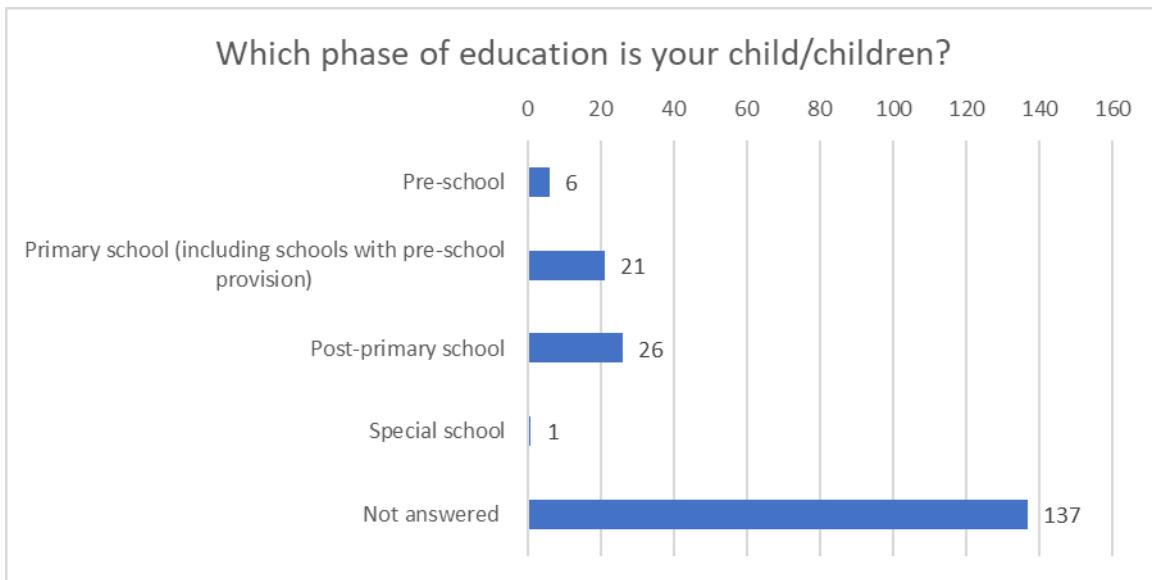
24. A total of 176 Citizen Space responses were received by the close of the consultation. Anything received after this has not been considered in this response.

25. The greatest number of responses were received from members of the public (42.61%) followed by a parent or guardian (20.45%). The fewest responses were received from a sectoral or community body (3.41%). However, Sectoral Bodies, representatives from Arm's Length Bodies and Political Parties contributed via written submissions.

26. As already noted, the Department is grateful for all those who took the time to respond to the consultation. The Department acknowledges that the broader subject on which the consultation touches is contentious with diverse views all of which are deeply held.



27. Responses from parents of post-primary school children (26 responses) and Primary Schools, including those with pre-school provision (21 responses) made up a bulk of responses from those with children currently at school. However, most overall responses in this category came from those who preferred not to answer or had no children currently at school (137 responses).



28. Further detail of the responses to Questions 7 – 19 relating to specifics of the IE Strategy & Action Plan received via Citizen Space can be found attached at Annex 1.

Summary & Analysis of Key Areas

29. Further summary, analysis and overall themes identified from responses can be found in Annex 1. Responses with percentages added regarding whether respondents either agreed or disagreed or neither agreed nor disagreed have also been included.

Responses from Sectoral Bodies

30. Section 3 of the Act requires the Department to consult with 'any body appearing to the Department to have an objective the encouragement or promotion of integrated education'. The following is a summary and overall analysis of the findings with comments made by such organisations.

Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education response

31. Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) agreed that consultation with key stakeholders is vital to ensuring the strategy and action plan are impactful and would encourage DE to include Integrated school leaders and practitioners. They suggested that young people should also be approached for consultation as they are the ones who will be living in the society impacted by the decisions made now.

32. NICIE contend that the impact of engagement needs to be monitored and any recommendations made by these key stakeholders should be addressed. There should also be assessment of demand for Integrated Education in the whole of Northern Ireland. In their view, the provision does not currently meet what communities and families want - but data is needed to fully understand this.

33. How demand is assessed is an area that NICIE wish to be considered carefully. When considering data relating to demand, NICIE suggest that all educational bodies and partners would need to be involved with this, to allow understanding and cooperation across all sectors. NICIE state that many groups involved in the consultation process were loudly opposed to the Integrated Education Bill and that there needs to be a genuine support from all sectors to allow access to Integrated Education places for the communities and families who want it.

34. NICIE request that increased funding and resources are allocated to support Integrated Education effectively. This includes promoting a better understanding of what Integrated Education entails among the public. NICIE suggest that a prevailing misconception and misunderstanding surrounding Integrated Education within Northern Ireland communities has hindered progress in certain areas. They believe it crucial for DE to take a proactive role in providing cohesive, accurate, and accessible information about Integrated Education, as part of their statutory duty.

35. The Integrated Education Act places a statutory duty on the Department of Education to encourage and facilitate the development of Integrated Education, including addressing the current unmet demand for places in Integrated Schools. NICIE are supportive of the proposed actions; think they are appropriate with the potential to lay a solid foundation for addressing key issues and questions surrounding the provision and availability of Integrated Education.

36. To ensure the effectiveness and usefulness of the data collected, NICIE think it essential to consider the perspectives and needs of all stakeholders in education. Findings and recommendations resulting from the data must be acted upon promptly and with genuine intention to drive meaningful change.

37. According to NICIE, proper understanding and awareness of Integrated Education are paramount. Accurate and accessible information about the definition and reality of Integrated Education is essential to dispel misconceptions and promote progress. The Department of Education should take the lead in providing consistent messaging as part of its statutory duty, fostering greater understanding and acceptance within the broader community.

38. Recognizing the valuable work already carried out by organisations such as the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) in supporting Integrated Schools, it is crucial to provide sufficient funding and resources to meet the growing demand they face. Facilitating more efficient partnerships

between the Education Authority (EA) and NICIE, drawing on the expertise available, will further strengthen the support provided to Integrated Schools.

39. NICIE are concerned that Area Planning to date has been about individual sectors bringing forward schools showing patterns of growth or decline in enrolments (and other sustainable indicators) rather than looking at areas and particular extent of choice within areas or innovative/creative ideas to ensure sustainable educational provision in areas. Therefore, NICIE would encourage a mindset shift within the Area Planning arena that is open to planning for the further development of Integrated Education/other ideas, where demand is assessed/demonstrated.
40. NICIE contend that the Area Planning process should involve options for Integrated Education going forward rather than relying on parents and individual schools solely being responsible for the development of Integrated Education. The guidance from the Area Planning Working Group Collaborative Subgroup does not include Transformation as an option as it is not deemed to be a 'collaborative' solution. NICIE believe this is counter-productive to the further development of Integrated Education. Schools in areas need to be made aware that Transformation is an option.
41. NICIE contend that existing provision does not reflect potential demand. There is a need to find a way to assess future demand for Integrated Education, not just demand for those schools that exist now. It is NICIE's understanding from Section 6 of the IE Act that the 'Education Authority must, for the purpose of assisting its strategic planning of the provision of education, take steps to ascertain the demand for integrated Education.' NICIE accept that Section 6 is a more complex area of the Act.
42. NICIE are supportive of The Causeway Project, which is a good example of collaboration between schools to provide stronger, educational provision at post primary level with an integrated ethos, which will encourage all parents to see this as an option in the Coleraine area. NICIE would like to see more innovative developments like this being planned for.
43. NICIE recognise that the Department is fully committed to active and ongoing monitoring of progress against delivery of the DE Integrated Education Act Strategy vision and the actions set out within the Action Plan.
44. To ensure the consistent implementation of the peace and reconciliation role of Integrated Education, it is imperative to provide adequate funding and training for teachers new to the sector. Without explicit and meaningful training, it is unrealistic to expect school staff, who are already burdened with heavy workloads, to fulfil this important responsibility consistently and effectively. Proper resources and financing must be allocated to support their efforts in a meaningful and sustainable manner.

Integrated Education Fund response

45. The Integrated Education Fund (IEF) expressed its disappointment that the draft strategy does not address many of the issues in Section 9 of the Integrated Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 (IE Act), highlighting several concerns with the Strategy & Action Plan. IEF suggest that the Strategy & Action Plan was not compliant with the requirement of the Act. Further, they suggested that this included conflating "shared education" with "Integrated Education," failing to provide support for Integrated Education and sufficient places in integrated schools, and not allocating the necessary resources for Integrated Education.
46. Further alleged failure to comply include no open 12-week consultation with knowledgeable individuals and groups, a lack of consultation in general, a failure to include targets, timetables, and measurable benchmarks for assessing the strategy's success and progress and publishing the strategy without adequate consultation.
47. IEF questioned the appropriateness of the governance structures set up to support implementation which includes a number of bodies that were openly hostile to the passing of the IE Act.
48. It is the view of the IEF that these violations undermine the effectiveness of the strategy and may impact upon a successful implementation. Their response argued that their challenges aim to rectify these breaches and ensure that the strategy aligns with the statutory requirements of promoting and supporting Integrated Education.
49. The IEF also identified five key points that it feels need to be addressed:
 - 25% of all pupils in Northern Ireland to attend an Integrated school by 31 December 2035, as demonstrated by the identification and assessment of demand.
 - A Department of Education grant is made available to all schools wishing to become Integrated.
 - Agree a fair and rational method of measuring parental preference for school type to be agreed and implemented by 31 December 2024.
 - Complete a review of development proposal and case for change process for Integrated schools, to be completed by 31 December 2024.
 - Independent review of the area planning process and consultation to be completed and recommendations implemented by 31 December 2024.

Controlled Schools Support Council response

50. The Controlled Schools Support Council (CSSC) acknowledges the ambition set forth in the Integrated Education Act Strategy and Action Plan, whilst appreciating that the Strategy will continue to evolve in response to the progress

& growth of the sector. They note that this is an initial Strategy which provides a broad overview of key actions but express uncertainty regarding it meeting the requirements of the Act. For example, they express concern that Provision 5 of the Act, which states the provision of IE should be within the context of Area Planning and overall sustainability of the school estate, has not adequately been considered.

51. However, they welcome the opportunity to contribute to the review & future development of the Strategy & Action Plan. They stress that the ambition to create a vibrant & sustainable network of schools providing high-quality education is a shared goal across all sectors.
52. CSSC agrees that it is through working in partnership and collaboration that the Integrated Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 can be implemented effectively to improve outcomes for our children and young people.
53. CSSC underscores their vision of empowering controlled schools to serve their communities and enrich the lives of children & young people. They recognise the changing nature of communities, which may lead to decisions by schools to transform to Controlled Integrated status to align with the wishes of the local community. CSSC believe that integrated schools can make a positive contribution by educating students from differing cultures, religious beliefs, socio-economic backgrounds and abilities and they support all controlled schools being diverse and inclusive.
54. CSSC acknowledges that additional funding will be required to support the implementation of the strategy but in the context of increasingly constrained financial resources it will be important for DE to keep resourcing of the strategy under review. CSSC would emphasise that whilst cost implications must be considered this cannot be to the detriment of other schools.
55. CSSC welcomes the Outcome Based Approach to monitor and evaluate Integrated Education. This will need to be included in the review of guidance in relation to monitoring and evaluating the success of Transformation.
56. CSSC stress the importance of collaboration with educational partners to support schools in the process of transformation and those who have already transformed to Controlled Integrated status. They express their willingness to contribute to the Strategy's review and future development through active participation in the working groups.
57. CSSC agrees that the extent to which consultation between the DE and NICIE occurs should be formalised and documented but would emphasise that this should be extended to include where consultation with other bodies is appropriate.

58. CSSC welcomes DE's intention to consider further how the demand for Integrated Education is identified, assessed, and monitored and notes DE's intention to undertake additional survey work that would explore parental preferences and the factors that underly these.

59. CSSC recognises the complexity of this issue and the gaps in available data. It agrees that no single data source or measure is likely to be sufficient to measure demand and be capable of being measured and monitored. The current means of assessing demand is incomplete and more reliable data is required. It is important to acknowledge that in aiming to meet demand for Integrated Education the overall sustainability of the school estate is an important consideration as endorsed in the Act.

60. Overall, CSSC's response reflects their commitment to promoting Integrated Education and their desire to ensure that the Strategy aligns with the Provisions set out in the Act, fosters inclusivity and good relations, and supports schools in their efforts to transform and provide high-quality education to all students.

Mentimeter On-Line Consultation Event

61. The online consultation event on the Integrated Education Act Strategy & Action Plan had a total of 14 attendees. The event was hosted by officials from the Department of Education (DE) through a Mentimeter presentation. The presentation included questions to test technology, gauge familiarity with Integrated Education and the accompanying Act, and measure understanding of the Strategy & Action Points. Attendees were also given the opportunity to provide free-text responses to elaborate on certain aspects of the Strategy & Action Plan.

62. The highest number of responders came from the general public (7), followed by sectoral bodies (2) and other (2) categories. There were also attendees from various educational backgrounds, including pre-school leaders, parents/guardians, and teachers/educational practitioners. Most of the attendees (13 out of 14) were familiar with the Integrated Education Act in Northern Ireland.

Mentimeter Summary & Overall Analysis

63. Attendees were asked to rate the Vision for Integrated Education presented in the strategy. The average score was 2.6, indicating a moderate agreement that the vision sets the appropriate ambition. However, a significant number of responders (average score of 3.8) felt that the vision did not go far enough, while a minority (average score of 1) thought it went too far.

64. In terms of familiarity with the Action Plan, the majority of responders (13 out of 16) indicated that they had read it, indicating a good level of engagement with the proposed actions.

65. When asked about the words or phrases that came to mind when hearing the term "Integrated Education," the responses reflected a range of themes. These included future orientation, equality, conflict resolution, cohesion, inclusion, shared future, and celebration of diversity. Attendees emphasized the need for intentional mixing of children and the belief that integrated education should be the norm. They also highlighted the role of Integrated Education in promoting positive outcomes such as a shared society, peace, reconciliation, and economic prosperity. Some responders expressed concerns about the Act's treatment of integrated schools and the acknowledgement of naturally integrated schools.

66. In terms of the significance of the Integrated Education Act for Northern Ireland, the responses emphasized various aspects. These included the Act's potential to bring about positive change, serve as a gold standard education system, promote equality of education, a vaccine against sectarianism, and improve financial efficiency. Responders also highlighted the Act's role in reconciliation, meeting parental demand, broadening the definition of integrated education, and providing opportunities for children of all abilities to receive quality education together.

67. The findings highlighted strong support for integrated education as a means to promote equality, reconciliation, and a shared future. The attendees emphasized the importance of parental choice, quality education, and the need for stronger political support to implement the Act effectively.

What you told us: Themes identified from comments re on-line consultation event

- Future-oriented: Integrated education was associated with terms like "future," "the way forward," and "future-proof," emphasizing its long-term benefits.
- Equality and inclusion: Attendees highlighted the importance of providing equal opportunities in education and promoting inclusivity for all students.
- Shared society and reconciliation: Integrated education was seen as a way to foster a shared society, promote reconciliation, break down barriers, and celebrate diversity.
- Parental choice and demand: The significance of parental choice, fulfilling parental demand, and expanding the availability of integrated education options was emphasized.

- Ethos and values: Attendees highlighted the importance of fostering a shared ethos, intentional mixing of children, and celebrating diversity within integrated education.
- Economic prosperity: Integrated education was viewed as contributing to economic prosperity, a stronger economy, and smart use of resources.
- Tolerance and respect: Integrated education was seen as fostering tolerance, respect, positive attitudes, and improved community relations.
- Political support: There was an emphasis on the need for political leaders to support integrated education and effectively implement the IE Act.

Responses from Other Bodies/ALBs/Political Parties

Other Bodies

Integrated AlumNI response

68. The Integrated AlumNI suggest that the Action Plan in its present form does not include any substantive actions to “encourage, facilitate and support integrated education” as required by Section 4 of the Integrated Education Act, and that the next Action Plan must have detailed actions to carry out this function.

69. It also comments that the Action Plan largely comprises of a list of things the Department is already doing and does not mark a step change in the Department’s actions to IE. The Integrated Education Act requires the Action Plan to include targets and measurable benchmarks which are currently not included. The new Action Plan must include these targets, modified to fit within the NICS Outcomes-Based Accountability framework.

70. Integrated AlumNI argue that given the limited capacity available to the Department, it should not overly focus on monitoring the ethos of schools, leaving this to NICIE. Departmental focus in this area will only remove resources from the much more urgent need to meet the overwhelming demand for Integrated Education.

71. In order to create an Action Plan that will meet the requirements of the Act, the Integrated AlumNI suggest that the Department must:

- Properly measure parental demand for IE, putting in place measures as soon as possible and introducing measurement in 2024.
- Specify in the action plan how exactly DE will meet the demand for Integrated Education.

- Adopt per-annum targets for IE growth (for example, 20% of children to be educated in integrated schools by 2030).
- Provide substantial grant funding for all schools wishing to become integrated schools (at the moment, the £20,000 total budget is not sufficient and could impede the transformation process by forcing schools to rely on their own resources to run ballots).
- Carry out an independent review of the Area Planning process, to be completed and recommendations implemented by 31 December 2025.
- Carry out a review of the Development Plan process, to be completed and implemented by 31 December 2025.

72. The Integrated AlumNI point to the definition of demand within the Act and that the EA's Integration Works guidance already acknowledges some ways of measuring demand. The Integrated Education Act also provides some indicators that could form part of a system of demand measurement and Integrated AlumNI suggest the Department could also measure parental choice via the Education Authority Admissions Portal, asking parents what kind of education they would *ideally* have for their children.

73. The Department could build on this work by commissioning qualitative and quantitative surveys on an area basis to determine support for Integrated Education.

Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People response

74. The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) welcomed the consultation on the draft Integrated Education Strategy - Action Plan. Although NICCY did not provide a detailed response to the plan, they raised several key issues in their feedback.

75. NICCY emphasized the importance of meaningful engagement with children, young people, and their parents/guardians in the consultative process, particularly regarding the implementation of the Integrated Education (IE) Act. They highlight the need for providing information and support to enable children's participation, in line with Article 12 of the UNCRC. NICCY recommends that the Department's engagement and consultation protocol reflect the inclusion of children's participation as a central element.

76. Regarding Action 6, which addresses the publication of data on the demand for Integrated Education, NICCY suggests increasing the provision and accessibility of information on IE to children, young people, and their parents. They stress the importance of enhancing understanding of IE's contribution to the education system in Northern Ireland. NICCY also calls for giving voice to young people and local communities in future school provision planning, area learning

communities, and school development plans, emphasizing the need for investment, time, and deliberation.

77. Lastly, NICCY strongly recommends that the Department engage in a Child's Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) to ensure the plan's compliance with children's rights. The CRIA framework examines the potential impacts on children and young people and suggests ways to avoid or mitigate any negative effects. Conducting a CRIA would enable the Department to assess the extent to which the action plan fulfils their children's rights obligations, aligning with the UNCRC and international human rights treaties.

78. NICCY's feedback highlights the importance of children's participation, increased accessibility to information, and conducting a Child's Rights Impact Assessment to ensure a child-centred approach in the final Integrated Education Strategy and Action Plan.

Governing Bodies Association

79. The Governing Bodies Association (GBA) stress upon the need to focus on the delivery of statutory education and areas of need, such as SEND, given the current adverse financial climate. They emphasize the importance of considering the value of large funding allocations to the entire education system, not just one sector.

80. They suggest that transformation should only be considered for schools that meet key sustainability indicators outlined in the Sustainable Schools Policy (SSP).

81. The GBA highlights the expanded definition of Integrated Education in the new legislation, which applies to schools across all education sectors. They recommend that the DE acknowledges this diversity and inclusivity during the implementation of the Act.

82. Concerns are raised about the lack of clarity regarding reasonable proportions of Protestant and Roman Catholic children in integrated schools, as specified in the legislation. The GBA urges the Department to provide clear definitions and criteria for this aspect, as it contributes to the practical application of distinguishing Integrated Education from other forms of provision and gauging demand.

83. Parity of access to services and professional learning programs across all sectors is emphasized, with no preferential funding provided to one sector over another.

84. The importance of demonstrating sustainability, especially when opening new schools in a context of reduced resources and a declining school-aged

population, is highlighted. The GBA points out that the Act's duty is to encourage, facilitate, and support Integrated Education, without explicit language to "grow" the integrated sector. Actions should align with identifying, assessing, monitoring, and meeting the demand for Integrated Education within the context of area planning and overall school estate sustainability.

85. The GBA stresses that the updated definition of Integrated Education applies to many schools in Northern Ireland, and inclusivity and diversity are not exclusive to the integrated sector. They urge the Department to acknowledge and support the existing social and cultural diversity across all education sectors, rather than focusing solely on one sector.
86. The GBA expresses a willingness to provide feedback on drafts of regulations and guidance related to the implementation of the Act when they become available.

National Secular Society Response

87. The National Secular Society (NSS) states that it is essential that the Department of Education ensures that every family who wants to send their child to an integrated school can do so.
88. It is concerned about the lack of ambition and specificity in the vision of the current Strategy. They call for Integrated Education to be the default choice for all families, rather than a niche option. The NSS suggests including a target for the number of pupils attending integrated schools in the next decade measured against demand. They also question the proposed funding of £50,000, deeming it insufficient for effective implementation.
89. The NSS emphasizes the need for fair and accurate methods to measure demand for Integrated Education, arguing that parental preferences alone cannot determine it. They caution against using religious demographics as a proxy, as integrated schools attract families from different religious backgrounds.
90. The Society highlights challenges faced by parents, such as labelling issues and reduced chances of acceptance to integrated schools if, for example, a child attends a Catholic nursery. They propose providing grants to all schools seeking integration as a solution.
91. The plan for the Education Authority to collaborate with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) in considering data on demand for future strategic plans and operational plans is strongly opposed by NSS. They argue that CCMS, being controlled by the Catholic Church, would prioritize Catholic education over non-denominational Integrated Education, fearing bias toward

Catholic education. They cite public opposition from Catholic clergy discouraging Catholic parents from choosing integrated schools.

92. The NSS advocates for broader reform in the education system to accommodate a diverse and non-religious population. They argue that current collective worship and religious education arrangements breach the European Convention on Human Rights. They call for a more inclusive approach and reconsideration of Christian ethos in Integrated schools as Northern Ireland becomes more culturally diverse. Ultimately, the NSS recommends moving towards a secular school system that treats all families equally and gradually eliminating religion-based selection in integrated schools.

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council Response

93. The Fermanagh and Omagh District Council (FODC) has expressed support for the Department's commitment to engagement and consultation in developing the Strategy and Action Plan for the Integrated Education Act. They stress the importance of transparent and consistent budget reviews, considering the financial challenges faced by government departments and public sector bodies. While the Department has agreed to provide initial additional funding of £50,000, the Council raises concerns about the source and continuance of funding given the ongoing challenges.

94. The Council urges the Department to involve local communities in the consultation process, in addition to school leaders and government partners. They cite research conducted by Queen's University Belfast and recommend the use of Community Conversations as an aid to support this. The Council also highlights the need for research and consultations to strengthen the evidence base and understand the perspectives of all stakeholders, including school leaders, on the potential transition to an integrated school system.

95. FODC supports the Department's responsibility to assess and meet the demand for Integrated Education, recognizing its role in promoting Good Relations. They welcome the Department's commitment to developing a measurable and valid definition of demand, as this is an ongoing topic of debate. Research by Queen's University Belfast indicates that demand extends beyond parental choice and varies across areas and schools. The Council supports improving data collection to accurately measure demand and allocate resources effectively, addressing gaps through research adaptations and utilizing the school admissions portal.

96. The Council appreciates the Department's commitment to actively monitor progress in implementing the Strategy but expresses concerns about accountability and monitoring in the absence of the Executive. They emphasize the importance of Integrated Education in fostering a shared society and promoting Good Relations. The Council seeks further engagement, clarification

on funding allocation, and improved guidance for parents and guardians. They emphasize the need for an agreed definition of demand and consistent, transparent budgetary reviews to ensure sustained funding. Additionally, maintaining high-quality education in integrated schools is crucial, as parental decisions are influenced by the educational progress of children.

Ulster Teachers' Union

97. The Ulster Teachers' Union has responded to the Integrated Education Act Strategy and Action Plan with a series of concerns and suggestions. They question the methodology used to measure the demand for Integrated Education, seeking clarity on how this demand is determined and known. They express the need for transparency in the measurement process and question the reliability of data collected through Area Planning in accurately capturing the demand for Integrated Education. It also wishes to note that the funding of Integrated Education should not be of a detrimental effect to other sectors.
98. It is the Ulster Teachers' Union's position that many schools from the Controlled Sector already have children from different socio-economic backgrounds and abilities and also from different faiths and none. It points to the establishment of the Model schools that were to ensure that the ethos supported and accepted the different cultures and values of children.
99. The Union emphasizes the importance of collaboration between the Department of Education and its education partners in developing and implementing the strategy. They call for regular data on demand levels to be released annually, enabling stakeholders to monitor progress effectively. They also highlight the need for the Education Authority to work not only with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) but also with the Controlled Schools Support Council (CSSC), ensuring that all sectors are represented in decision-making processes.
100. The Ulster Teachers' Union raises concerns about the Area Planning Model and calls for an independent review of its effectiveness across all sectors. They believe that all stakeholders should be consulted during this review to ensure a comprehensive examination of the model and its impact on Integrated Education.
101. Regarding the outcomes-based approach mentioned in the plan, the union seeks clarification on the specific outcomes and indicators that will be used to measure progress. They stress the importance of transparency and clear explanations of how new data will be collected and utilized to track advancements in Integrated Education.
102. The union welcomes the review of guidance for schools seeking integrated status but raises concerns about funding. They question whether the financial

resources required for schools to transform will come from an already strained education budget or if additional funding will be provided.

103. Additionally, the Ulster Teachers' Union highlights the importance of equal access to support services and professional learning opportunities for all schools, regardless of sector. They stress the need for appropriate funding to ensure that all teachers have access to professional development programs.

104. In conclusion, the Ulster Teachers' Union advocates for transparency, collaboration, and adequate funding for all sectors in the implementation of the Integrated Education Action Plan. They seek clarity on measurement methods, collaboration with education partners, and outcomes-based approaches. They also emphasize the importance of equitable access to support services and professional learning opportunities for all schools while expressing concerns about funding allocations.

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG)

105. CnaG emphasizes the need for greater clarity in defining 'demand' for Integrated Education, considering factors beyond ethos, such as the quality of schools, proximity to home, and admissions criteria. They advocate for an inclusive consultation process that involves all sectoral bodies, including Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, as they are the statutory body for Irish-medium education. They deem this as particularly important considering the development of Integrated Education through the medium of Irish.

106. CnaG also highlights the importance of assessing data gaps to accurately measure demand, including for various types of education. They specifically mention the need to evaluate demand for Irish-medium education and Integrated Education through the medium of Irish.

107. Regarding support services, CnaG agrees that the Department should collaborate with the Education Authority to ensure appropriate access for integrated schools. However, they stress that all sectors of education, including those teaching through the medium of Irish, should have equal access to these services. CnaG also emphasizes the necessity of providing appropriate professional learning programs for integrated schools teaching through the medium of Irish.

108. Overall, CnaG's response aims to enhance the effectiveness of the Integrated Education Act Strategy and Action Plan by promoting clarity in defining demand, inclusive consultation, data assessment, and equitable access to support services and professional learning programs. These recommendations address the diverse educational needs, including Irish-medium Integrated Education, and ensure a comprehensive approach to integrated education in the plan.

Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS)

109. The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) welcomes open and transparent consultation with all stakeholders, emphasizing the need for inclusivity and equal weighting of views. They express concerns about potential imbalance or overemphasis on specific organizations or sectors in the consultation process.
110. CCMS suggests extending specific consultation to all sectors to address sustainability, educational provision, and financial impacts. They emphasize the importance of clear articulation and quantification of demand based on data and actual trends, aligned with existing planning processes.
111. CCMS highlights the need for a clear and unambiguous definition of demand for Integrated Education. They call for meaningful outcomes and measures in the Action Plan that go beyond simple targets and consider the quality of education and overall sustainability.
112. CCMS welcomes the intention to have measurement of performance in relation to the Action Plan rooted in outcomes-based style accountability. The associated outcomes and measures need to reflect how children and young people/education/society is better off as a result of the implementation of the plan rather than relying on targets offering no proof of the quality of education or desired impact that the ethos of the Integrated Education sector would have.
113. CCMS raises concerns about resource diversion from the general education budget and the impact on existing provision and priorities. They stress the need for clear guidance on school transformation and support for fulfilling the legal definition of Integrated Education.
114. CCMS supports assistance for all schools in guiding parents through the admissions process and urges the sharing of draft regulations and guidance for input and consultation. They express concern about the feasibility, achievability, and resourcing of the listed actions in the questionnaire.
115. CCMS highlights the potential detrimental impact of the Act on existing provision and the lack of additional resources provided despite the additional responsibilities conferred by the Act.
116. CCMS suggest that regulations and guidance should be shared in draft form with all stakeholders for input and consultation.

The Executive Office (TEO)

117. The Good Relations and Inclusion Division responded on behalf of The Executive Office (TEO) and recognizes the importance of the Integrated Education Act Strategy and Action Plan. They acknowledge the existing research measuring demand for Integrated Education and express interest in understanding the process of defining demand outlined in the plan.
118. The Good Relations and Inclusion Division emphasizes the need for collaboration with the Department on the IE Strategy and suggests a joined-up approach in area planning, considering factors beyond education. They highlight the potential economic and societal benefits of reducing division through a strong good relations strategy.
119. Overall, the division supports the goals of the Integrated Education Act Strategy and Action Plan, emphasizing collaboration, data-driven approaches, and a broader perspective in addressing demand for Integrated Education.

Political Parties Submissions

Alliance Party Response

120. The Alliance Party has submitted a response to the consultation on the Integrated Education Act Strategy and Action Plan, expressing significant concerns about the process leading up to the consultation and the compliance of the Action Plan with the Integrated Education Act.
121. Firstly, the Alliance Party points out flaws in the process preceding the consultation. They highlight the absence of published terms of reference for the Implementation Steering Group and the IE Working Group, as well as the lack of public records of their discussions. According to Alliance, this lack of transparency raises questions about the inclusivity and openness of the plan's development.
122. Secondly, the Alliance Party raises concerns about the influence of groups opposed to Integrated Education on the development of the Strategy and Action Plan. They note that the majority of members in both groups come from organizations that publicly opposed the Integrated Education Bill during its legislative progress. This raises concerns about potential bias and opposition to Integrated Education within the groups responsible for developing the plan.
123. Thirdly, the Alliance Party argues that the Integrated Education Strategy and Action Plan fail to comply with the requirements set out in the Integrated Education Act. They specifically highlight the failure to fulfil the requirement for consultation with governors, pupils, families, and community bodies as mandated by Section 9(2)(e)(i) of the Act. They assert that there is no evidence

of the Department taking measures to comply with this provision and emphasize that the Act does not allow for the delegation of consultation responsibilities to an external body.

124. The Alliance Party also criticizes the lack of explanation from the Department of Education regarding why the Strategy and Action Plan do not align with the provisions of the Integrated Education Act. This lack of clarity raises concerns about the Department's commitment to Integrated Education and adherence to legislative requirements.
125. Lastly, the Alliance Party rejects the proposed format of the Integrated Education Act Strategy and Action Plan, asserting that it fails to comply with the Integrated Education Act. They emphasize the need for the Action Plan to meet the requirements of the Act to ensure the proper implementation and support of Integrated Education in Northern Ireland.
126. Overall, the Alliance Party's response highlights the flawed process, concerns about potential bias, non-compliance with the Integrated Education Act, lack of explanation, and the rejection of the proposed Action Plan. They emphasize the importance of aligning the plan with legislative requirements to effectively support Integrated Education in Northern Ireland.

Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)

127. The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) has raised several concerns and provided its views on various key areas related to the Integrated Education Act. In terms of demand for Integrated Education, the DUP emphasizes the need to involve the Education Authority in defining demand, ensuring neutrality and strategic planning for education. They stress the importance of distinguishing between general support for inclusion and specific intent to apply for an integrated school place. The party also calls for widespread consultation during the development of the definition and any related regulations.
128. Regarding measuring progress, the DUP welcomes the inclusion of education partners in monitoring and reviewing the Action Plan. They emphasize the need for realistic and fair targets, taking into account the fiscal environment and demands in special education needs provision. The party cautions against rushing the process and treating Integrated Education as an isolated issue.
129. In terms of ethos, information, and guidance, the DUP expresses disappointment over the omission of sustainability requirements in the updated guidance for Development Proposals. They argue that sustainability should be a crucial aspect, removing ambiguity and ensuring compliance with the Sustainable Schools' Policy. They also stress the importance of meeting the new legal definitions of integrated Education in order to secure approval and

support and suggest regular data publication on schools conforming to the new definition.

130. Regarding regulation and compliance, the DUP acknowledges the provision for regulation-making powers and emphasizes the need for wide consultation, including with the public, to ensure confidence and legitimacy in future legislation. They raise concerns about the lack of prior consultation before the introduction of the draft legislation and highlight the importance of conducting thorough consultations for any proposed changes to the statute book.
131. Overall, the DUP advocates for a comprehensive, fair, and consultative approach to the implementation of the Integrated Education Act, ensuring neutrality, sustainability, and compliance with legal definitions while considering the broader educational landscape and community perspectives.

Sinn Féin

132. Sinn Féin's response to the Integrated Education Act Strategy and Action Plan demonstrates their support for the Act and their commitment to advancing Integrated Education in Northern Ireland. They view the strategy as a crucial opportunity to implement the principles outlined in the Good Friday Agreement and the Integrated Education Act.
133. Sinn Féin emphasizes the importance of adhering to the legal definition of Integrated Education and integrated schools as outlined in the Integrated Education Act. They express concerns about academic selection in integrated schools, arguing that it undermines inclusiveness and diversity. Sinn Féin advocates for integrated schools that cater to students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and abilities, promoting an inclusive learning environment.
134. In their response, Sinn Féin highlights the need for integrated schools to actively support and respect all identities, fostering diversity, respect, and understanding among students. They also emphasize the importance of removing barriers to Integrated Education, such as limited availability in rural areas and associated costs for families.
135. The response also seeks clarification on what the funding needs are for integrated education.
136. Sinn Féin would encourage the Department to ensure that there is an increasing availability and accessibility of information on all school types provided to children, as well as parents, enabling them to make an informed decision about school choice.

137. Overall, Sinn Féin's response to the Integrated Education Act Strategy and Action Plan broadly supports the plan's objectives and calls for adherence to legal definitions, the promotion of inclusiveness, and the removal of barriers to ensure the successful implementation of Integrated Education in Northern Ireland.

Annex 1 - Detail of Responses to Questionnaire with Summary and Overall Analysis with Key Themes Identified

Question 7: To help us develop a future strategy, please tell us to what extent you agree or disagree that the strategy and action plan helped you understand the requirements of the Act?

Summary:

Most respondents (69.32%) agreed that the Strategy and Action Plan helped them understand the requirements of the Act, while 19.89% disagreed and 10.80% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Overall Analysis:

The high level of agreement suggests that the Strategy and Action Plan were effective in communicating the requirements of the Act to the respondents. This is an important finding, as it indicates that DE is on the right track in terms of meeting its regulatory obligations.

However, it is also worth noting that almost 20% of respondents (19.89%) disagreed with the statement. This suggests that there may be some areas where the Strategy and Action Plan could be adjusted to improve understanding of the requirements of the Act.

DE should consider conducting further research to identify the specific areas where the Strategy and Action Plan could be improved. This could involve conducting surveys or interviews with stakeholders to gather their feedback.

DE should also consider providing additional training and support to employees to help them understand the requirements of the Act when developing policy.

Question 8: To what extent do you agree or disagree that this new vision for Integrated Education sets the right ambition for Integrated Education?

Summary:

The survey results show a high level of agreement among respondents that the new vision for Integrated Education sets the right ambition, with 74.43% agreeing and only 19.89% disagreeing.

There is also broad support for the implementation actions proposed to deliver and support effective communication and consultation, with the majority of respondents agreeing with each statement. The highest level of agreement is seen for statements related to ensuring that the Department meets its duties

under the Act (78.41% agree), continuing the consultative process with all partners (80.11% agree), and engaging with representatives of Integrated Education (80.68% agree).

Overall Analysis:

The survey results indicate strong support for the new vision for Integrated Education and the proposed implementation actions. This suggests that stakeholders are generally satisfied with the direction and approach being taken by DE to promote and support Integrated Education. The high level of agreement across most statements suggests a shared understanding and commitment to the goals of Integrated Education.

However, there are some areas where there may be room for improvement, such as providing additional funding to support implementation (66.48% agree) and ensuring that internal processes and procedures reflect the requirement to consider Integrated Education (77.84% agree). Overall, the survey results provide a positive indication of the progress being made around Integrated Education in Northern Ireland.

Question 9: To what extent do you agree or disagree that implementation of the following actions will deliver and support effective communication and consultation?

Summary:

The survey results indicate a high level of agreement among respondents regarding the proposed actions to support effective communication and consultation during the implementation of the Integrated Education Act.

The majority of respondents agreed that the various measures, such as utilizing existing groups, providing initial funding, committing to ongoing resource reviews, and ensuring compliance with the Act, will contribute to successful communication and consultation.

Overall Analysis:

The findings suggest a positive perception of the proposed communication and consultation strategies. The high agreement rates across most statements demonstrate a shared understanding of the importance of effective communication and consultation in implementing the Integrated Education Act.

This consensus among respondents highlights a commitment to fostering open dialogue and collaboration with various stakeholders, including Integrated Education representatives, school leaders, practitioners, and relevant bodies like NICIE.

The survey results provide valuable insights into the perceived effectiveness of the proposed actions. By identifying areas of agreement and potential concerns, i.e. the levels of funding allocated to support implementation, DE can refine its communication and consultation approach to ensure inclusivity, transparency, and effective engagement with all relevant parties. This will be crucial in promoting successful implementation of the Integrated Education Act and achieving its objectives.

Communication and Consultation - 1. The Department will continue to utilise the two Integrated Education groups to support implementation of the Act.

73.87% agreed with this statement with 17.62% disagreed. 8.52% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Communication and Consultation - 2. Provision of initial additional funding of £50,000 to support implementation of this Strategy.

66.48% agreed with this statement with 26.71% disagreed. 6.82% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Communication and Consultation - 3. The Department has committed to keeping resourcing of the strategy under review.

76.71% agreed with this statement with 10.80% disagreed. 12.50% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Communication and Consultation - 4. The Department will make sure internal processes and procedures reflect the requirement to consider Integrated Education when it changes policies or processes.

77.84% agreed with this statement with 13.07% disagreed. 9.09% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Communication and Consultation - 5. The Department will ensure that it meets all its duties under the Act.

78.41% agreed with this statement with 12.50% disagreed. 9.09% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Communication and Consultation - 6. The Department will continue the consultative process with all partners during implementation of the IE Act

80.11% agreed with this statement with 11.37% disagreed. 8.52% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Communication and Consultation - 7. The Department will engage with representatives of integrated education, including school-leaders and practitioners on key educational issues.

80.68% agreed with this statement with 13.07% disagreed. 6.25% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Communication and Consultation - 8. The Department will focus on consultation with NICIE as the DE body that is tasked with encouraging and promoting Integrated Education.

77.84% agreed with this statement with 15.34% disagreed. 6.82% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Communication and Consultation - 9. The Department will draw up a formal document that sets out the basis for consultation with NICIE and the extent of its coverage.

80.11% agreed with this statement with 12.50% disagreed. 7.39% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Question 10: Have Your Say. Please feel free to provide any further comments or feedback regarding Key Area 1 – Effective Engagement and Consultation. Please do not provide any personal or specific information that may identify you or anyone else.

What you told us: Themes identified from comments re Key Area 1 – Effective Engagement and Consultation

Consultation and Engagement:

- Importance of engaging with a wide range of stakeholders, including integrated education leaders, practitioners, parents, and young people
- Need for effective and meaningful consultation processes that ensure diverse perspectives are heard and considered
- Concerns about limited consultation opportunities and inadequate funding for consultation initiatives

Funding and Resources:

- Perceived inadequacy of the £50,000 funding allocated for implementing the strategy
- Calls for more substantial financial support to effectively promote and sustain Integrated Education
- Suggestions for additional resources to facilitate consultation, implementation, and monitoring of the strategy

Partnership and Collaboration:

- Emphasis on the need for collaboration and partnership among various stakeholders, including the Department of Education, Integrated Education

- sector bodies, and other relevant organisations
- Concerns about the involvement of partners who are not supportive of Integrated Education and may hinder its implementation

Measurement and Evaluation:

- Request for clear and measurable targets to track progress and assess the impact of the strategy
- Importance of evaluating the effectiveness of consultation and engagement processes in shaping the Strategy and Action Plan

Transparency and Accountability:

- Calls for greater transparency in the decision-making process and accountability for the implementation of the Strategy
- Concerns about the lack of evidence and data to support some of the claims and statements in the Strategy

Effectiveness and Implementation:

- Doubts about the practicality and effectiveness of the Strategy in achieving its intended outcomes
- Concerns about the potential negative impact on existing schools and the diversion of resources from traditional schools

Scope and Priorities:

- Calls for a broader focus on integrating students from all backgrounds, including those from minority religious groups and none
- Suggestions to prioritize addressing unmet demand for Integrated Education and ensuring fair access for all

Historical and Cultural Context:

- Recognition of the historical context and the need to address the enduring legacy of division and sectarianism in Northern Ireland
- Calls for acknowledging the diversity of perspectives on Integrated Education and addressing the concerns of those who may have reservations

Sustainability and Long-Term Vision:

- Importance of considering the long-term sustainability of Integrated Education and developing a vision for its future growth and development
- Suggestions for a more transformative and ambitious approach to promoting Integrated Education

Question 11: To what extent do you agree or disagree that implementation of the following actions will support the identifying, assessing, monitoring, and aiming to meet the demand for Integrated Education?

Summary:

The majority of respondents agreed that the proposed actions would support the identifying, assessing, monitoring, and aiming to meet the demand for Integrated Education. The highest level of agreement was for the Department to produce an operational definition of demand for Integrated Education that is measurable and valid (85.80% agreed). The lowest level of agreement was for the Education Authority working in partnership with CCMS to consider data relating to demand when developing and up-dating future Strategic Area Plans and associated Operational Plans (71.59% agreed).

Overall Analysis:

The findings suggest that there is broad support for the proposed actions to support the identifying, assessing, monitoring, and aiming to meet the demand for Integrated Education. However, there is some concern about the ability of the Education Authority and CCMS to consider data relating to demand when developing and up-dating future Strategic Area Plans and associated Operational Plans. This may be due to a lack of resources or expertise in this area.

It is important that the Department address this concern to ensure that the proposed actions are effective in meeting the demand for Integrated Education.

Able to meet demand - 10. The Department will produce an operational definition of demand for Integrated Education that is measurable and valid.

85.80% agreed with this statement with 6.25% disagreed. 7.95% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Able to meet demand - 11. The Department will, in carrying out this exercise, assess any current gaps in data to measure demand and take action to address those.

85.23% agreed with this statement with 5.11% disagreed. 9.66% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Able to meet demand - 12. The Department will work with its education partners to identify outcomes for children and young people to accompany this Strategy. Metrics will be identified to measure progress towards achieving these outcomes.

82.96% agreed with this statement with 7.39% disagreed. 9.66% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Able to meet demand - 13. The Department will routinely publish data relating to the demand for Integrated Education.

84.66% agreed with this statement with 7.96% disagreed. 7.39% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Able to meet demand - 14. The Education Authority working in partnership with CCMS will consider data relating to demand when developing and updating future Strategic Area Plans and associated Operational Plans.

71.59% agreed with this statement with 16.47% disagreed. 11.93% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Able to meet demand - 15. The Department will review its existing internal processes and procedures relating to the development of new schools.

87.50% agreed with this statement with 6.82% disagreed. 5.68% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Able to meet demand - 16. The Department will ensure it meets the duties within the Integrated Education Act relating to development of new schools.

85.23% agreed with this statement with 6.25% disagreed. 8.52% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Question 12: Have Your Say. Please feel free to provide any further comments or feedback below regarding Key Area 2 – Demand for Integrated Education. Please do not provide any personal or specific information that may identify you or anyone else

What you told us: Themes identified in responses to Key Area 2 – Demand for Integrated Education

Inadequate provision of Integrated Education:

- Lack of integrated schools, specifically at the post-primary level in certain areas.
- Limited access to integrated primary schools.
- Over-subscription in existing integrated schools, leading to disappointment for families who cannot secure a place.
- Demand for Integrated Education far exceeds the current supply.
- Need for increased provision and more integrated schools to meet parental demand.

Measurement and definition of demand:

- Concerns about the lack of a clear method for measuring and defining demand.
- Calls for a fair and rational method to measure parental preference for school type.
- The need for data collection and analysis to accurately determine demand.

- Importance of public opinion and input in assessing demand.

Funding and resource allocation:

- Funding issues affecting integrated schools due to insufficient resources provided.
- Budget constraints hindering the ability of integrated schools to offer quality education and necessary resources.
- Concerns about funding being targeted solely towards Integrated Education, potentially neglecting other types of schools.

Collaboration and planning:

- The need for collaboration between educational bodies, government organisations, and stakeholders to promote and develop Integrated Education.
- Call for comprehensive area planning and a review of the development process to address the backlog and ensure timely establishment of new integrated schools.
- Importance of collaborative work, innovation, and transformation in creating sustainable provision.

Government responsibility and accountability:

- Criticism of government departments, such as the Department of Education (DE) and Education Authority (EA), for their handling of Integrated Education.
- Questions about objectivity and inclusivity in the planning and development of future strategies.
- Calls for greater accountability and transparency in decision-making processes.

Parental preference and community engagement:

- Emphasis on the importance of parental preference and voices in planning and decision-making processes.
- Concerns that parents have not been listened to and their preferences have been disregarded.
- The desire for cross-community and Integrated Education options for children.

Question 13: To what extent do you agree or disagree that implementation of the following actions will provide useful evidence of progress made through the lifetime of this Action Plan?

Summary:

The majority of respondents agreed that the actions outlined in the Integrated Education Strategy will provide useful evidence of progress made throughout the lifetime of the plan. Specifically, over 80% of respondents agreed that the Department formally reporting on progress to the Assembly, reporting on progress at subsequent intervals as laid down by the Act, and reviewing and

revising the Strategy based on those reports are all effective ways to demonstrate progress.

However, there was less agreement on the statement that future versions of the Strategy will be outcomes-based, complete with associated outcomes and indicators to measure performance. While over 70% of respondents agreed with this statement, a significant portion (15.91%) disagreed. This suggests that some stakeholders may have concerns about the feasibility or effectiveness of implementing an outcomes-based approach.

Overall Analysis:

The findings of this survey indicate that there is broad support for the actions outlined in the Integrated Education Act Strategy and Action Plan as a means of providing evidence of progress. However, there may be some areas where further clarification or consultation is needed to address concerns or objections from stakeholders. In particular, the Department may want to provide more information about how it plans to develop new sources of data to support an outcomes-based approach and how it will engage with education partners in monitoring and reviewing delivery of the Action Plan.

By addressing these concerns, the Department can increase the likelihood that the Strategy will be successful in achieving its goals.

Actions lead to evidence of progress - 17. The Department will formally report on progress on this strategy to the Assembly by 26 April 2024.

81.25 % agreed with this statement with 7.95 % disagreed. 10.80% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Actions lead to evidence of progress - 18. The Department will report on progress with the strategy at subsequent intervals as laid down by the Act.

88.07% agreed with this statement with 4.54% disagreed. 7.39% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Actions lead to evidence of progress - 19. The Department will review and revise the Integrated Education Strategy in light of that report and publish and lay a revised version with the Assembly.

84.10% agreed with this statement with 7.95% disagreed. 7.95% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Actions lead to evidence of progress - 20. Future versions of the Strategy will be outcomes-based, complete with associated outcomes and indicators to

measure performance. The Department will develop new sources of data to support this if required.

73.86% agreed with this statement with 15.91% disagreed. 10.23% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Actions lead to evidence of progress - 21. The Department will monitor and review delivery of the Action Plan with its education partners in line with outcomes, indicators and performance measures.

80.69% agreed with this statement with 6.82% disagreed. 12.50% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Question 14: Have Your Say. Please feel free to provide any further comments or feedback below regarding Key Area 3 – Measuring Progress. Please do not provide any personal or specific information that may identify you or anyone else.

What you told us: Themes identified in responses to Key Area 3 – Measuring Progress

Targets and accountability:

- The need for specific targets and benchmarks to be incorporated into the Strategy.
- Calls for clear, measurable, and understandable targets aligned with the suggestions in the Integrated Education Act.
- The absence of targets in the current Action Plan is a notable concern and compromises the efficacy of the Strategy.
- The importance of performance measures and regular monitoring against targets to track progress and ensure accountability.
- The need for a review of development proposals and case for change processes for integrated schools.

Infrastructure and curriculum:

- The need for all schools to have infrastructure and teaching that imbeds an integrated ethos.
- Mandatory anti-bias training for all staff.
- The inclusion of integrated modules in the curriculum at all key stages.

Collaboration and engagement:

- Outcome-based approach:
- Mixed views on the merits of an outcome-based approach, with some concerns around how to measure and evaluate outcomes effectively.
- The need for meaningful measures and indicators that are wide-ranging and take family and community support into account.

Government responsibility and accountability:

- The need for the Department to be transparent and demonstrate genuine

intention in implementing the Strategy.

- Calls for a review of internal processes and procedures to ensure compliance with the Integrated Education Act.
- Concerns over the lack of progress and the value of a report to an Assembly that is not currently sitting.

Question 15: To what extent do you agree or disagree that implementation of the following actions will support the ethos of Integrated Education and provide appropriate information and guidance to help Integrated schools support this in their school?

Summary:

The vast majority of respondents (over 80%) agreed that the actions outlined in the question will support the ethos of Integrated Education and provide appropriate information and guidance to help integrated schools support this in their school. There was a slightly lower level of agreement for statements regarding EA developing learning programmes to leaders and teachers and DE working with education partners to provide guidance for parents, with around 84% and 83% agreeing, respectively.

Overall Analysis:

The findings suggest that there is strong support for the actions proposed by the Department to support Integrated Education. This includes reviewing guidance and resources for schools wishing to transform to integrated status, working with NICIE and EA to ensure Integrated schools have access to support services and professional learning programmes, and reviewing and updating existing guidance on the statutory process for proposed and significant changes to education provision.

The high level of agreement indicates that these actions are seen as important and necessary to support the ethos of Integrated Education and to provide appropriate information and guidance to schools. This suggests that the Department is on the right track in its efforts to promote and support Integrated Education.

Findings

Support Integrated Ethos, providing information and guidance - 22. The Department will review the guidance used for schools wishing to transform to integrated status.

87.5% agreed with this statement with 6.25% disagreed. 6.25% neither agreed nor disagreed

Support Integrated Ethos, providing information and guidance - 23. The Department will review the resources required to support schools transforming to integrated status.

89.21% agreed with this statement with 6.25% disagreed. 4.55% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Support Integrated Ethos, providing information and guidance - 24. The Department will work with NICIE to support integrated schools to confidently understand and fulfil the updated legal definition of Integrated Education.

86.36% agreed with this statement with 5.68% disagreed. 7.95% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Support Integrated Ethos, providing information and guidance - 25. The Department will work with EA to implement arrangements to ensure Integrated Schools have appropriate access to support services.

88.07% agreed with this statement with 5.11% disagreed. 6.82% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Support Integrated Ethos, providing information and guidance - 26. The Department will work with EA to implement arrangements so that professional learning programmes are available to leaders and teachers within Integrated Schools as required by the Act.

84.66% agreed with this statement with 6.25% disagreed. 9.09% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Support Integrated Ethos, providing information and guidance - 27. The Department will review and update existing guidance on the statutory process by which proposed and significant changes to education provision are made to ensure it is clear in setting out the nature of the evidence that should be considered and provided when bringing forward a proposal relevant to Integrated Education.

86.36% agreed with this statement with 6.25% disagreed. 7.39% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Support Integrated Ethos, providing information and guidance - 28. The Department will continue to work with education partners to review and update information and guidance on Integrated Education and schools for parents and guardians navigating the admissions process.

83.52% agreed with this statement with 7.39% disagreed. 9.09% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Question 16: Have Your Say. Please feel free to provide any further comments or feedback below regarding Key area 4 – Ethos, Information and Guidance. Please do not provide any personal or specific information that may identify you or anyone else.

What you told us: Themes Identified in responses to Key Area 4 – Ethos, Information and Guidance

Funding and Resource Allocation

- Provide a set grant to schools for integrating, such as £20,000, along with clear guidelines for implementation.
- Complete a review of the development proposal and case for change process for integrated schools by December 2024.
- Conduct an independent review of the area planning process and consultation to make recommendations by December 2025.

Ethos, Information, and Guidance

- Work with NICIE to ensure ethos is supported and information and guidance are provided to schools and parents.
- Review guidance for schools wishing to transform to an integrated status.
- Collaborate with NICIE to monitor and evaluate ethos.

Support for Integrated Schools

- Partner with EA to ensure integrated schools have access to support services.
- Fund professional learning programs for leaders and teachers in integrated schools.
- Review the statutory process for significant changes to education provision.
- Work with education partners to update information and guidance on Integrated Education.

Demand and Measurement

- Collaborate with NICIE to assess demand for Integrated Education.
- Establish a clear definition of demand for Integrated Education.
- Measure demand for Integrated Education.
- Actively address the demand for Integrated Education.

Implementation and Monitoring

- Ensure implementation of the Integrated Education Act.
- Set clear and measurable targets for the implementation process.
- Regularly review the success of the implementation process.

Question 17: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the following action will meet the requirement for providing regulations?

Summary:

A majority of respondents, 82.95%, agreed that DE will prepare regulations and guidance to support delivery of the Integrated Education Act as required, while 7.96% disagreed. Additionally, 9.09% of participants neither agreed nor disagreed.

Overall Analysis:

The high percentage of respondents agreeing with Action 15 suggests a consensus among the participants that the Department's preparation of regulations and guidance is necessary and aligned with the requirements of the Integrated Education Act. This indicates that stakeholders recognize the importance of developing clear guidelines and frameworks to facilitate the successful implementation of the Act.

On the other hand, the percentage of respondents who disagreed suggests that a small portion of participants have reservations or concerns about the Department's approach to providing regulations. It would be valuable to analyse the specific feedback provided by these individuals to gain a better understanding of their perspectives and any potential issues they raised.

To ensure effective implementation of the Integrated Education Act, it is essential for the Department to consider the feedback received from the consultation process, particularly from those who expressed disagreement or uncertainty. Addressing any concerns raised and providing further information or clarification can help build consensus and ensure a more inclusive and comprehensive set of regulations and guidance.

Providing Regulations - Action 15 The Department will prepare regulations and guidance to support delivery of the Integrated Education Act as required.

82.95% agreed with this statement with 7.96% disagreed. 9.09% neither agreed nor disagreed

Question 18: Have Your Say. Please feel free to provide any further comments or feedback below regarding Key area 5 – Regulations & Compliance. Please do not provide any personal or specific information that may identify you or anyone else.

What you told us: Themes identified in responses to Key Area 5 – Regulations and Compliance

Clarity, Targets, and Reviews:

- The regulations should have clear targets with specific timelines.
- Regular reviews should be conducted to assess progress and address any challenges.
- Clear indications of the root cause of issues and how to improve moving forward should be provided.

Department's Focus and Boldness:

- The Department should focus on key deliverables to support Integrated Education.
- The Department should be bold in using its powers to make regulations that support the growth of Integrated Education.

Involvement of Stakeholders:

- Full involvement of relevant partners, including NICIE, teachers, pupils, and parents, is essential.
- The regulations and guidance should be shared in draft form with all stakeholders for input and consultation.

Guidance and Best Practices:

- Guidance should be practical, include financial implications, and be agreed upon with school leaders.
- The guidelines should be drawn up with expertise from the Integrated Education sector.

Consultation and Impact:

- Effective consultation with stakeholders is crucial before implementing any changes.
- Any changes to regulations or guidance should ultimately positively impact integrated schools.

Legislation and Compliance:

- The regulations should comply with equality legislation and ensure that no child is educationally disadvantaged.
- The regulations should be clear and ensure clear targets to be reached by certain points with reviews being made to find why any targets are not reached.

Question 19: Please make any additional comments you would like to add below.

What you told us:

Respondents made a number of points reiterating or adding detail and, in some cases, raising questions around policy and practice in related areas.