



A review of the schools community relations programme

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
An Boinn Oideachais
Máinystéir o Lúib



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

A REVIEW OF THE SCHOOLS COMMUNITY RELATIONS PROGRAMME 2002

Una O'Connor

Brendan Hartop

Alan McCully

Unesco Centre, School of Education, University of Ulster

CONTENTS

		Page
	Timing of Responses	
	Executive Summary	
1	Introduction	1
2	History of Community Relations and Policy Context	5
3	Review of Schools Community Relations Programme	21
4	Recommendations Arising From A Review Of Schools Community Relations Programme	41
	Tables	49
	Appendix	53
	References	55

Timing of Responses

Responses should be sent to the postal or E-mail address shown below, to reach the Department no later than 31 October 2002.

Postal Address:

Mrs Edith Preston
Community Relations Branch
Department of Education
Rathgael House
43 Balloo Road
BANGOR
Co Down
BT19 7PR

Tel No: 028 91279747

E-mail Address:

edith.preston@deni.gov.uk

This document can be viewed at the Department's website at:
www.deni.gov.uk

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. In May 1996, the Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI), published a *Strategic Plan for Education 1996-2000*, which identified community relations as one of four themes for priority action. The Strategic Plan stated that DENI community relations strategy comprised 3 main forms of action:

- i. cross-community programmes involving young people;
- ii. EMU within the Northern Ireland Curriculum;
- iii. support for the development of integrated education.

The subsequent consultation document, *Learning for Tomorrow's World: Towards a New Strategic Plan for Education Services in Northern Ireland 2000-2006*, is the preparatory step to carrying the strategic plan forward.

2. A number of factors led the Department of Education (DE) to commission a review of the Schools Community Relations Programme (SCRCP). The purpose of the review was to assess operational structures and their impact on community relations, identify effective practice and make recommendations for its future operation. The focus was on the period following the devolution of SCRCP to the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) in 1996, when the Programme was located closer to Board personnel who were responsible for direct support to schools.

3. The remit of the review translated into 8 key tasks:

- i. clarify the history and policy context of SCRCP;
- ii. analyse the strengths and weaknesses of current practice;
- iii. assess the impact of SCRCP at institution/individual level;

- iv. assess the appropriateness of current structures and methodologies;
- v. identify how the Programme might better address issues identified in the *Education for Diversity* report;
- vi. determine if SCRP should be more closely linked to other DE strategies, eg School Improvement Programme;
- vii. identify how SCRP can involve more socially disadvantaged young people;
- viii. assess if SCRP complies with equality requirements of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998).

4. The SCRP (formerly the Cross-Community Contact Scheme), was introduced in 1987. Responsibility was devolved to the ELBs in 1996. The remit of the Programme was to bring together children from both sides of the community in structured, ongoing community relations programmes. The Programme now involves pupils from approximately 700 schools (59% of all schools in Northern Ireland). In 2000/01 the total grant for the Programme was £1,095,000, with an additional £718,705 directed to substitute teacher costs. Participant numbers in the Programme for the last academic year were 36,837 (21%) of primary pupils and 3,983 (3%) of post-primary pupils.

5. Changes in educational policy and curriculum development have had implications for the status, remit and delivery of community relations programmes. The most notable developments have included:

- DE Training and Inspectorate report on Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) and Cultural Heritage (CH) in primary and post-primary schools (1998/99), which concluded that only a minority of schools were engaged in SCRP, and that not all links were purposeful in promoting EMU objectives;

- the publication of *Towards a Culture of Tolerance: Education for Diversity* (1999), which recommended that those involved in education should seek to develop policies and strategies that embody the concept of community relations, encouraging greater commitment and ownership in the system;
- governmental support for a review of overall community relations policy (2000), including an assessment of current strategies and recommendations for future policy, with the intention of bringing greater cohesion and consistency across sectors;
- the ongoing curriculum review undertaken by the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), leading towards the development of a dedicated programme for democratic citizenship, underpinned by the concepts of pluralism, social justice, democracy and human rights;
- governmental and departmental initiatives (including the *Programme for Government, the School Improvement Programme and Targeting Social Need*), though not directly addressing community relations, reiterated a commitment to greater co-operation and co-ordination for the advancement of an inclusive and tolerant society;
- explicit reference to issues of equality and human rights as defined in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998), outlining the role of public authorities in the promotion of good cross-community relations.

6. Significant strengths in the current operation of the SCRP are identified. These include:

- teachers who go far beyond their contractual commitment and manage the Programme in a dedicated and professional manner;
- the value of long term school links, with strong, well-established partnerships;
- exemplars of good community relations practice within schools, demonstrating the potential of the Programme;
- the particular value of links which include residential and in-school activities;
- the commitment of Board Officers;
- the commitment shown by many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other voluntary agencies.

7. A number of weaknesses in the current operation of the SCRP are identified. These include:

- lack of a coherent definition of community relations underpinning the Programme;
- low strategic importance of the Programme at all levels;
- time-consuming administrative procedures which deflect both Board Officers and teachers from addressing the core objectives of the Programme;
- lack of transparency in the allocation of funding to ELBs;

- ▶ historical considerations contributing to inconsistencies in the distribution of funds;
- ▶ unpurposeful and/or inconsistent school links;
- ▶ lack of coherent strategies for monitoring and evaluation;
- ▶ deficiencies in provision of training;
- ▶ the selective nature of pupil involvement.

8. The review suggests that priority should be attached to the improvement of SCRP within an overall community relations strategy. Recommendations are made with regard to structure; operation and curriculum; and administration and funding.

9. Structural recommendations include:

- ▶ renaming the Programme to increase relevance and inclusivity, becoming a whole-school responsibility;
- ▶ adoption of a programme which is no longer limited solely to cross-community contact activities between pupils organised by pairs of teachers and partner schools. Activities could include whole-school staff development, staff development with a partner school, school stock-taking to identify most important community relations issues facing the school and the community it serves;
- ▶ gradient programmes that progressively evolve to an increased community relations focus;
- ▶ strengthening of parental engagement.

10. Operational and curriculum recommendations include:

- a more inclusive and pluralist definition of community relations, clearly articulated by DE and ELBs;
- community relations given an accountable priority at all levels of the education system;
- improved monitoring and evaluation by both schools and ELBs, with an emphasis on community relations practice;
- increasing the opportunity for the dissemination of best practice, including the development of exemplar programmes;
- the development of a strategy in support of SCRP by all core funded groups involved in the Programme;
- the development of a monitored inter-board directory of core funded and voluntary agencies;
- greater DE co-operation between Curriculum and Community Relations Branches;
- encouraging schools to place a community relations ethos within their mission statement;
- a statutory community relations dimension within the formal curriculum, developing the potential for a relationship between active citizenship, EMU and SCRP;
- greater cohesion between schools and the youth service;
- the development of a link between SCRP and the School Improvement Programme;

- the development of a link between SCRP and the Targeting Social Need initiative;
- ensuring SCRP complies with equality requirements of Section 75.

11. Recommendations for administration and funding include:

- adoption of a 3-year funding cycle to support a developmental community relations strategy;
- consideration given to devolving funding to schools in the longer term, with schools holding dedicated funding for community relations as a core component to their whole-school development plan;
- a co-operative inter-board panel with a transparent administrative strategy;
- consideration given to an inter-board system for the whole administration of the SCRP;
- Board commitment to increasing the level of support to schools in a more practical way. This may entail sharing resources, personnel, skills and good practice;
- a review of the role of CASS in community relations;
- more strategic distribution of funding, particularly with regard to uncontentious, historical programmes and new innovative programmes;
- increased funding to support more training and evaluation.

1. INTRODUCTION

This review of the Schools Community Relations Programme (SCRP) is a response to a commission from the Department of Education (DE).

The Schools Community Relations Programme (formerly the Cross-Community Contact Scheme) was introduced in 1987 and subsequently devolved to the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) in September 1996. The remit of the Programme remained the same, namely to bring together children from both sides of the political divide in structured, ongoing community relations programmes. With devolution to the Education and Library Boards, it was anticipated that levels of participation could be increased to further enhance the experience for pupils and teachers. The Programme now involves some pupils from approximately 700 schools (59% of all schools in Northern Ireland). In 2000-01, expenditure on the Programme was £1,095,000 (with an additional £718,705 in substitute teacher cover).

The Department of Education, in partnership with the Education and Library Boards, considered that given the length of time the Schools Community Relations Programme had been in existence, and the context in which it now operated, it was appropriate to carry out a review. Recent critiques of community relations practice - Cairns and Hewstone (2001), and Hughes and Donnelly (2001) have questioned existing policy and practice. Cairns et al (2001) have stated that existing contact schemes were, in the main, preaching to the converted, and that those who held more liberal attitudes were more likely to be already involved with the other community and with contact programmes. The review is conducted, therefore, with an awareness of these factors, and the recommendations arising will take account of developments in formal schooling, the youth sector and in society in general. The Programme has been operating under the auspices of the Education and Library Boards since 1996, so a 5-year period is a timely one to review operational structures, assess the impact on community relations, identify effective practice and make recommendations for its future operation.

The current curriculum review, involving the location of the core values of Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) at the heart of the curriculum, and the proposal to introduce a programme for democratic citizenship, creates new opportunities for the SCRP to become more integrated with formal education structures. The unfolding political circumstances in Northern Ireland necessitate all schools responding positively to prepare young people to contribute to a just and democratic society.

1.1 Background

In June 1998, a Ministerial Working Group was established to investigate ways for enhancing the contribution by all schools to the promotion of a *culture of tolerance* as outlined in the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement. The Working Group issued a progress report, *Towards a Culture of Tolerance: Integrating Education*, in December 1998.

On its recommendations, an EMU Working Group was established with a remit to review community relations policy in education and advise on how future policy might contribute to a more structured approach, leading to the promotion of a culture of tolerance in all schools. The then Minister for Education, John McFall, stated that the fundamental aim of the Working Group was to consider ways in which schools can promote a culture of tolerance through the general curriculum and in particular, through the delivery of the cross-curricular themes of EMU and Cultural Heritage (DENI 1999).

The Working Group produced its report *Towards a Culture of Tolerance: Education for Diversity*, which was issued for consultation in September 1999. The main recommendation was that those in education should seek to develop policies, strategies and suitable funding mechanisms that embody the concept of community relations and encourage a greater commitment to its ownership at all levels of the education system.

The *Education for Diversity* report also highlighted several issues for consideration in any subsequent review of community relations:

- ▶ the failure to fully address the issue of division;
- ▶ an evidence-based assessment of impact and value of inter-school links in order to identify good practice;
- ▶ the links between cross-community contact programmes and mainstream curriculum;
- ▶ the dissemination of effective practice and greater opportunities for networking between teachers;
- ▶ the value of single school work on EMU;
- ▶ the acceptance of the legitimacy of community relations programmes as whole-school priorities amongst principals and senior management.

The Working Group also defined a set of core values for the education service and advocated that schools should teach and reinforce the values of:

- ▶ pluralism;
- ▶ pursuit of social justice;
- ▶ acceptance of human rights and responsibilities;
- ▶ democracy.

The *Education for Diversity* report recommended that the promotion of core values which support pluralism, human rights and full participation in society should be central to the mission statement of the education service. Support was given to changes in the curriculum in relation to the

development of Social, Civic and Political Education (SCPE), along with a respect for diversity as a full, rather than a peripheral, element of the curriculum. Significantly, the report also recommended the review of a number of areas, including the design and operation of the SCRP, with the view to improving the effectiveness and appropriateness of the present structure.

1.2 The Remit of the Review

A statement detailing the aim and objectives of the review was provided by the Department. The overall aim was to investigate ways in which the present structure of the SCRP could be made more appropriate and effective, and the role that a revised Programme would have as part of any strategy to promote a culture of tolerance in all schools.

In operational terms, the objectives translated into 8 key tasks:

- i. to clarify the history and policy context of SCRP;
- ii. to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of current practice;
- iii. to assess the impact of SCRP at institution/individual level;
- iv. to assess the appropriateness of current structures and methodologies;
- v. to identify how the programme might better address issues identified in the *Education for Diversity* report;
- vi. to determine if SCRP should be more closely linked to other DE strategies, eg School Improvement Programme;
- vii. to identify how SCRP can involve more socially disadvantaged young people;
- viii. to assess if SCRP complies with equality requirements of Section 75 of Northern Ireland Act (1998).

2. HISTORY OF COMMUNITY RELATIONS AND POLICY CONTEXT

2.1 The Establishment of the Cross-Community Contact Scheme (1987)

The first public statement of commitment to the development of a community relations policy came when Nicholas Scott was Northern Ireland Education Minister. The release of DENI Circular 1982/21, *The Improvement of Community Relations: The Contribution of Schools*, stated that every teacher, every school manager, Board member and trustee, and every educational administrator within the system has a responsibility for helping children to learn to understand and respect each other, and their differing customs and traditions, and of preparing them to live together in harmony in adult life (DENI 1982).

The Department of Education also indicated that it would be promoting discussions on the role of education and would be asking the Schools Inspectorate to concentrate on promoting and encouraging ways of improving community relations.

The introduction of the Scheme in 1987 was accompanied by a strengthening of the administrative support base through the expansion of the Community Relations Branch within the Department of Education. The Branch carried responsibility for the administration of the Cross-Community Contact Scheme for schools and youth groups.

By 1987 community relations activity had increased in a number of ways. Pilot programmes involving inter-school contact had been established, the development of EMU within the curriculum was evolving – the first EMU Guide was issued by the Northern Ireland Council for Educational Development (NICED) in 1988 – and the establishment of integrated schools was beginning to spread beyond Belfast. During this period, the Minister of State with responsibility for Education, Dr Brian Mawhinney, initiated a number of measures intended to give more support for community relations activity. This included the establishment of the

Cross-Community Contact Scheme in 1987, which was designed to encourage schools and youth groups to bring together young people from across the community through ongoing, constructive and collaborative activities which lead to greater mutual understanding (DENI 1991).

The establishment of the Scheme was followed in 1988 with core funding to voluntary reconciliation groups and cultural traditions agencies that were active in supporting community relations initiatives in schools. The involvement of core funded bodies in SCRCP has continued.

2.2 The Economy of the Programme

During the period 1996-2001 considerable resources were devoted to the expansion of the Programme. When it was established in 1987, approximately £500,000 was devoted to contact programmes involving less than 15% of all schools. By 1995 approximately £1,200,000 was supporting contact programmes involving 45% of all schools (42% of primary and 59% of post-primary). An evaluation of the Scheme by the Inspectorate stated that two-thirds of the joint work seen was of high quality and pupils were deriving both educational and social benefit from participating in it (DENI 1991).

By the time the Scheme was devolved to the Boards in 1996 the amount of annual funding to support contact programmes was £866,000, rising to £1,189,000 in 1997/98. In 2000/01 the amount was £1,095,000 (excluding substitute teacher cover) which was allocated across the 5 Board areas. The total number of schools involved in the SCRCP has remained relatively stable over the past 5 years, reaching a peak of 718 (59%) in 1998/99 and dropping to 645 (52%) in 1999/00. The current number of schools involved in the Programme (2000/01) stands at 717 (59%). Although the overall representation of schools involved in the Programme appears substantial, it does not, however, accurately reflect pupil participation. Within participating schools, the number of pupils actively engaged in SCRCP is recurrently low, representing just 20% of primary and 4% of post-primary pupils in 1997/98, and 21% and 3% respectively in 2000/01 (Table 1).

The cost of retaining existing participant numbers is significant when applied against the overall economy of the Programme. Based on data provided, the ratio of cost per pupil is calculated for the period 1996-2000 (Table 2). The results reveal variations of spending within individual Boards during the period, ranging variously from £14-£23 per pupil in 1996/97 to £22-£37 per pupil in 2000/01. The figures also highlight the disparity in pro rata funding between Boards.

An overall breakdown of spending is illustrated in Table 3. The results indicate that the largest proportion of spending is directed towards transport (27%), residentials (20%) and entrance fees (17%). The Programme is a valuable source of income for many local transport companies and community groups; however, there is a danger that automatic reliance could lead to inertia and self-sustaining arrangements, with little regard to the development of programmes. Additionally, the high ratio of residential costs would indicate that core funded groups have a greater responsibility in the Programme than hitherto realised, with little accountability to Boards.

It should also be noted that spending does not include costs for substitute teacher cover. Over the period 1997-2001, substitute cover has amounted to £3,108,558 (Table 3), resulting in a slightly less than doubling of Programme costs. The total outlay for the Programme, therefore, in the period 1997-2001 has been £7,551,558.

The sums spent on transport, entrance fees, residentials and substitute cover is illustrative of the emphasis placed on out of school activities.

2.3 The Education Reform Order (1989)

The Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order (1989) introduced four educational themes – Cultural Heritage, Education for Mutual Understanding, Health Education and Information Technology – as part of the curriculum for all grant aided schools in Northern Ireland. The statutory provisions relating to these educational themes came into operation in respect of all pupils in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 and in the first

year of Key Stage 4 from 1 August 1992. The intention was that the themes became an integral part of the whole curriculum and were manifest in everyday teaching and learning, through the development of skills, knowledge and understanding and personal qualities and attitudes.

Whilst EMU and Cultural Heritage were identified as statutory features of the curriculum, participation in cross-community programmes remained a voluntary option which Boards encouraged teachers to utilise. The introduction of EMU focused attention on community relations work in schools. It was envisaged that EMU and the Cross-Community Contact Scheme would complement each other.

2.4 Devolution to the Education and Library Boards

The responsibility for the administration of the Cross-Community Contact Scheme was passed to each of the Education and Library Boards in 1996, and re-launched as the Schools Community Relations Programme. Each Board has a named officer responsible for EMU (at Adviser or Assistant Adviser level), and in most cases this is also the officer responsible for administration of the Programme. Officers from different Boards meet collectively through a forum known as the Inter-Board EMU Panel. It was envisaged that the establishment of an Inter-Board EMU Panel would increase the potential for coherent policy development and co-operation between Boards and was considered crucial to the successful devolution of the Scheme.

The rationale for devolution to the ELBs was that it would place the administration of the new programme closer to Board personnel who were responsible for direct support to schools at local level. It was envisaged that the most significant benefit would be the placement of resources alongside those providing field support within local communities and would also provide an ideal opportunity for ELBs to renew their commitment to cross-community contact as a strategy to promote EMU (Smith and Robinson, 1996).

In reality, the re-launch of the Scheme resulted in relatively little change to the overall purpose of supporting cross-community contact between Catholic and Protestant children in Northern Ireland. However, in a more global, pluralist society, there is a view that a community relations programme in education should form part of a broader context, reflecting community relations in other areas of social policy in Northern Ireland, most notably in relation to legislation for equality, anti-sectarianism and anti-racist policies.

2.5 The Education Environment

2.5.1 The Education and Training Inspectorate

In their inspection on the educational themes within the primary sector, the Department of Education Inspectorate (1998/99) found that the provision for Cultural Heritage and EMU was satisfactory or better in a majority of the schools inspected. A caring and supportive learning atmosphere, good use of expertise and integration were identified as the basis of success.

Within EMU, the Inspectorate noted the value that schools placed on maintaining cross-community links and identified the strengths as a culture of openness, whole-school appreciation, committed co-ordinators, well-planned programmes, effective resources and community links. However, the Inspectorate also pointed out that while children had the opportunity to engage in joint curricular activities, more frequently, contact was limited to shared activities or sporting events (DE, 1999). The perceived weaknesses were identified as limited co-ordination of EMU and Cultural Heritage themes, lack of proper monitoring structures, fragmented integration of the themes into the curriculum, uncertainty amongst co-ordinators as to their role and lack of training.

A similar inspection of EMU provision was conducted amongst 25 post-primary schools during 1999. The subsequent report drew attention to positive elements of EMU practice, notably the importance of a supportive school ethos, incorporation of EMU themes within all areas of

study, developmental strategies and good use of resources. There were, however, significant flaws which had impacted on levels of provision. The Inspectorate identified practice isolated from mainstream school provision, superficial interaction between young people, a reluctance to engage with the full range of EMU objectives, low participation in SCRP, insufficient professional development and lack of whole-school commitment as threats to schools engaging in effective community relations work.

The Inspectorate concluded that the most comprehensive and effective provision was characterised by a holistic approach, involving all staff, and that management arrangements for policy-making and planning should be the responsibility of staff, principals and Boards of Governors, so that the content of EMU provision was balanced within the overall school plan.

2.5.2 The Curriculum Review

In 1997, the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) produced guidance materials for EMU and Cultural Heritage, listing the core themes as:

- ▶ fostering respect for self and others and building relationships;
- ▶ understanding conflict;
- ▶ appreciating interdependence;
- ▶ cultural understanding.

It was recommended that the values of the core themes should be variously translated into practice via:

- ▶ institutional development;
- ▶ the curriculum;

- training and professional development of teachers;
- support for voluntary agencies;
- work through the Youth Service.

The work currently being undertaken by CCEA in the review of the Northern Ireland Curriculum will be significant in adapting the curriculum from 2004 onwards. It is anticipated that the current review will highlight the importance of the values, attitudes and skills that underpin the curriculum and have affective impact on pupils, teachers and the overall ethos of the school.

The proposed aim of the new curriculum is to enable young people to achieve their potential and to make informed and responsible choices and decisions throughout their lives (CCEA, 2000). The accompanying objectives focus on developing young people as individuals and as contributors to society, the economy and the environment. These objectives are underpinned by value statements that recognise the rights of the individual and the role of equality, human rights, democracy and justice as a means of resolving conflict. The objectives reflect the aims of current cross-curricular themes, but also encompass emerging areas of learning, including citizenship, education for parenthood, media education, employability, development education and sustainability.

Of particular significance in the review is the potential relationship between Citizenship Education and SCRP. The present curriculum is already committed to the improvement of community relations through the cross-curricular themes of EMU and Cultural Heritage. However, the inclusion of a citizenship strand within a Personal Development Programme at Key Stages 1 and 2, and a dedicated programme for Democratic Citizenship at Key Stages 3 and 4 represents a more focused approach to the development of a culture of tolerance and reflects similar initiatives in England, Scotland, the Republic of Ireland and Europe. The concepts underpinning the proposed citizenship theme – diversity/interdependence, equality/justice and democracy/participation – have

also the potential to be fostered through community engagement in any revision of SCRP.

2.6 The Youth Service

Youth organisations and associated activities contribute significantly to the development of the whole person as part of a wider life-skills curriculum and continue to have a significant role in the field of community relations. A parallel Youth Service Community Relations Support Scheme operating in the youth sector, also funded by the Department of Education Community Relations Branch, was reviewed in 2001. As in the formal sector, it emerged that community relations work had struggled to find a place within the core of youth work policy and practice.

A major initiative is currently underway, through the Joined in Equity, Diversity and Interdependence (JEDI) project, with the aim of embedding these principles in all aspects of the work of the youth service. JEDI takes as its mission the establishment of a creative partnership promoting a new vision of community through sectoral, organisational and personal transformation. JEDI is about building a pluralist youth sector as a contribution towards the building of a pluralist society (JEDI 2000).

Given that the statutory youth and schools sector are both located within the ELBs, and that SCRP has broadly similar aims to the Youth Service Community Relations Support Scheme, it is logical that there should be effective co-ordination between the formal and informal sectors. Through JEDI, the Youth Service, too, are committed to re-defining community relations work in the light of its key principles and the wider implications of education for citizenship.

2.7 The Changing Policy Environment 1996 - Present

Over the past 5 years, a number of changes in the policy environment have had and will continue to have implications for any future strategy to

support the improvement of the Schools Community Relations Programme.

2.7.1 Decentralisation

The commitment by the Labour government, underlined by the Belfast Agreement (1998) and the Human Rights Bill (2001), to decentralise administrative responsibility from the Department of Education has had implications throughout the education system. Devolution to the Education and Library Boards for the allocation of funds included a commitment to community relations work and a duty to promote integrated education. Labour's education agenda also included a desire to develop more democratic institutions. It was an inclusive approach that encouraged schools to take greater ownership of community relations activity and develop a capacity to engage in action at classroom, school and community level.

2.7.2 Department of Education Strategic Plan

In May 1996, the Department of Education published a Strategic Plan for Education 1996-2000. The Mission Statement set out 3 broad aims for the education service. These were identified as:

- ▶ fostering specific values and attitudes;
- ▶ raising standards of learning;
- ▶ personal development.

Within this framework, the mission statement advocated a set of integral values and attitudes. These included moral values and personal responsibility, respect for diversity and for the work of every individual and the promotion of a tolerant and peaceful society (DE 1996).

The Plan identified 5 key themes that would underpin the work of all education partners. One of the themes is *Providing Education and*

Personal Development for Life, with emphasis on EMU and respect for diversity. Within this, a number of key strategic aims are identified, one of which is to ensure that citizenship, human rights and the promotion of tolerance and understanding of diversity are key elements in the curriculum for schools and the youth service, and to strengthen community relations among young people (DE 1996). Community relations was identified as a theme for priority action, with 3 main strands:

- i. cross-community contact programmes involving young people;
- ii. EMU within the Northern Ireland Curriculum;
- iii. support for the development of integrated education.

Section 4 of the Strategic Plan addressed the role of the education service in preparing young people for a social and working environment. In *Looking to the Future*, it highlighted that young people needed to understand and respect different cultural values in an increasingly pluralistic and more global environment; and to recognise the importance of equality, tolerance and human rights in their society.

Following wide discussion, the subsequent consultation document, *Learning for Tomorrow's World: Towards a New Strategic Plan for Education Services in Northern Ireland 2000-2006*, is the preparatory step to carrying the strategic plan forward from April 2000. Most of the themes of the original Plan remain current. It is envisaged that the Plan will not just involve the Department, but will necessarily impact on education partners, including ELBs, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) and the Youth Council.

Within the framework of schools and the youth service, 2 key themes are highlighted for attention: *Promoting Excellence and Promoting Personal and Social Responsibility*. Of the 2, the latter is of particular

significance for cross-community practice. Under the theme, the Consultation Document outlined 5 core areas:

- i. contribution to the world of work;
- ii. the school in the community;
- iii. creating a culture of tolerance and good citizenship;
- iv. personal and social skills;
- v. wider horizons and language skills.

In practical terms, it was envisaged that commitment to these core areas would enable young people to develop a positive, enquiring and outward-looking attitude to the modern world, marked by appreciation and celebration of difference and a desire to make a positive contribution to society; and to foster an understanding of the responsibilities of citizenship and of their place in Europe and the World (DE 1996).

2.7.3 The Programme for Government

To achieve the *culture of tolerance* outlined in the Belfast Agreement is a significant challenge for society in Northern Ireland. In the light of recent political developments, the Northern Ireland Executive developed a Programme for Government that is nominally a statement of overall government policy. The first draft of the Programme was agreed during 2000 and covered the 3 years from April 2001. Following consultation, a revised Programme was endorsed by the Assembly in March 2001. The new draft retained the framework of the original, but focused on key developments and priorities for 2002-03.

Increasingly, there has been the recognition that community relations will only improve if there is significant and co-ordinated effort across all departments and agencies. The draft Programme for Government essentially reiterated the commitment originally outlined in the Belfast

Agreement of a peaceful, inclusive, prosperous, stable and fair society, firmly founded on the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance and mutual trust and the protection and vindication of the human rights of all (NI Executive, 1998).

In Section 2 of the draft, *Growing as a Community*, the Executive identified the challenges of developing a society in which all citizens can freely and fully participate. Explicit reference is made as to how political and religious division will be addressed. Of particular importance is the need to support the capacity of local communities to deal with matters of dispute and division. Issues of particular focus included:

- ▶ promotion of equality of opportunity and human rights in society;
- ▶ improving community relations and tackling divisions in society;
- ▶ tackling social need and social exclusion;
- ▶ respecting, supporting and celebrating cultural and linguistic diversity.

In Section 4, *Investing in Education and Skills*, included the provision of an education and training system which recognises and responds to the diversity of our society and the needs of its young people, and promotes a culture of tolerance (NI Executive, 2001). The draft programme recognised the role the education system has to play through the curriculum and the youth service in informing young people of their responsibilities as citizens. Within this priority, the Executive has undertaken a commitment to a phased implementation of a Citizenship Programme for all post-primary pupils from September 2002.

Within the broader community framework, the Executive agreed that there should be a review of current policies. In support of this action the Executive has committed to:

- complete the review of current community relations policy and assess its impacts and achievements by 2002;
- put in place a cross-departmental strategy for the promotion of community relations by 2002;
- take forward the recommendations of the Towards a Culture of Tolerance: Integrated Education Working Group during 2002-03.

The Executive has upheld its commitment to review community relations. In April 2001 the review was established with the remit to assess current community relations policy and the impact to date of that policy (Harbison, 2001). The review will consider the appropriateness of aims, consider if changes are required and outline recommended structures for monitoring and evaluating the impact on community relations of future policy.

2.7.4 The School Improvement Programme

The School Improvement Programme was initiated in 1998, with the aim of improving administrative and curricular standards within schools. The principles of the Programme were established in the 1980s in Northern Ireland within the framework of curricular initiatives including *Primary Guidelines* and *the 11-16 Curriculum Review and Development Programme*. They also featured more recently in the *Raising Schools Standards Initiative* (RSSI) initiated in 1994/95, which was an important governmental priority designed to identify the role and responsibilities of teachers, principals and Boards of Governors.

Based on evidence from RSSI and schools inspections, the Department of Education (1998) highlighted those factors that were considered important to promoting children's achievements. These included:

- a shared vision and aims;
- high expectations of what pupils can achieve;

- concentration on teaching and learning;
- monitoring individual children's progress.

Additionally, the Department considered that the setting of targets for children's achievements was an important element in helping to improve standards. Crucially, they recognised that targets did not just cover literacy and numeracy, but other wider aspects of school performance, including community involvement and school life. The Inspectorate reinforced this in their report on *The Development of Links Between the School and the Community*, noting that solid partnerships occurred when the curricular experiences and the personal and social development of the pupils are enriched through regular opportunities to contribute to the wider community and to draw on its resources (ETI, 1998).

It was noted, however, that if targets were to contribute to raising standards, they should be realistic, challenging, achievable, focused on the school's key priorities and set in the context of the school's development plan, and have the commitment of all staff, principals and Board of Governors.

In a further report into promoting and sustaining good behaviour, DENI noted that the opportunities to focus on personal and social development and on raising self-esteem for low-attaining and demotivated pupils, were often felt to have been crowded out by the pressure of implementing the full statutory curriculum (DENI 1998). In discussions with teachers, the Department found that many perceived present curriculum requirements restricted opportunities to engage with less motivated pupils, increasing the likelihood of greater disaffection.

As part of an overall improvement strategy, the Department advocated the implementation of School Development Plans that set out a school's curricular and other intentions. School Development Plans necessarily cover a broad range of administrative issues as well as curricular, teaching and learning strategies with a view to constructive target-setting for each institution. Developmentally, significant numbers of schools

have now adopted self-evaluation techniques which critically measure the quality and effectiveness of the provision they make for children and how standards and the nature of provision can be improved.

Development planning offered many benefits to schools. DE identified successful components to include a focus on issues central to teaching and learning experiences with a distinction between improving the experiences the pupils receive and improving the standard of their work, but should cover both. It was noted, however, that to be fully effective, development planning must focus on how well the school will support the raising of standards of the pupils' attainments.

2.7.5 Targeting Social Need

The Targeting Social Need (TSN) policy was first introduced in 1991 and was an initiative towards the achievement of equality of opportunity. It was an acknowledgement that the changing context of political, social and legislative structures required a widening of the issues and activity relating to community relations policy. TSN policy was designed to tackle community differentials through targeting resources towards disadvantage by seeking to identify those in greatest social need, regardless of gender, religion or race, and redress the inequalities amongst the different sections of society.

In response to a review of the initial programme, New Targeting Social Need (New TSN) was announced in the *Partnership for Equality* White Paper in March 1998. It was identified as one of the Government's key socio-economic commitments within the Belfast Agreement. New TSN aimed to tackle social need and exclusion in Northern Ireland in an objective manner, without discriminating against any section of the community. The programme recognised that people who were in social need could be disadvantaged in various ways. It sought to counter the effects of social disadvantage and to redress the problems of unemployment and inequalities in other areas, including health and education. The strategy was supported by a programme for Promoting Social Inclusion (PSI).

Education is one of the most important determinants on personal, social and economic circumstances, and has a central role to play in New TSN. Within the framework of New TSN, the Department of Education has committed to undertake action in several areas. Amongst these is an investigation how to increase participation of young people from socially disadvantaged areas in SCRP and the Youth Service Community Relations Support Scheme, and how to subsequently raise participation in community relations programmes in socially disadvantaged areas.

2.7.6 Equality of Opportunity

Within the operation of the draft Programme for Government, specific reference is made with regard to human rights and equal opportunities in accordance with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998), whereby public authorities have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group (NI Executive, 2001). The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (2000), in its Guide to Statutory Duties, echoed the Executive recommendations and added that the promotion of equality of opportunity entailed more than the elimination of discrimination.

Much academic analysis has focused on community relations attitudes between Catholics and Protestants. Whilst findings would support the perception of an improvement in attitudes between the 2 traditions in the late 1980s and early 1990s, there are suggestions of a more recent (1996 onwards) decline in levels of tolerance, accompanied by a perceived unease within the Protestant community (Hughes et al, 2001).

Promoting equality, however, will require more than anti-sectarian initiatives. An increasingly culturally diverse society has created broader tensions. Recent research (Connolly and Keenan, 2000) on ethnic minorities has indicated that racial prejudice in Northern Ireland is twice as prevalent as sectarian prejudice. The findings have suggested that curriculum planners should develop clear strategies to address negative, racist attitudes. The recommendations included the introduction of an

inter-cultural dimension to increase pupils' awareness of racism and to help develop an understanding and respect for cultural diversity.

There are undoubtedly significant equality and community relations implications under Section 75. An effective community relations agenda should seek to accommodate all variations of social division. The evidence would suggest that education has a significant role to play in reducing all forms of discrimination within a broad community relations strategy.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this section has been to demonstrate that recent legislative and curricular change has created circumstances which are bound to impact on SCRP and make a review of its provision timely. There is a recognition that a more cohesive community relations strategy is required across all sectors. The Department of Education is committed to giving community relations a more central mission role in schooling. The potential now exists to centralise the Programme within overall educational policy and planning. A united community relations strategy - combining SCRP, JEDI, DE strategies and the recommendations of the Harbison Report - could be pivotal to future developments.

3. REVIEW OF SCHOOLS COMMUNITY RELATIONS PROGRAMME

Methodology

A quantitative and qualitative approach to the collection of data was considered the most-effective means of gaining a broad representation of professional perspectives within the limited deadlines imposed on the study. Due to time and financial constraints, young people's responses were monitored through the evaluations of documentation on existing programmes and the voices of their teachers. However, a more comprehensive evaluation of the Programme should ideally include a

study on its impact with young people. This is a limitation of the review, and logical progression would suggest a large-scale study of young people's experience of the Programme as an essential follow-up exercise.

The following methods were used to complete the review:

- ▶ initial meetings with each of the 5 ELB officers responsible for SCRP in order to clarify and identify issues and negotiate access to data;
- ▶ analysis of documents, statistical records and student evaluations related to the Programme;
- ▶ interviews with senior officers of the ELBs based on an agreed semi-structured interview schedule;
- ▶ interviews with each of the ELB officers responsible for SCRP on an agreed semi-structured interview schedule;
- ▶ interviews with 2 officers from the Curriculum Advice and Support Services (CASS);
- ▶ interviews with representatives from the Department of Education Community Relations Branch with responsibility for overseeing SCRP;
- ▶ interview with a member of the Education and Training Inspectorate;
- ▶ organisation and facilitation of a 2-day residential conference (Appendix 1).

It was envisaged that interviews would yield different perspectives according to the professional interest of each stakeholder; there was, however, the likelihood of a recurrence of common concerns. The

interviews essentially were an opportunity to collect perceptions of the overall operation of the programme and to assess how procedures might be revised for future implementation.

Input to the conference was invited from representatives of DE Community Relations Branch; ELB officers responsible for SCRP and associated senior officers; representatives from organisations that facilitate SCRP; and principals and teachers from four schools in each of the Board areas. The schools selected would reflect differing levels of experience of the Programme and the maintained, controlled, integrated, primary and post-primary sectors were represented. The conference incorporated a combination of focus group interviews conducted by members of the research team and open discussion groups.

Interviews with partners in the SCRP concentrated on 4 key areas identified below:

- ▶ the overall aims and purposes of the Programme;
- ▶ the effect of devolution to the ELBs in 1996;
- ▶ the strengths and weaknesses of the Programme;
- ▶ recommendations for the future operation of the Programme.

3.1 The Aims and Purposes of the Programme

All partners were able to draw on their experiences of working in the community relations field and expressed similar views on the aims and purposes of the Programme. The key points emerging from this part of the consultation were as follows:

- i. The Programme encouraged common aspirations and a commitment to bringing Catholic and Protestant children together through the core values of tolerance, mutual

understanding and respect. DE representatives added that it was the responsibility of Departmental management and Chief Executives of ELBs to clearly articulate to practitioners what constituted community relations within current democratic structures.

- ii. Although the youth service is engaged in similar work, an understanding of how the respective programmes complemented each other tended to vary across the Boards, reflecting differing internal structures. DE representatives welcomed a closer partnership between the non-formal and formal education sector. Many respondents noted that the existing examples of good practice of youth workers in schools, and within SCRP offered wider scope for experiential learning.
- iii. The importance of progression was identified as a central aim of any programme. It was agreed that Programmes should identify achievable, realistic targets, which reflected the development aspect of community relations work. This conceptual view of the Programme was largely missing from the teacher perspective, although the sound working relationships between teachers was considered of crucial importance in the success of ongoing, sustainable programmes.
- iv. Core funded agencies pointed out that the remit of the Programme frequently encompassed more than just the school. Larger community issues often impacted on the work done in schools, and when handled skilfully, could encourage good community relations at a much wider level.
- v. Many respondents noted that the Programme merited greater integration within the overall framework of EMU policy. Board Officers highlighted the existing misconception that EMU and SCRP were the same, and

that any contact work fulfilled school EMU obligations.

Evidence of this misconception was not reflected in consultation with teachers. However, it was clear that many teachers in the sample group found the Programme the most tangible way of demonstrating their commitment to community relations and EMU.

- vi. Many respondents at Board and teacher level, felt that in an attempt to give the Programme greater rigour and credence, emphasis has often been placed on operating it in a direct relationship with subject areas, at the expense of a wider EMU and community relations dimension. Teachers considered that the dilemma of prioritising often meant that the potential for community relations was not fully developed. DE representatives, however, whilst acknowledging the perception of undue focus on curriculum objectives, pointed out that often a curriculum base was a safe and secure way of entering community relations, providing a developmental framework was also present.

3.2 The Effect of Devolution of the Programme to the Education and Library Boards

The devolution of the Programme to the Education and Library Boards in 1996 necessarily had different implications for all those involved in community relations. This was reflected in the broad spectrum of responses, which ranged variously on operational structures to administration of funds, to implementation. However, the diversity of feedback was indicative of the different roles partners had in the Programme.

The key points emerging from the consultation were as follows:

- i. In general, the transition was considered beneficial. In administrative terms, devolution provided the opportunity for each Board to individually formulate a framework for the

Programme within their remit. In practical terms, it enabled the Programme to be located closer to teacher and school with the ongoing support of localised Board personnel.

- ii. Variation in administration across the ELBs has contributed to inconsistencies in the operation of the Programme, leading to the perception in schools that there is inequity of treatment.
- iii. Board Officers believed that the position of the Programme within formal structures lacked clarity and that its peripheral position to CASS could be interpreted negatively. It was agreed that greater liaison and exchange of information with CASS Officers could potentially create opportunities for increased collaboration within the Boards and raise the status of SCRP in schools.
- iv. Schools generally agreed that their administrative burden had increased following transition. The perceived volume of paperwork implied that bureaucracy impinged on time that could be devoted to community relations work. Accountability in terms of form-filling, receipt-keeping and general paperwork was considered the major drawback of transition. This concern was echoed by core funded groups who believed that Board Officers should minimise their paperwork and become more conspicuous at selected SCRP events.
- v. DE representatives noted the excessive administrative burden that Board Officers have handled post-devolution. The perception existed that such bureaucracy was at the expense of adequate training and dissemination, when Officers could be used more productively for training, monitoring and professional development.

- vi. There was a concern, particularly by teachers, that financial resources had become more restricted following transition, particularly relating to substitute cover, transport costs and residential fees. The main area of contention was that while programmes had continued to grow and develop, levels of funding had remained limited. Board Officers indicated however, that devolution had encouraged a more equitable funding system as each Board area had a certain freedom to decide how, and where, to allocate grant.
- vii. Board Officers indicated some unease about resource distribution and concern about inequality of funding. There was a general concern amongst Officers at their perceived position as financial 'gate-keepers' where the process of application for funding created a climate of suspicion, and where a culture of accountability questioned the motives of some applications.
- viii. Concerns were raised about the allocation of resources to core funded groups, particularly in relation to the issue of apparent duplication of funding. Board Officers believed that some groups were strongly committed to community relations, whilst others used the Programme as a means of income support. This was a view similarly held by teachers, who rated some experiences as more worthwhile than others.
- ix. There was a concern that devolution had worked adversely against effective support structures by drawing Board Officers too much into an administrative role. Whilst some teachers queried the accessibility of Board Officers, it emerged that the appointment of a Field Officer in one Board area had contributed positively towards an improvement in guidance, support and evaluation.

- x. There was consensus with regard to the failure of current appraisal and evaluation procedures. At present, evaluation and feedback are largely based on impressions from participating teachers. They frequently take the form of general comments on the suitability of the venue or transport arrangements, rather than an assessment of the extent to which community relations objectives have been addressed. Respondents considered that a dedicated effort towards critical self-evaluation would be productive.
- xi. There was a concern that the content of many programmes had not moved forward developmentally following transference to the Boards. Expectations that funding granted in the past would continue year-on-year was associated with a reluctance to change the content and methodology of programmes. Criticism that a number of application forms were bland, curricularly safe and annually repetitive was counteracted by an acknowledgement that individual Boards have greater authority to deal with problematic proposals constructively and positively.
- xii. It was considered that the work carried out in individual programmes had become more curriculum-focused following devolution. This was a double-edged issue. Programmes were required to reflect work within the curriculum – which advantageously located them within the overall structure of the school. Teachers, however, perceived that the emphasis on curricular aims was unnecessarily stringent and deflected attention from specifically community relations objectives.
- xiii. Respondents considered that, under present Programme criteria, there was little flexibility to engage in single identity work or address diversity in a broader context eg work with the travelling community, integrated schools and cross-border activity.

3.3 Strengths and Weaknesses of the Programme

The current structure and operation of the Programme inevitably yielded an assortment of perceived strengths and weaknesses. However, all partners expressed a desire that the issues raised - whether positively or negatively - were addressed critically as part of any future re-structuring of the Programme.

The strengths of the Programme were identified as follows:

- i. Community relations work provided a real opportunity for children to meet in a managed and professional way, and funding for this was a major strength. It was commonly agreed that funding encouraged participation, without which little activity could take place. DE representatives and core funded agencies also emphasised the benefits some children gained through SCRIP experiences.
- ii. Board respondents noted that successful programmes increased the potential for schools to develop a whole-school policy in community relations. There were a few examples where this was the case, but awareness of the potential was limited.
- iii. It was commonly agreed that a major strength of the programme was the continued commitment and dedication of teachers, both personally and professionally. The Programme offered the opportunity for teachers to meet and encouraged mutual support and exchange of views. In some cases this commitment and dedication was recognised in posts of responsibility which in turn raised the profile of community relations within the school.
- iv. Practical engagement in a cross-community setting provided teachers with the opportunity to initiate innovative practice beyond their day-to-day classroom experience. Successful

programmes that addressed personal and community issues in a positive manner raised the profile of community relations work inside and outside the school. Teachers noted however, that the work still needed parity with other areas of the curriculum.

- v. Board Officers commented on the practice of bringing groups together in neutral venues such as museums and activity centres, using staff as facilitators. Although caution was expressed about handing ownership to outsiders, the experience allowed teachers to be learners alongside pupils and had the potential to empower them with a confidence for future work. DE representatives highlighted the role of core funded groups as partners in SCRP, helping schools to implement the Programme.
- vi. A minority of exchanges focused on school-based activity, where work was facilitated either by outside specialists in areas such as Art or Drama, or by the teachers themselves. There were indications from both Board personnel and teachers that some of the best practice occurred in schools. Additionally this encouraged teachers to take greater ownership, and programmes often displayed clearer references to community relations objectives and innovative strategies.
- vii. The benefit of residentials, where children live and work together as one cohesive group, was positively noted. However, their survival was under increasing pressure due to demands on teachers' time, costings and issues surrounding child protection.
- viii. Parental involvement was considered advantageous to the operation of programmes, although it was not yet a widespread practice. It was acknowledged that community links were often initiated via parental interest and this lent

greater credibility and support to activities beyond the school gates.

In the course of the review many of the weaknesses identified invariably were the flip side of the strengths. The perceived weaknesses of the Programme are identified as follows:

- i. There was common agreement that the Programme continued to have low strategic importance at all levels. This low priority was illustrated by a lack of support at institutional level.
- ii. Board Officers were strongly critical of a culture of perpetual expectation amongst schools whereby funding would continue for longstanding programmes with little developmental dimension. Board Officers considered the programmes part-funded initiatives, while schools still perceived funding as total. DE representatives also voiced concerns that there seemed little relationship between sound pedagogical outcomes and levels of funding.
- iii. There was concern from Board Officers and some teachers that the aims of proposals and stated learning outcomes were not always reflected in subsequent practice. Lack of evidence of critical reflection on the nature of exchanges added to the problem. This caused unease that proposals which failed to demonstrate any developmental strategy could access large sums of money, while more innovative programmes frequently operated on smaller budgets.
- iv. Board Officers expressed concerns about a lack of progression and focus in school links which was borne out in discrepancies between proposals on paper and in reality. Officers considered that the transition period between application and funding did not provide sufficient time to fully

develop thoughtful programmes with a coherent and sustainable community relations dimension.

- v. It was common practice for schools to have multiple links across the age range, often involving more than one partner school. This could be successful when carefully co-ordinated by a teacher given responsibility for the task; in some instances, however, the links relied heavily on the individual interests of teachers and there was little evidence of an overall school community relations strategy integrating SCRP with EMU policy.
- vi. Concerns were raised about levels of support in relation to training, dissemination and confidence-building. Core funded groups considered that greater investment within ELBs was necessary to support teachers effectively at initial training and in-service levels. Both teachers and Board Officers agreed that a lack of support reduced the capacity to deliver programmes confidently, although there was a discrepancy between what Boards felt they provided and what teachers felt was offered. This may be explained by the confusion that existed amongst teachers as to identifiable community relations training and indicated the need for a clearer connection between EMU provision and the Programme. Even then it was a double-edged issue – Boards organised training sessions at regular intervals, but a lack of priority in this area, coupled with schools' perception of a 'glut' of in-service training, meant that attendance at community relations training often suffered at the expense of training in literacy, numeracy and core subjects.
- vii. In practical terms, concerns were raised about the lack of continuity in personnel within schools. The sometimes rapid turnover of teaching staff often led to inexperienced

teachers being given unrealistic responsibility, thus limiting the chance for the programmes to progress. Core funded groups emphasised the importance of consistent teacher involvement throughout the planning, delivery and evaluation of the Programme; sending substitute teachers on trips was identified as a significant weakness.

- viii. Concerns were raised about the imbalance of participants in certain areas. The requisite ratio of 60:40 was difficult to operate in some instances and raised concerns about equitable representation and the viability of activities. Geographically, there was an imbalance in some Boards, along with a reluctance of schools and young people to participate in certain difficult areas. While this had led to the ad hoc relaxation of criteria to allow schools to benefit from the Programme, it also fuelled the argument for greater flexibility of criteria which would allow schools to engage in meaningful activity appropriate to their circumstances.
- ix. Board Officers had concerns about the continuing disproportionately high involvement of primary schools over secondary schools. Efforts to redress the balance, however, were challenged by the demands of the curriculum, the pressure of examinations and, more recently, the impact of AS Levels on time. Some teachers also indicated that in the present political climate secondary schools were more reluctant to participate.
- x. The emphasis on learning outcomes associated with the curriculum was cited by some as a significant flaw in the operation of the Programme, in that it had the potential to divert attention from community relations objectives. Additionally, many teachers felt that the impetus to integrate community relations into formal structures was sometimes a contrived exercise.

- xi. At Board level some concerns were raised with regard to the balance between curriculum and community relations objectives as provided by core funded agencies. There was a perception that some organisations put their own agenda to the fore at the expense of the objectives of SCRP and did not necessarily provide the programme or the skills to sustain community relations work. Teachers recognised the constructive and relevant support offered by some agencies, but there were significant examples that drew attention to poor preparation and inappropriate content and delivery.
- xii. Concerns about evaluation and monitoring were a recurring theme. Respondents felt that the absence of a sufficiently adequate monitoring system severely limited any assessment of the Programme. Teachers questioned the validity and relevance of current evaluation forms and were of the universal belief that they were rarely read. It was commonly agreed that greater critical reflection, combined with a dedicated monitoring procedure were essential to properly evaluate practice.
- xiii. Criticisms regarding accountability were voiced as an impediment to effective practice, particularly amongst teachers from 2 of the Boards. What was perceived as unnecessary and/or excessive paperwork was cited as a major drawback and some respondents felt that ongoing bureaucratic demands had an adverse effect on both time and dedication to the Programme.
- xiv. In practical terms, many teachers considered the structure of the Programme administratively inflexible. The restricted access to substitute cover was a recurring theme amongst teachers who saw it detrimentally impacting across the various stages of planning and implementation. Undoubtedly, programmes made demands on teacher time,

but Board Officers pointed to the financial reality of the high hidden costs involved in substitute cover. It is a situation that will not be easily solved, but is one on which Boards and schools need to negotiate for mutual benefit.

- xv. The reluctance by teachers to engage in controversial issues was acknowledged by all parties. Innovative programmes that addressed sensitive and controversial issues in a thoughtful and strategic manner existed, but were not widespread. Generally, the consulted teachers felt that difficult issues needed to be addressed, but either drew attention to a lack of training or, in the case of primary schools, expressed reservations as to their appropriateness. It was also felt that, in certain geographical areas, sensitive topics were not an option due to school, parental or community resistance.
- xvi. All respondents drew attention to the partial and selective nature of pupil participation within schools. Teachers acknowledged that the selection of pupils, the design of the Programme and the level of interaction between young people was often orchestrated to portray the image of the school as favourably as possible in the eyes of the partner school and the community.

3.4 Respondents' Suggestions to Improve the Schools Community Relations Programme

This section of the review identifies respondents' suggestions for the improvement of the Schools Community Relations Programme, and how these may be best implemented within a revised funding scheme. An assumption is made that new guidelines will be more coherent if they are developed within a framework that recognises the beneficial impact of the Programme as well as the contribution of teachers, pupils and administrative personnel to the achievement of community relations

objectives. Key points emerging from this part of the consultation were as follows:

- i. There was consensus that benefits were to be gained in a structured programme of preparation and training. Core funded groups stressed the importance of initial programme development, emphasising the necessity for teachers, voluntary agencies and other partners to engage in dialogue. A one-day annual seminar involving teachers and Board personnel was suggested as a means of addressing any practical or procedural concerns and ensuring that channels of communication were preserved.
- ii. DE representatives considered that good programmes, by their nature, should be easily monitored, and that greater uniformity in application and progression would inevitably facilitate evaluation. Additionally, it was suggested that the Inspectorate could have a strategic role to ensure standards were maintained. It was generally agreed that greater DE involvement had the potential to give the Programme added focus and credibility. One teacher's suggestion that the Inspectorate might have a strategic role in ensuring that standards were maintained was overwhelmingly rejected by colleagues.
- iii. Core funded groups stressed the need to provide pupils with a clear understanding of the purpose and process of the Programme they were involved in and to have realistic expectations of what constitutes community relations.
- iv. There was an overwhelming request for more guidance when applying for funding. Teachers welcomed recommendations for the development of a protocol that had clarity of purpose and coherence with clear objectives and success criteria. However, it was noted that requirements for new schools should be developed; in this instance a

certain leniency was advocated, with expectations rising each year, thereby giving links time to evolve.

- v. Board Officers, DE representatives and core funded groups recommended that schools should articulate more clearly their vision of how continuity and progression might be achieved. This was considered crucial in terms of sustainability and strengthening ownership.
- vi. Both Board Officers and teachers recognised the need to improve communication between practitioners and administrators. There was general agreement that increased contact between Board and school demonstrated visible commitment to the Programme, which presently was constrained by limited resources at Board level. Teachers felt it crucial that they had an easily available, designated contact within the Board, responsible for advice, support and, if necessary, site visits. The appointment of a Board Field Officer with a specific remit in these areas was recommended, although it was acknowledged there would be implications for staffing resources.
- vii. Board Officers and teachers called for the establishment of an approved list of voluntary agencies. DE representatives additionally recommended that inclusion on this list should be conditional on NGOs critically reviewing their community relations strategy for schools.
- viii. Core funded groups questioned their role as 'host' to some programmes and teachers' views on that role: as simply a venue or as an equal partner. It was recommended that possibilities for stronger partnerships should be explored, combining joint preparation, delivery and ownership.
- ix. Teachers considered that dissemination of good practice would enhance the success of the Programme. This

dissemination would provide guidance for new links and act as a benchmark for existing programmes. In support of this, teachers indicated that a by-product of the SCRP review consultation days was the benefit derived from engaging with each other in discussion on their respective programmes.

- x. Several recommendations were made on the issue of funding. Inevitably – reflecting differences in the perspectives of administrators and practitioners – many teachers argued for greater flexibility in spending on the basis that justifiably educational activities should be encouraged. Conversely, Board personnel believed that the resources made available to schools were adequate and that programmes should be supplemented with funding from other sources. A recommendation for payment only on the completion of programmes was cited by some Board Officers as a means of informing teachers on the bureaucracy and accountability that is a required part of accessing public money.
- xi. The necessity for training was a recommendation voiced by all partners. It was stressed that until teachers received the training that made them comfortable with controversial themes, they will be unable to deliver programmes effectively. Core funded groups encouraged a gradient approach to training, acknowledging that ‘softer’ community relations activity was a valid starting point for some. DE representatives also emphasised a necessity for in-house training within voluntary agencies engaged in community relations work.
- xii. A recommendation for greater flexibility to address other divisions in society, such as race, disability and gender was suggested by all partners. Respondents considered that

application criteria should reflect the climate of a changing society, enabling schools to contribute positively to social and community development.

- xiii. The relationship between citizenship and community relations work was noted for its capacity to equip children with the knowledge of their place and role in the community and the wider world.
- xiv. Board Officers and DE representatives strongly recommended the establishment of a clear system of monitoring with in-built evaluation strategies that encouraged critical reflection. Pupil evaluations were considered a crucial component. Teachers were generally supportive of the suggestion, providing it did not increase administrative demands.
- xv. Many respondents recommended increased marketing strategies to address the low uptake of the Programme by secondary schools. Some respondents believed that an international link combining a more pluralistic dimension could be a less threatening incentive for secondary schools. Whilst it was recognised that international links were a useful development, some respondents queried their central role at the expense of local activity.
- xvi. Board Officers had strong and varied views on the role of the Inter-Board EMU Panel. Several recommended that co-operation between the Boards needed to be strengthened. There was a call for greater consistency in operation and procedure and a strengthening of the culture of mutual sharing and support.
- xvii. Some Board Officers called for the re-location of the Programme inside the CASS system to facilitate community relations work becoming a core area of the educational

process. Re-location had the potential to raise the profile of community relations work institutionally and encourage greater awareness. There would, however, be implications for future co-operation with the Youth Service within the Boards.

- xviii. There was common agreement that the dual involvement of schools and youth organisations in community relations had benefits in terms of shared experiences and joint training initiatives. Board Officers and teachers recognised the specific skills and expertise of youth workers in experiential and active learning within community relations. It was agreed that benefits could be gained from closer associations. However, any shift would have implications for internal Board organisation.
- xix. Teachers stressed the value of residentials. They enabled the community relations dimension to be given prominence and placed an emphasis on inter-active and inter-personal skills. However, in the current working environment, teachers felt less able to give their time and energy to residential experiences. Some suggested that incentives might be introduced to reward teachers for engaging in residential work.
- xx. Many respondents noted the value of parental involvement in community relations work. There was a recognition that involvement was very limited at present due to constraints surrounding safety and child protection. It was advocated that parental awareness be raised with regard to community relations activity, including the role it might play in emerging programmes.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS ARISING FROM A REVIEW OF SCHOOLS COMMUNITY RELATIONS PROGRAMME

The recommendations offer suggestions intended for the long-term future of the Programme.

The overall structure of the Programme must be considered in the context of changing democratic structures and policy. Recent increases in polarisation, sectarianism and racism point to the continuing need for some form of defined and central community relations strategy. All changes - whether political, societal or educational - will impact on what happens in the classroom. It is important therefore, that schools identify their position in the overall context of what is happening in Northern Ireland.

The current reviews of community relations policy and the curriculum, coupled with improved legislation on equality, have created a climate in which it is possible to reflect on past practice and develop a community relations strategy for the future. This climate of review offers the opportunity for future Programmes to have greater relevance and impact - not just in schools, but in the wider community.

The review of the SCRП makes recommendations under the broad headings of *structure; operation and curriculum; administration and funding*.

4.1 Structure

4.1.1 The common perception is that the essential purpose of the SCRП is to engage children from both sides of the community in mutually beneficial contact experiences which promote the core values of tolerance, mutual understanding and respect. The underlying ethos of the Programme has remained intact and there is no reason why this central emphasis should change. It is recommended, however, that SCRП be considered within the following pluralist and local contexts:

- i. The term 'community relations' has acquired ambiguity and a certain stigma. Consideration should be given to re-defining and re-naming the Programme. Findings have suggested that the current programme format does not accommodate all groups, and a broader community relations base may be more relevant and inclusive.
- ii. The central commitment of each programme should remain the same - namely to bring children together in genuine, meaningful encounters, which reflect the real issues of the community in which they live.
- iii. Future programmes should reflect clear community relations objectives that acknowledge the unique circumstances of particular schools.
- iv. Future programmes should display gradient mechanisms which enable schools to increasingly engage with their community in a planned manner.
- v. The role of parents should be developed in establishing school-community links.
- vi. Future programmes should not avoid local issues. Schools should define programmes based on real community relations need rather than convenient partnerships. Safeguards should be established to ensure that a broad community relations focus progresses towards more meaningful encounters.

4.1.2 Several structural options emerge:

- i. Immediate transformation from the current one-year to a three-year funding cycle. This would necessitate structured preparation and planning and encourage schools to address issues in a strategic, ongoing and progressive way. The

drawback here is that certain programmes may have a natural lifespan of one or two years that would conflict with a longer cyclical process. Teachers may also be reluctant to commit to the inevitable time demands that the development, implementation and monitoring of a 3-year programme would require.

- ii. A moratorium phasing out/in year, where all schools could opt out of the Programme for one year with the provision to rejoin the three-year programme the following year. Whilst this route may allow a clear transition period and afford the Boards the opportunity to prepare a support strategy, the risk is that some schools may be lost in the process. A further concern would be the interruption to school links. Implementing a moratorium – even for a year – may be hard to justify with ongoing sectarianism and racism.
- iii. A 3-year cycle will necessarily have implications for teacher involvement. A longer programme cannot remain the remit of pairs of teachers, but should become a whole-school responsibility. ELB support for such a development will be critical.

4.2 Operation and Curriculum

4.2.1 It is recommended that the operation of the SCRP should include flexibility in the application process so that schools can address community relations according to their own circumstances, eg cross-border, ethnic minorities, racism, travelling community and the disabled.

4.2.2 Monitoring and evaluation should be considered within a new operational framework. Programmes will remain incomplete unless they are assessed within formal guidelines. A number of issues relating to the improved evaluation of the Programme are identified. These include:

- i. Evaluation should not primarily be external. Schools should critically evaluate their own programmes. To be able to critically reflect upon community relations activity is essential and should be clearly outlined within any associated training programme.
- ii. An effective monitoring system requires the development of clear, specific and realistic outcomes. Future programmes should include exemplar indicators which define aims and outline relevant measures of progression.
- iii. Monitoring relies on constructive feedback from ELBs if it is to be of developmental value. The existing practice of selective monitoring does not inspire teachers to adhere to consistent practice.
- iv. Increased opportunity for the dissemination of best practice.

4.2.3 It is recommended that core funded groups should clearly define their strategy and contribution towards providing relevant support to the SCRP.

4.2.4 An inter-board directory of core funded and voluntary agencies should be compiled, with specific reference to areas of competence.

4.2.5 There are considerable benefits to closer links with the formal curriculum and CASS system:

- i. At Departmental level, there is particular need for greater co-ordination between Curriculum Branch and Community Relations Branch, with reference to the relationship between EMU, Citizenship and SCRP.
- ii. A more clearly defined community relations dimension with monitoring and accountability within the formal curriculum -

in particular through EMU, Cultural Heritage and Citizenship - could strengthen the impact of the SCRP.

- iii. In the light of ongoing curricular reforms, there are advantages for re-defining community relations as part of an active citizenship dimension.

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

4.2.7 Consideration should be given to the profile of the SCRP within governmental and DE initiatives. Recommendations include:

- i. Strengthening institutional commitment to a community relations agenda through greater association with the ***School Improvement Programme***. The principles underpinning School Improvement, including the development of whole-school plans and associated target-setting, have the capacity to integrate SCRP activity within an institutional ethos and mission statement.
- ii. Developing strategies to increase the overall uptake of schools in the programme, including giving priority to schools in areas of social tension - in line with the ***Targeting Social Need*** initiative.
- iii. An effective SCRP should support human rights and equality of opportunity. If programmes are to promote a culture of tolerance, they should reflect pluralism in its various forms.

4.3 Administration and Funding

4.3.1 To enhance the cohesion of the SCRP, the following recommendations should be considered:

- i. A more cohesive, supported inter-board panel would significantly benefit the overall management of the Programme. Under present structures Boards operate the SCRP independently and this does not encourage the open exchange of information.
- ii. A transparent inter-board administration plan for SCRP should clearly outline uniform procedures regarding the application process, allocation of funding, monitoring and evaluation and financial accountability.
- iii. It is recommended that ELBs consider practical strategies with a remit to develop resources and provide professional support, training and guidance to teachers.
- iv. DE should establish a more direct monitoring relationship with the ELBs at the operational level of the Programme and put in place accountability mechanisms regarding its administration.

4.3.2 Increased funding does not guarantee better programmes. However, funding levels impact on the perceived value and priority given to the Programme. A 3-year programme will have implications for the administration of funding. The following options can be considered:

- i. DE Community Relations Branch considers whether funding should remain with individual ELBs. Maintaining the status quo may not necessarily enhance the operation of a new programme.

- ii. Funding becomes an inter-board responsibility, with each of the Board Officers working co-operatively to administer a shared budget. This ensures agreed administrative procedures are put in place.

- iii. Funding is devolved to individual schools, which would encourage greater ownership of programmes. Such a move would necessitate specific administrative procedures. Schools would be obliged to earmark dedicated funding so that it does not become blurred within the overall school budget. The additional benefit of devolved funding would be the release of Board Officers from administrative tasks to more purposeful activity.

TABLE 1

SCHOOLS COMMUNITY RELATIONS PROGRAMME

Number of Participating Schools 1997-2001

	Total Primary Schools	Total Primary Schools in SCRP	%	Total Post-Primary Schools	Total Post-Primary Schools in SCRP	%
1997/98	945	499	53	285	160	56
1998/99	940	546	58	284	172	61
1999/00	941	493	52	288	152	53
2000/01	924	574	62	284	143	50

Number of Participating Pupils 1997-2001

	Primary Enrolments	SCRP Enrolments	%	Secondary & Grammar Enrolments	SCRP Enrolments	%
1997/98	182,261	35,918	20	153,094	5,692	4
1998/99	179,033	38,003	21	153,944	5,491	4
1999/00	175,602	37,294	21	154,964	4,415	3
2000/01	172,491	36,837	21	155,553	3,983	3

Source: Department of Education, Statistics and Research Agency.
(Figures include primary, secondary, grammar, special, integrated and preparatory schools)

NB: Breakdown of data for 1996/97 not available.

TABLE 2

SCHOOLS COMMUNITY RELATIONS PROGRAMME:
EXPENDITURE 1996-2001

	Board	No of Pupils	Grant	£ Per Pupil
1996/97	BELB	9,322	219,000	23
	NEELB	8,378	134,000	16
	SEELB	9,982	218,000	22
	SELB	10,951	177,000	16
	WELB	8,728	118,000	14
1997/98	BELB	7,609	234,000	31
	NEELB	8,750	204,000	23
	SEELB	9,337	330,000	35
	SELB	8,323	254,000	31
	WELB	7,591	167,000	22
1998/99	BELB	7,887	234,000	30
	NEELB	8,878	162,000	18
	SEELB	9,642	270,000	28
	SELB	9,486	224,000	24
	WELB	7,601	142,000	19
1999/00	BELB	9,023	234,000	26
	NEELB	6,572	187,000	28
	SEELB	8,169	275,000	34
	SELB	10,318	229,000	22
	WELB	7,627	162,000	21
2000/01	BELB	8,718	234,000	27
	NEELB	6,588	175,000	27
	SEELB	7,207	270,000	37
	SELB	11,180	259,000	23
	WELB	7,127	157,000	22

Source: DE Community Relations Statistics Branch

Schools Community Relations Programme: 1997-2001

Total Grant Allocations: £4,403,000

Total Substitute Cover Costs: £3,108,558

Total Grant Allocated per Board	BELB £936,000	NEELB £728,000	SEELB £1,145,000	SELB £966,000	WELB £628,000	
Breakdown of Costs	Transport £1,203,816 (27%)	Hire Charges £102,265 (2%)	Entrance Fees £763,389 (17%)	Materials £166,902 (4%)	Residential £892,242 (20%)	Other £292,139 (7%)
Substitute Cover per Board	BELB £744,102	NEELB £348,764	SEELB £741,213	SELB £844,479	WELB £430,000	

Source: DE and ELBs. Figures given are approximate, based on data provided. Breakdown of costs does not include underspend. This accounts for discrepancy in percentages.

NB: Total Breakdown of data for 1996/97 not available.

TABLE 3

SCHOOLS COMMUNITY RELATIONS PROGRAMME

CONSULTATION SESSION 1

‘What do we mean by community relations?’

Consultation Questions

The group is asked to consider the following questions:

- ▶ What have been the significant changes within NI society in recent years that may have a bearing on future relations between Nationalists, Republicans, Unionists and Loyalists in Northern Ireland?
- ▶ What are the implications of these recent developments within NI society for what schools might do to equip young people for life within a divided (sectarian) society?
- ▶ What sort of activities might be involved if schools were to adopt a broader vision of community relations that goes beyond cross-community contact between pupils?

CONSULTATION SESSION 2

'How can we get more ownership from schools?'

Consultation Questions

The group is asked to consider the following questions:

- ▶ Assuming schools would wish to undertake a range of activities that does not only consist of contact programmes, what would be the implications if the SCRP invited schools to apply for funding based on a 3-year school plan? Would this achieve more commitment or ownership by schools rather than individual pairs of teachers? Would this be a welcome change?
- ▶ In the longer term, what would be the implications (advantages, disadvantages) of devolving funding for community relations development plans directly to schools, rather than being administered through the Boards?

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