

# Shared Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2016

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## **EXPLANATORY NOTES**

### **BACKGROUND AND POLICY OBJECTIVES**

3. This Act is intended to provide a legislative definition of shared education, confer a duty on the DE to encourage, facilitate and promote shared education and to confer a power on relevant arms-length bodies of the department to encourage and facilitate shared education. The Act will at the same time commence the duty specified in the Education Act (NI) 2014 for the Education Authority to encourage, facilitate and promote shared education.
4. “Building a Strong and Shared Community” has been recognised by the Executive both as the key priority within its Programme for Government 2011-15 (PfG) and as essential to the growth of a strong, modern economy and society.
5. The PfG set out three specific objectives for the Department of Education relating to shared education to:
  - establish a Ministerial Advisory Group to explore and bring forward recommendations to the Minister of Education to advance shared education;
  - ensure all children have the opportunity to participate in shared education programmes by 2015; and
  - substantially increase the number of schools sharing facilities by 2015.
6. The Ministerial Advisory Group was appointed in July 2012 and published their report in April 2013. Following a period of civic debate, the Minister accepted their recommendations in a statement to the Assembly on 22 October 2013. One of the recommendations accepted by the Minister was to bring forward legislation on shared education.
7. Shared education aims to encourage, facilitate and promote collaborative working across educational providers, on a cross sectoral basis, to deliver educational and social benefits to learners including equality of opportunity, good relations and respect for identity, diversity and community cohesion.
8. The Education Act 2014 sets out a duty for the Education Authority to encourage, facilitate and promote shared education. The Act provides for

*These notes refer to the Shared Education Act (Northern Ireland)  
2016 (c.20) which received Royal Assent on 9 May 2016*

commencement of this duty on a date as the DE may appoint (paragraph 7(2) (a)). The Shared Education Act will provide for commencement of this duty.

9. The Act will further build on the commitment to enshrine shared education in legislation by extending a duty to encourage, facilitate and promote shared education to DE and to confer a power to encourage and facilitate shared education to relevant arms-length bodies of the department.
10. The Act provides a consistent definition of shared education, setting out the core components that are regarded as the minimum essential for the delivery of shared education.
11. The Act is underpinned by “Sharing Works – A Policy for Shared Education”, which includes a description of how shared education is expected to work in practice. Together, the Act and the policy will provide a framework for the advancement of shared education. The shared education policy sits within a broader education policy framework designed to improve educational outcomes for young people and tackle the significant tail of educational underachievement that has characterised our education system by breaking the cycle of social disadvantage, educational failure and restricted life chances.
12. Shared education covers a broad spectrum of structures and activities, including joint curricular delivery, joint extra-curricular activities and shared campuses.
13. By its nature shared education requires two or more educational establishments to work collaboratively to benefit the children and young people enrolled in these establishments. This will include two or more schools, two or more early years settings, two or more youth work settings or any combination of two or more of these settings working collaboratively (for example, a pre-school setting with a primary school; a youth group with a post-primary) subject to the partnership satisfying the minimum requirements in respect of religious belief and socio-economic status.
14. A single educational establishment that can demonstrate a mix of religious belief and socio-economic status would not satisfy the definition of shared education.