

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

Shared Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2016

EXPLANATORY NOTES

COMMENTARY ON SECTIONS

Section 1: “Purpose”

Section 1 sets out the purpose of shared education.

Section 2: “Shared Education”

Section 2 provides a common definition of shared education. This sets out the core components that are necessary ie: the education together of those of different religious belief and those who are experiencing socio-economic deprivation and those who are not which is secured by the working together of two or more relevant providers.

Section 3: ‘Duty of Department of Education to encourage, facilitate and promote shared education’

Section 3 confers on DE a duty to promote, encourage and facilitate shared education.

Section 4: ‘Power of other bodies to encourage and facilitate shared education’

Section 4 confers on the listed bodies (the Department of Education; the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools; the Youth Council for Northern Ireland; and the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and any sectoral body) a power to encourage and facilitate shared education.

Section 5: ‘Power of Department of Education and Education Authority to form company for purposes connected with shared education’

Section 5 provides the Department of Education (DE) and the Education Authority with the power to form or participate in a company formed under the Companies Act 2006 in respect of the advancement of shared education. This section is intended to facilitate the ownership and management of shared education campuses.

Shared education campuses are a headline action in the OFMDFM *Together: Building a United Community* strategy – specifically, the commencement of 10

new shared education campuses by 2018. The Strule Campus will also be a shared education Campus. Examples would include, but are not restricted to, a Controlled and a Catholic Maintained school coming together within a shared campus; or two schools from different management sectors sharing facilities.

While there will be no change in the character, identity or ethos of schools involved in a shared education campus, they will be engaged in shared education and sharing facilities or buildings. Schools will continue to operate as separate institutions with their own individual Board of Governors. An important factor is that schools consider themselves to be partners in their project irrespective of current or future enrolment changes.

As work has progressed with the initial group of schools that successfully applied for capital investment in a shared campus or facilities, new issues in terms of the purchase/ownership of land and management/governance arrangements have emerged for both DE and the Managing Authorities. The key emerging issue is the purchase and ownership of the land which is to be jointly occupied by two or more schools from two or more separate school management sectors. Purchase of the land by either 'owner' (i.e. the Education Authority or Catholic Trustees) is not considered to be a viable option.

The establishment of a company, formed equally by the Education Authority (EA) and the school Trustees, has emerged as a possible option for the purchase/ownership of land and management of shared education campuses. While it is envisaged that the EA will primarily form and participate in any such companies, the section also applies to DE in the event the EA and School Trustees agree this is preferable. School Trustees in the Catholic maintained sector have been using the framework of a charitable company limited by guarantee for ownership of Catholic maintained schools in particular Dioceses for several years. However there is currently no specific legislation that allows the DE or Education Authority to establish or participate in a company. Section 4 provides the legislative provision for this.

As this provision is within the scope of the Shared Education Act, the ability to form such a company is restricted to shared education purposes only.

Section 6: 'Duty of education bodies to consider shared education'

Section 6 requires DE and relevant arms length bodies to consider shared education when developing or amending policies, strategies and plans as well as the design and delivery of educational services.

Section 7: 'Review of shared education'

Section 7 places a requirement on DE to lay a report before the Assembly, no more than two years after the Act receives Royal Assent and on a biennial basis thereafter which details the extent to which DE and EA have exercised their duty and the extent to which relevant arms length bodies have exercised their power as well as levels of participation, efficiency in use of shared education resources and the impact on educational attainment and good relations. In

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reporting, DE will seek to assess the impact across s.75 groups and not just the core components as set out in the legislative definition.

Section 8: ‘Commencement of duty of Education Authority in relation to shared education’

Section 8 amends Section 7 of the Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 to provide for the commencement of the duty on the Education Authority to encourage, facilitate and promote shared education. That duty will come into operation on the day after the day on which the Shared Education Act receives Royal Assent.

Section 9: ‘Interpretation’

Section 9 provides for the interpretation of words and expressions used in the Act.

Section 10: ‘Short title and commencement’

Section 10 cites the short title of the Act.