

North-South Co-operation on Education

including lifelong learning

A Mapping Study

by [Andy Pollak](#) 4 May 2000

This document is intended to provide general information on co-operation in education and related areas between the two Irish jurisdictions. It was prepared over a short period to assist the work of the Centre's Study Group on Education; it is not a definitive study of the field and there may be significant errors and omissions. The author would be grateful if readers would draw any such errors and omissions to his attention. Members of the Study Group are asked to note that this document is not intended to define or confine the scope of their discussions, but to provide background information.

INTRODUCTION

The education systems in the two Irish jurisdictions have gone their very different ways in the past 80 years, despite having sprung originally from the same British structures. Until the past 10-15 years, the gulf between them was reflected by an almost total lack of cross border contact between education administrators, teachers and students at all levels.

As Professor Dominic Murray wrote in the 1997 comparative study of the two systems by the Limerick-based [Centre for Peace and Development Studies](#) (formerly the Irish Peace Institute Research Centre): "It is still remarkable that so little mutual awareness exists about the educational systems in the north and south of the island. There is some sharing of knowledge between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, but this has tended to occur most often at the higher levels of the system e.g. the Departments of Education, curriculum councils etc. But at teacher and pupil level there remains little knowledge of the 'other system'."

Professor Murray points out that the European Commission, the OECD and UNESCO have all called for co-operation and sharing of information among all countries of the European Union at an educational level. "It would seem that nowhere is such a sharing process more important than between the north and south of Ireland."

For the purposes of this study, we will divide the education system into a number of constituent parts and study the levels of cross border and North-South co-operation in each one of them (click on the link to move to the relevant section):

- [education administration](#) Departmental structures · Religious and academic segregation · Departmental and agency co-operation
- [primary education](#) Cross border comparisons · Cross border co-operation · Special education · Irish-medium primary education · Teacher unions (primary)
- [second-level education](#) Cross border comparisons · Cross border co-operation · Co-operation Ireland and other supporters · ICT and other cross border projects (mainly second level) · Teacher unions (second and third level)
- [university and other third level](#) History of co-operation · Student flows · Research collaboration · Teacher training and exchanges
- [adult education and lifelong learning](#)
- [all-Ireland education organisations](#)
- [citizenship education](#)

EDUCATION

ADMINISTRATION

Departmental structures

The lead Departments in the two jurisdictions are organised differently. In the Republic there is a single Department of Education and Science (DES, see below); in the North, the former Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI) has had most of its responsibilities transferred to the new [Department of Education](#) (DE), with other functions, as before, devolved to agencies within the system, particularly the five Education and Library Boards. Since the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989 there has also been further delegation of responsibilities to the boards of governors of individual schools, particularly in the area of financial management.

The DE's responsibilities include:

- a strategic role in relation to the development and implementation of education policy
- overall responsibility for education from nursery to university level
- sport and recreation
- youth services
- arts and culture, including libraries
- teachers' salaries, pension and benefit schemes.

At the end of 1999, a separate [Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment](#) was sectioned off as part of the re-structuring of government departments brought about by the (so far short-lived) power-sharing executive. This Department, under a new permanent secretary, will eventually move to new premises in Belfast. Its responsibilities will include higher education; further education; vocational training; employment services; employment law and labour relations; teacher training and teacher education; student support and postgraduate awards, and training grants.

In the Republic, the unitary [Department of Education and Science](#) is much more centralised, with all but small financial and resource decisions the responsibility of civil servants in Dublin. The two main exceptions to this rule are the traditionally autonomous universities, although recent legislation has made them more accountable to the [Higher Education Authority](#); and the city and county-based vocational education committees (elected by local authorities), which run vocational schools and community colleges. The VECs are the only regionally devolved education authorities. The first executive agency, to run [educational psychological services](#), came into operation last year.

The Department of Education and Science's wide-ranging responsibilities include:

- policy formulation and review
- allocation and monitoring of all resources, including teachers salaries
- evaluation of performance
- quality assurance
- a wide range of both executive and operational functions.

The Department is organised in six main divisions: primary education; second-level education; third level, vocational education and training, and European/international affairs; building, youth/adult education and external staff relations; the school inspectorate; central services.

Within both jurisdictions there are centralised bodies—either executive agencies or the Departments themselves—responsible for the curriculum, the school inspectorate, higher education, certification and further education.

Religious and academic segregation

Since partition both school systems have been organised on a religiously segregated basis. In Northern Ireland most children attend predominantly Protestant ('controlled') schools or Catholic ('maintained') schools. Around four per cent of children attend primary and secondary integrated schools. The northern system is also segregated on the basis of academic ability in that children take a selection test at age 11 to determine which of them should attend the more academic grammar schools (Northern Ireland is the only region in the UK to retain this system). Around one third of children in second-level education attend grammar schools.

Similarly in the Republic, although the divisions are less explicit, schools outside the vocational and community sectors and the very small [multi-denominational sector](#) (16 primary schools, with four planning to open soon) are largely based on denominational ethos (including the vast majority of primary schools, and 57 per cent of second-level schools). Apart from the multi-denominational schools, virtually all 3,200 primary or national schools are *de facto* denominational schools (the great majority of them Catholic); at second level around 435 out of 760-odd schools are run by religious organisations, most of them Catholic religious orders. The 327 vocational, community and comprehensive schools and colleges have more secular management structures.

However in both jurisdictions a minority of pupils in many schools, particularly second-level schools, come from a religious ethos different to that of the school. In the Republic the decline of religious adherence and vocations, and the growth of 'parent power', mean that many religious orders are planning to reduce their direct involvement in and control of schools, and parents are increasingly influential in school management.

Because of the complexity of Irish education on both sides of the border—largely a consequence of the historical influence of the churches, and in the Republic, because of strong union and (to a lesser extent) parent bodies—there are many special interest and representative bodies.

In Northern Ireland the statutory co-ordinating body for Catholic 'maintained' schools under the diocesan authorities is the [Council for Catholic Maintained Schools](#). The co-ordinating body for integrated schools is the [Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education](#). There is also a body which negotiates with the DE on behalf of Irish-medium schools. The Transferor Representatives' Council (TRC) takes a special interest in those 'controlled' state schools which were formally in Protestant church ownership, and includes representation from the Church of Ireland [General Synod Board of Education](#), the [State Education Committee](#) of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Board of Education of the [Methodist Church in Ireland](#).

In the Republic, there are managerial and lobbying bodies for the Catholic and Protestant primary schools; the secondary schools; the community schools; the vocational schools; the gaelscoileanna and the multi-denominational schools.

Departmental and agency co-operation

One of the main obstacles to official North-South co-operation in education has been the mismatch of administrative structures in the two jurisdictions. Unlike the decentralised health boards, which exist on both sides of the border, there is no equivalent in the Republic to the North's Education and Library Boards. What co-operation takes place often has to be between either the hugely centralised Department of Education and Science in Dublin and one or more of the ELBs, or between an ELB and a Vocational Education Committee, which controls only one sector of education in its county area.

The first significant example of co-operation between the (then two) Departments was the [European Studies Project](#), which began in the late 1980s and which brought together around 90 second-level schools North and South, in its first phase up to 1992 (*see also section on [second-level education](#)*).

The 1990s—and particularly the post-ceasefires period since 1994—saw increased contact between senior officials in Marlborough Street (DES) and North Down (DENI). The former have helped their northern colleagues with their Irish language education programme, and the northerners have returned the favour by advising on setting up public-private partnerships to build schools and other educational facilities. Some teacher and student teacher exchanges have taken place through the [Central Bureau for Educational Visits and Exchanges](#) in the North and [Léargas](#), the Southern agency for exchanges, transnational partnerships and international aspects of education and training.

The two curriculum councils—the Republic's [National Council for Curriculum and Assessment](#) (NCCA) and the Northern Ireland [Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment](#) (CCEA)—have been having more or less annual meetings for the past three years. This is an extension of a longer, 10-year series of annual meetings between the chief executives of the curriculum councils in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Out of these meetings have come some small but significant co-operation in citizenship education. Both the English and the Northern Irish councils, which originally visualised citizenship education as a cross-curricular, non-exam subject, have been influenced by the success of the Republic's 'stand alone' [Civic, Social and Political Education](#) programme for 12-15 year olds.

On the other hand the NCCA has drawn on British and Northern Irish experience of continuous assessment by teachers in the junior cycle of second-level schools in formulating their plans for more such assessment in the Junior Certificate exam in the Republic. With the NCCA about to become a statutory body—in line with its UK counterparts—officials believe there is considerable scope for further co-operation and mutual learning, both North-South and East-West, in such areas as ICT, forms of assessment and senior cycle curriculum change.

There have also been a number of small technical co-operation projects between the [Department of Education and Science](#) and the [Southern Education and Library Board](#) which, with the [Western Education and Library Board](#), is the northern board most involved in cross border contacts. These cover the promotion of energy efficiency, awareness, management systems and lighting installation in border region schools, and installing photovoltaics for internet communication in four secondary schools.

At their recent—and so far, only—meeting the Republic's Minister for Education and Science, Dr Michael Woods, and the Minister for Education in the Northern Ireland Executive (now suspended), Martin McGuinness, agreed to set up a North-South special education co-ordination group; joint working groups in a number of areas of educational

underachievement—pupil attendance/retention, literacy and numeracy, and child protection; and a working group to examine cross border teacher mobility.

The Ministers also agreed to commission the [Centre for Cross Border Studies](#) in Armagh to undertake an evaluation of “the range and effectiveness of current initiatives in the area of school, youth and teacher exchanges, and to make recommendations to a steering committee representative of both administrations on the adoption of a coherent integrated strategy for the future”.

It should also be noted that the [British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body](#) held an enquiry in 1998-99 into Education and Inter-Community Relations in the island of Ireland and between Ireland and Great Britain. The [Report](#) of the relevant committee, and the subsequent [19th](#) and [20th](#) plenary sessions of the Body, discussed a number of issues relevant to North-South co-operation in education.

There have also been East-West meetings (between the respective Ministers in Westminster and Dublin), resulting *inter alia* in an agreement (in 1998) to link the National Grid for Learning and Ireland’s [ScoilNet](#).

PRIMARY EDUCATION

Cross border comparisons

Primary education in Northern Ireland covers 4-11 years. Primary teachers are mostly employed by the Education and Library Boards or by the [Council for Catholic Maintained Schools](#), but other arrangements exist. The curriculum is a statutory one; the law lays down programmes of study for all pupils attending grant-aided schools. This also applies to pupils with special educational needs, although in their case exemptions can be arranged through statements of special needs. 85 per cent of teaching time is meant to be devoted to the statutory primary curriculum. The first two of the four 'key stages' of compulsory schooling (age 5-16) are spent at primary school.

Primary education in the Republic covers 4-12 years (the statutory schooling age is 6-15, due to be raised to 16 in the near future). Most primary schools have boards of management, on which managers (usually clergymen), teachers and parents are represented. These boards employ the teachers, although they are paid by the Department. The curriculum is centralised, although not statutory, and Irish is a compulsory subject. A new primary curriculum, with more precisely stated learning objectives and increased assessment, will be introduced on a phased basis starting this September.

It is difficult to find comparable data to assess the relative merits and demerits of the two Irish primary systems. However a case study carried out by the [Irish National Teachers' Organisation](#) in 1994 of six comparable schools in Limerick and Derry (*see table 1*) appeared to indicate that primary schools in the Republic were under-funded and under-resourced compared to those in Northern Ireland. The study also showed higher pupil-teacher ratios and poorer promotional prospects for the teachers in the six Republic of Ireland schools. On the other hand, in common with their colleagues elsewhere in the UK, Northern Ireland teachers are generally less well-paid than their Republic of Ireland colleagues, where strong unions and a traditionally high status have ensured that teachers are paid well by international standards.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Limerick-Derry	Lmk-Dry	Lmk-Dry	Lmk-Dry	Lmk-Dry	Lmk-Dry
Enrolment	37-37	107-120	164-148	187-188	275-294	695-610
Class Teacher	2-2	5-6	6-7	8-8	10-9	25-25
Admin. Principal	n-n	n-n	n-y	n-y	y-y	y-y
Total Teachers	2-2	5-6	7-8	9-9	14-13	28-29
Largest Class	20-16	33-26	33-29	26-27	36-31	36-29
Smallest Class	17-11	13-16	20-15	20-14	26-23	23-19
Average	18.5-13.5	21.4-20.6	27.3-21.6	23-24	27.2-27	28-23.5
PTR	18.5-13.5	21.4-20	23.4-18.5	21-21	19.6-22.8	24-21.3
Vice-Principal	0-0	1-1	1-1	1-1	1-1	1-2
Other Posts	0-1	0-2	3-4	0-4	1-7	5-16
Computer	3-4	0-8	4-7	5-10	2-15	6-28
Printer	0-4	0-8	1-2	3-7	1-14	2-15

TV	0-2	1-2	1-1	1-1	1-2	4-4
Video	0-1	1-2	1-1	1-1	1-2	4-4
Radio/Cassette	2-2	5-7	8-7	8-6	6-5	16-31

Table 1: Case study—six primary schools Limerick/Derry, 1994

Primary schools in Northern Ireland tend to be considerably better resourced than in the Republic. The principals of two comparable 500-pupil schools in Newry and Dundalk which featured in an *Irish Times* [article](#) in 1998 said they had respectively £107,000 and just over £55,000 (£37,500 from the Department of Education and Science) to spend per year, excluding teachers' salaries.

The Republic's primary pupil-teacher ratio is the worst in western Europe, at nearly 24:1, although the North's is not much better at just under 20:1.

Cross border co-operation

There is relatively little contact between primary schools in the two Irish jurisdictions. For obvious reasons most cross border projects involve primary schools close to the border, where travel for young children is less problematic. They are usually powered by the 'beyond the call of duty' commitment of individual principals, teachers and others. For example, in this border area, one outstanding initiative is run by the [Churches' Peace Education Programme](#) (which brings together the Catholic hierarchy's Irish Commission for Justice and Peace and the Protestant [Irish Council of Churches](#)). This project links 22 rural primary schools on both sides of the border in Fermanagh, Cavan, Leitrim and Donegal. It has been going since 1995 and is funded by the EU Peace and Reconciliation Programme.

The most unusual thing about this project is that it has been able to involve schools in border Protestant communities which often feel isolated, marginalized and suspicious of cross-community and cross border co-operation as a 'takeover' strategem. This was done by using the 'cultural heritage' approach (and thus within the Education for Mutual Understanding syllabus) and working on common heritage-related themes like farming traditions, emigration, schools in the past, and entertainments in the past. Resource materials for each theme were produced by the Peace Education Programme. A vital element of the project was the production of a display and dramatic presentation at the end of each linked school project which was attended by parents and the wider community. Project office Brigid Lenane stresses that the availability of resource materials is vital to the success of such an initiative, since it is extremely difficult to ask already-stretched teachers to take on such a sensitive extra workload without such resources.

Another successful example of what can be done in a peripheral cross border area is an inter-schools initiative in north Monaghan and South Tyrone. Here, in 1996, a highly motivated group of people in Truagh in North Monaghan and Augnacloy in South Tyrone brought together a cluster of three southern primary schools and two northern primary schools and one secondary school into the [Aughnacloy/Truagh European Studies Schools Project](#).

The six schools developed a joint environmental studies programme based around their common 'sense of place' in the Blackwater Valley, and common curriculum topics in cultural heritage, art and music. The EU Peace and Reconciliation Programme funded the group with part-time project officers and ICT equipment, including video-conferencing. Late last year the schools received £100,000 from the Department of Education and Science to develop their latest project, the Blackwater Valley Lifelong Learning Centre, initially in a new school at Knockconan in north Monaghan. The centre plans to be a cross border resource providing

adult education and ICT for this rural area. The Aughnacloy-Truagh project won an AIB 'Better Ireland' award this year.

Another project owing a huge amount to the effort of one individual is the [Pushkin Prize](#). This was started in 1987 by the Duchess of Abercorn, a resident of County Tyrone, to commemorate her ancestor, the Russian poet. It uses a poetry and creative writing competition to link children from around 50 primary schools in Northern Ireland and the Republic, not just in border areas. It recently made [headlines](#) for the wrong reasons when a local Sinn Féin councillor objected to the Duchess visiting a school in Pomeroy whose children were participating in the programme. The visit went ahead without incident following the intervention of the Sinn Féin leader and education minister, Martin McGuinness.

Another small project, recently initiated by a DES inspector and the [Southern Education and Library Board](#), brings together four primary schools on each side of the border to study their local area, to exchange information by e-mail, and then make a one-day visit to their counterpart school.

There are a number of annual or once-off projects such as competitions involving primary schools on a cross border and North-South basis. The largest is probably the [Esso Schools Wildlife Challenge](#), which brings up to 300 schools together from all over Ireland every year to do written, artistic and practical projects around the theme of wildlife and the environment. It has been run on a North-South basis since 1995.

Special education

There has been little actual co-operation on special needs education, although it has been raised at a number of meetings between Northern and Southern Ministers for Education in recent years. At policy level papers have been exchanged about how the two jurisdictions deal with autism, dyslexia and Attention Deficit Disorder. Both sides are keen to discuss the possibility of doing joint research into the best models of response to these problems in the Irish situation. (In the Republic these matters are partly within the jurisdiction of the [Department of Health and Children](#), and in the North, the [Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety](#).)

Similarly, in the area of practical care, there has been some talk about the possibility of working together so that children with unusual special needs in border areas might be treated by joint specialised units.

School transport is another area which has been raised in discussions. Among the issues discussed has been how to avoid situations where, for example, the family of a child in the Republic who has gone to a residential special school in Northern Ireland, has had to pay for his or her transport costs across the border.

Irish-medium primary education

The main cross border co-operation in the Irish language area is a [project](#), administered by the [Western Education and Library Board](#), to produce Irish language materials in the Ulster dialect for use in Irish-medium schools in Northern Ireland and the border counties. It has a budget of £330,000 over two and a half years from both Departments of Education and the EU Peace Programme. The project also involves individual gaelscoileanna (Irish-medium schools) on both sides of the border, the Belfast-based bunscóil (primary) and naíscoil (nursery) schools umbrella group [Gaeiloiliúint](#) (GO), the Northern Irish-language group Gael Uladh, the third-level education sector and teachers' groups.

Three story books for 7-8 year olds (translated from Welsh), plus a cassette were launched last year, along with two novels for 10-12 year olds (translated from Scots Gaelic). By the end of the project 21 fiction and non-fiction titles will be available to schools.

[An tÁisaonad Lán-Ghaeilge/The Irish Medium Resources Unit](#) in [St Mary's University College](#) in Belfast is translating the children's micropedia, Kingfisher, to be produced in CD-ROM form, also funded jointly by the two main Departments.

In another project, six primary schools in the Donegal Gaeltacht, six gaelscoileanna in Northern Ireland and three in the Southern border counties have been linked electronically.

Teacher unions (primary level)

It is an interesting historical accident that the [Irish National Teachers' Organisation](#) (INTO), the primary teachers' union in the Republic, is also the only all-Ireland teachers' union, with around a quarter of its members in the North, all but a few of them primary and secondary teachers in Catholic schools. This year's INTO president, Des Rainey, is from Derry. For some years the union has campaigned to make it easier for Northern primary teachers to work in Southern schools, notably by removing the obligatory Irish test all primary teachers in the Republic have to pass (it was recently removed for second-level teachers).

A motion from the union's leadership passed at the INTO's 132nd annual [congress](#) in April 2000 called on the Departments of Education, North and South, to co-operate on the establishment of General Teaching Councils for the island; to consider setting up a joint registration committee of the councils which would recognise the qualifications of all teachers trained in the Republic, Northern Ireland and Britain; to move towards common teacher qualifications to allow all-island mobility; to provide for the North-South transfer of superannuation benefits; to start discussions on the harmonisation of pupil/student qualifications at all levels and entry procedures to third-level institutions; and to set up a common, centrally-administered programme to promote closer co-operation among schools on the island, with substantial resources to provide for exchanges, research and in-service teacher training.

The [Ulster Teachers' Union](#)—one of the three main teachers' unions in Northern Ireland—which has about three quarters of its 5,500 members in state primary schools, recently rejoined the Irish Congress of Trades Unions after a break of many years. It has occasional contact with Southern unions and has particularly close relations with the island-wide INTO, with which it has issued a major joint policy document. It has participated in North-South linkages including the job shadowing scheme supported by Co-operation Ireland. It has lobbied on the pensions transfer issue but has not recently addressed the question of the Irish language qualification.

SECOND-LEVEL EDUCATION

Cross border comparisons

	North	Republic
Population 12-18 years (1994)	0.18 million	0.48 million
Enrolments (1992-93)	145,008	358,437
Number of teachers involved in second-level education (1993-94)	9,839	20,355
Average second-level teachers' pay before tax (incl. superannuation)	Stg£21,745	IR£24,533
Pupil/teacher ratios (1993-94)	15.1:1	16.7:1
Recurrent unit cost per pupil per annum at second level (1993)	Stg£2,295	IR£1,814
Participation rates at upper second level (18)	72%	79%
Second-level education costs, current and capital (1993)	Stg£377m	IR£704.3m
Pay (% of total)	72.1%	83.9%
Non-pay (% of total)	27.9%	16.1%

Table 2: Comparison of second-level statistics by Dr Don Thornhill, secretary of Department of Education, Dublin, 1995

The most immediately striking difference between the two education systems at second level is that in Northern Ireland there is selection at 11. Those who pass this selection test go on to grammar schools (mainly Protestant 'controlled', Catholic 'maintained' or academically high-achieving 'voluntary') and usually stay in school until 18, with a far higher chance of going on to third level, while the rest go to secondary intermediate (high) schools with a much greater risk of leaving school early with poor qualifications. The INTO has called this test one of Northern Ireland's "greatest social evils" in that it "ensures that at least two-thirds of our young people are categorised as 'failures' at the age of 11 years." On the other hand there is strong middle-class parental pressure to maintain the system, which results in outstanding results by UK standards in the school-leaving and university entrance GCE 'A'-level exam.

Statutory education ends at 16 although it is free for those who decide to continue to age 18. At 16 pupils sit the GCSE examination (usually in 7-10 subjects), and at 18 they sit GCE 'A'-level (usually in 3-4 subjects).

In the Republic there is no selection, and second-level schools are a matter of parental choice. There is a wide choice, with different management boards and funding arrangements. They range from fee-paying schools, through secondary (offering a more academic curriculum, although this is changing), vocational (traditionally less academic, although this too is changing), comprehensive, to community schools and colleges, whose more secular and participative management structures make them the favoured option where new schools are being set up or old schools are being amalgamated.

Pupils in the Republic take the broad-based Junior Certificate examination (usually in nine subjects) at 15-16, and go on to take the only slightly less broad-based Leaving Certificate

examination (6-7 subjects, including Maths, English and Irish) at 17-18. Education is free up to 18, although most publicly-funded schools, both primary and second-level, have to do a considerable amount of fund-raising to cover operational spending, as well as for extra-curricular activities.

One recently introduced innovation is that nearly half of Southern students now take a '[Transition Year](#)' after the Junior Certificate which is devoted to non-exam subjects, work experience and extra-curricular activities. One of the problems when it comes to student exchanges is that there is no equivalent year in Northern Ireland, with the result that exchanging groups are sometimes mismatched in age and maturity.

Cross border co-operation

At school level, it is among second-level schools that the contact between young people in the two jurisdictions has been greatest. There is considerably more going on in this sector, albeit unsystematic and overlapping, than would appear at first glance. A large part of this is due to the [European Studies Project](#), started in the wake of the [Anglo-Irish Agreement](#) in 1986 by the Departments of Education in Northern Ireland, England and the Republic of Ireland. This now involves over 200 schools, just under 100 in Northern Ireland and just over 100 in the Republic (and more than 200 elsewhere in a dozen other European countries).

The European Studies Project was a major Irish and European educational initiative, undertaken in the first instance **without financial assistance from the EU** or the US (unlike most of the more recent cross border educational initiatives on this island). In its first six-year phase it had a £3.2 million budget and six full-time field officers in the North, the Republic and England. In the 11-14 age group ESP schools are linked—usually through ICT and visits—to look at common history, geography and local environment themes. These courses fit into the curricular requirements of the three jurisdictions. In the 16-18 age group they are linked for the study of contemporary European issues, including social problems like drugs and unemployment. This work has been validated in a unique one-year Certificate in Contemporary European Studies, and in the UK counts as half an A-level.

Andrew Ryan, the project's Irish co-ordinator, claims that as a result of the ESP 80 per cent of schools in Northern Ireland with a sixth form now have an ongoing contact with a school in the Republic.

Probably the single best-funded initiative is now [Civic Link](#), which is essentially an American concept. President Clinton and his Irish-American Education Secretary, Richard Riley, were anxious to launch an educational initiative during the President's second Irish visit in 1998. They arranged for the adaptation of [Project Citizen](#)—a US programme which involves second-level students exploring and lobbying on local community problems—to a cross border Irish model by [Co-operation Ireland](#). Some 26 schools are involved in its first year (with another 46 to follow). The [US Department of Education](#) has pledged nearly \$700,000 and the Department of Education and Science another IR£300,000. However there has been some criticism from Irish educationalists that its American methodology is too prescriptive for Irish circumstances, and some concern that schools already involved in cross border exchanges—for example, through the [European Studies Project](#)—are those signing up again.

One of the more interesting cross border initiatives at second-level is the Citizenship Development Project, started in 1997 by [St Angela's College Sligo](#) and the [Western Education and Library Board](#). This groups 15–16-year-olds (in Transition Year in the Republic and lower sixth in the North) in 28 schools from the north-west—14 from each side of the border—in a 12-week programme around the theme 'Is this a just society?' It consists of an introductory video-conference link, an overnight residential at a neutral venue, and a cross border visit to a counterpart school.

Teachers are encouraged to have class discussions on controversial issues around the Northern Ireland conflict. This makes it almost unique among cross border programmes—and even citizenship programmes within the two jurisdictions, like [Education for Mutual Understanding](#) (N. Ireland) and Civic Social and Political Education (Republic)—where teachers often steer clear of such issues. This emphasis is despite the paltry two days training given to teachers on the CDP project.

However, like so many cross border education projects, the Citizenship Development Project is funded by the [EU Peace and Reconciliation Programme](#), and is due to end in December 2000, by which time around 1200 students will have experienced it. This means that its primary aim—to develop a model for a cross border citizenship development curriculum for wider use at Key Stage Four in the North and in Transition Year in the South—may go unrealised.

Two smaller but comparable programmes are run by the Curriculum Development Unit of the [City of Dublin VEC](#) with Northern Ireland partners. 16 second-level schools—12 in the Republic and four in the North—last autumn began an 18-month EU Peace and Reconciliation-funded pilot study to incorporate a cross border 'education for reconciliation' element into their Civic, Social and Political Education (Republic) and Social, Civic and Political Education (North) programmes (*see also 'A Note on Citizenship Education'*). This focuses on students' own experience and the practice of human rights. A separate programme around human rights links five schools in the Republic and five schools in the North with five schools in Kenya. It is a partnership between CDVEC, the [Western Education and Library Board](#) and the [North Eastern Education & Library Board](#).

Co-operation Ireland and other supporters

The largest single supporter and funder of cross border school and youth exchanges has been [Co-operation Ireland](#) (formerly Co-operation North), set up in 1979 by a group of business and professional people to promote North-South economic, social, educational and cultural co-operation.

According to Co-operation Ireland, well over 100,000 young people in school and youth groups (most of them of second-level school age) have gone through its programmes in the last 20 years. The organisation recruited schools and youth groups, found cross border partners for them and provided financial assistance for exchange visits.

A large proportion of these schools and groups went through this process up to the mid-1990s. A 1992 evaluation concluded that the programme had been more successful in improving communication and understanding between individuals rather than groups. It also noted that many of the exchanges had been once-off, with no repeat visits. Stressing the complexity of trying to reduce prejudice through this kind of managed co-operation of young people, it recommended more pre-exchange preparation, particularly in group work and leadership training.

As a result of this advice, from the mid-1990s Co-operation Ireland has been concentrating less on volume and more on the quality of its facilitation and group work. Fewer schools have been involved and the emphasis has been more on longer-term relationship building and facing up to problems of culture and identity. More time has been spent on pre-exchange preparation, including training teachers in conflict resolution and mediation skills, and theme packs have been produced for use on exchanges. There has also been an attempt to support those teachers involved in exchanges who have felt isolated in their schools.

This emphasis on getting groups to work together has led to Co-operation Ireland taking on projects with specific educational outcomes, such as [Civic Link](#). It has also meant more

emphasis on trying to link cross border programmes in a more meaningful way into the curriculum. Some students in the North incorporate them into their Education for Mutual Understanding courses. Co-operation Ireland is working with the Northern Ireland [Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment](#) to try to develop an accredited Civic Link module, and hopes that Civic Link can also be tied into one of the Civic Social and Political Education 'action projects' in the Republic.

However this longer-term, lower-profile work, with less tangible outcomes to show, has sometimes led to the organisation experiencing funding difficulties with corporate donors.

Both inside and outside Co-operation Ireland's programmes much of the real work of cross border educational exchange has been left to individual teachers and educationalists, usually with little official support. One of the most remarkable prototypes—because it was one of the relatively few in the early years to target a partner school in a loyalist town—was a 1980 link-up between Carrick-on-Suir CBS in south Tipperary and [Ballymena Academy](#) in County Antrim, in Rev. Ian Paisley's home town. The originator and continuing energy behind this initiative is a Carrick teacher, Nicholas Casey, and his huge personal commitment has ensured an annual exchange of 16 and 17 year olds ever since.

He wants his students to realise that "unionist people in Northern Ireland have values in their lives, including the value of Britishness, which they treasure". He believes that with the coming of peace in the North, the students can experience "the real differences between us, without the distracting business of bombs and bullets. We will have to accept their Britishness, and they'll have to accept our Irishness and we can only do that by meeting as people."

It is this same belief which motivated the teachers at [Alexandra College](#) in Dublin, a Protestant-managed school (but now with a majority of Catholic pupils) when they started the [Horizon Project](#) in 1991. This brings together students from up to 50 schools, North and South, for an annual long weekend to engage in outdoor, art, drama and social activities together.

ICT and other cross border projects (mainly second-level)

A number of other individual cross border projects have come to the notice of this researcher, several of them using ICT. The two schools internet networks, [ScoilNet](#) and the [Northern Ireland Network in Education](#), are linked through their teachers' sections.

The [Cross Connect](#) project, run by the [Faculty of Informatics](#) at the University of Ulster at Magee (in partnership with the [Western Education and Library Board](#), Co. Cavan and Co. Leitrim VECs), links 12 rural second-level schools in rural areas of Cavan, Leitrim, Tyrone, Fermanagh and Derry through ICT connections. Another University of Ulster-based cross border ICT project is [Dissolving Boundaries through Information Technology](#), which involves 50 schools and is designed to link schools North and South, primary and secondary, through the Internet and exchanges. It came out of a pilot project, [This Island We Live On](#), run by teachers and student teachers at the University of Ulster and [NUI Maynooth](#), which brought together 300 pupils aged 3-17. Dell provides the computers and Eircom the video-conferencing links.

A third ICT-based project, run out of the [National Centre for Technology in Education](#) in [Dublin City University](#), brings together four Northern schools and four schools in the Republic, along with four in Washington DC, to explore Irish cultures through different musical traditions, using a CD-ROM and a group of travelling musicians.

More recently, new funding for cross border projects appears to have been made available by the Department of Education and Science in Dublin. This has led, for example, to a project initiated by a Southern school inspector, along with the [Southern Education and Library Board](#), called 'Our Town, Your Town.' This brings together seven post-primary schools in the Southern Board area with seven from the Republic to study their local town and to visit their counterparts' towns on the other side of the border.

There are also numerous sporting, arts and music links between Northern and Southern schools. Sports like rugby, hockey and athletics, which involve children and young people from both North and South, and Northern Protestant and Catholic backgrounds, competing all over the island, have a particularly beneficial effect in breaking down barriers.

Music is also important. One of the biggest cross border events in recent years was the '[Doors—Celebrating Lifelong Learning](#)' series of concerts in Dublin, Belfast, Cork and Derry. This involved 1700 students, most of them of school age, in a musical extravaganza on the achievements and problems of students of all ages. It was developed by the two Departments of Education, the [Irish Business and Employers Confederation](#) (IBEC), the Northern Ireland Business Education Partnership (NIBEP) and Business in the Community and was sponsored by Marks and Spencer plc.

A smaller but longer-running musical exchange has seen the formation of a joint orchestra by three schools close to the border: [St Louis' Secondary School](#) in Dundalk, Abbey CBS Grammar School in Newry and [Banbridge Academy](#). The 140-strong orchestra, formed in 1995, has performed in Finland and the Czech Republic, and won first prize at the Dublin Feis Ceoil for the past three years.

At a 'North South Education Forum' in February, consisting of officials from four of the five education and library boards and the six border VECs, nearly 50 cross border educational and youth projects were listed (at pre-school, primary, secondary, further education and adult education levels). Many of them were parts of programmes already mentioned in this article, but there was a significant number of other, mainly small projects, mainly in areas contiguous to the border. They covered sectors like library co-operation; art and drama; sports and outdoor pursuits programmes; cookery, catering, and tourism training; joint youth work training and youth club exchanges, including a joint drug addiction support programme; training young women; community education; IT in primary schools; a curriculum module for young people involved in cross border visits; local schools participating in the [Warrington Project](#) exchange between British and Irish schools; the 'Salmon of Knowledge' exchange between two Dublin and Belfast primary schools; business (SME) studies for students at further education colleges; staff development at FE colleges; exchanges between young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (part of the [International Fund for Ireland](#) Wider Horizons programme); a joint careers and recruitment fair; a pre-school family support programme; [Duke of Edinburgh's Award/Gaisce](#) co-operation; use of wind turbines; permaculture design; and exchanges with Germany and Hungary.

This looks at first glance like an impressive list. However two questions occur to those who take an interest in cross border education projects as a means towards longer-term better relationships on the island of Ireland. Firstly, how many of them would continue to exist if there was no money from the [EU Peace and Reconciliation Fund](#), the [International Fund for Ireland](#) and other international funding agencies to support them? Until the past couple of years, there has been little or no 'mainstream' funding from the two Departments of Education, North and South, for this kind of activity. Secondly, how many of them are reaching those young people who are most ignorant of and alienated from the other Irish jurisdiction, the children and young people who live in strong unionist areas? The 1992 Co-operation North evaluation found that the schools taking part in that organisation's cross border programmes came roughly half and half from Catholic and Protestants areas in Northern Ireland. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that the proportions are considerably more skewed across the whole range of cross border school and youth exchanges.

Teacher unions (second and third level)

As noted [above](#), the 26,000-member [Irish National Teachers' Organisation](#), which is active in the South in the primary sector and in the North in the Catholic primary and secondary sectors, has been an enthusiastic advocate of measures to enhance the cross border mobility of teachers, with a detailed motion to that effect having been passed at its recent congress.

A similar motion was passed at the annual congress of the [Teachers' Union of Ireland](#) (TUI), which organises 11,000 teachers in vocational and community schools and institutes of technology in the Republic. It proposed that the TUI should back other teacher unions, North and South, in setting up a sub-group of the existing British-Irish group of teacher unions "to provide a forum for a North-South Council of Education Unions".

The [NASUWT](#) (formally the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers) has a significant share of membership in Northern Ireland (about 9,000 teachers, mainly secondary level) and two of its three most senior officials happen to be from the region. The union has a keen interest in North-South matters, and has cordial relations with the INTO (mainly through the latter's Northern structures) and with the main Southern-only unions, TUI and ASTI, with which it consults on issues such as cross border pension transfers (of which there have been precisely none since partition). The NASUWT regards as perhaps the main North-South issue the opening up of the Southern job market to the excess pool of teachers from the North by doing away with the Irish-language requirement.

The [Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland](#) (ASTI) is the main second-level teachers' union in the Republic, representing 16,000 teachers in community schools, community colleges, comprehensive schools and voluntary secondary schools attended by 80 per cent of all second-level students.

In Northern Ireland the INTO has around 6,000 members, the [Ulster Teachers' Union](#) about 5,500 (mainly primary), the [Association of Teachers and Lecturers](#) (ATL) about 2,000, the [National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education](#) (NATFHE) 2,000, and the [National Association of Head Teachers](#) (NAHT) something under 1,000. (All figures approximate.)

The NASUWT, ASTI, TUI and INTO are all members of the the [Irish Congress of Trade Unions](#) (ICTU), along with third-level unions NATFHE, the [Association of University Teachers](#) (AUT) and the [Irish Federation of University Teachers](#) (IFUT).

Several of the unions are members of international trade union groupings, although it is doubtful that these structures are of much relevance to North-South co-operation in Ireland. The global federation, [Education International](#), includes ASTI, the INTO and the TUI, and at the tertiary-level IFUT, along with eight UK-based unions including the UTU and the NASUWT. The same unions participate in the [European Trade Union Committee for Education](#) (ETUCE).

UNIVERSITY AND OTHER THIRD LEVEL

History of co-operation

For the obvious reason that college students are free agents compared to primary and secondary students and therefore respond to the market forces of cost and availability of places, cross border contact in third-level education is at a higher level than in the other two sectors. However it is considerably lower than one might expect on a small English-speaking island with similar university cultures and systems.

Until the 1980s there was little contact between the two higher education systems on the island. The main exception to this rule was the flow of mainly Protestant students who continued to come south to [Trinity College Dublin](#)—traditionally a Protestant university—until the onset of the Northern Ireland conflict and the ending of the Archbishop of Dublin’s ban on Catholics attending TCD reduced their numbers to insignificant levels in the 1970s.

Neither of the two major government reports in the 1960s—the Lockwood Report in Northern Ireland and the Commission on Higher Education in the Republic—paid any significant attention to either existing or potential cross border collaboration.

In the early 1980s the [Northern Ireland Economic Council](#) and the [National Economic and Social Council](#) commissioned Professor Gareth Williams of the University of Lancaster to “review the complementarity of third-level education in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and the scope for mutually beneficial co-operation”. The 1985 Williams Report noted that in international terms the two systems of higher education were small and that small systems were under an obligation to encourage contact and co-operation and to avoid parochialism.

After reviewing available demographic data and projections Williams suggested that demand for higher education places was set to fall in Northern Ireland while the demographic pressures would lead to it rising in the Republic. On this basis, he argued: “In principle, therefore, it ought to be possible to arrive at mutually beneficial arrangements whereby students from the Republic could enrol in Northern Ireland universities and colleges.” He suggested that it would be cheaper for the Irish Government to pay for its students to fill the spare capacity in Northern institutions than funding additional places in the Republic.

In order to plan for these developments and other collaboration, Williams proposed a North-South higher education liaison committee, which would advise the two governments on “those aspects of their higher education policies, which have, or might have, cross border implications”. He also suggested greater collaboration in distance learning and that opportunities existed for economies of scale in the purchase of expensive equipment. In the Derry-Donegal region, in particular, he suggested that the range of co-operation could be extensive.

The official reaction to the Williams Report was cautious on both sides of the border. Several university heads indicated that they were willing to consider greater cross border co-operation, but that a clear lead had to come from the governments and additional resources would have to be provided where appropriate. Representatives of the governments suggested that the initiative lay with the institutions. The then Minister for Education, Gemma Hussey, did not think the major Dublin conference in November 1985 (the same month as the Anglo-Irish Agreement) organised to discuss the Williams Report important enough to mention in her memoirs.

Osborne notes that it is “difficult to trace specific actions resulting from the Williams Report. Indeed, in one area, collaboration with the UK’s [Open University](#) in order to extend distance learning in the South, suggested by Williams, was rejected in favour of an indigenous distance learning centre based at DCU.” This did not stop the Open University thriving in both jurisdictions, with the demand for courses in the Republic leading to the opening of an [office](#) in Dublin in the mid-nineties, and the number of OU students in the Republic rising from a few hundred—mainly prisoners—in the late 1980s to around 4,000 now (slightly higher than the number in Northern Ireland).

Student flows

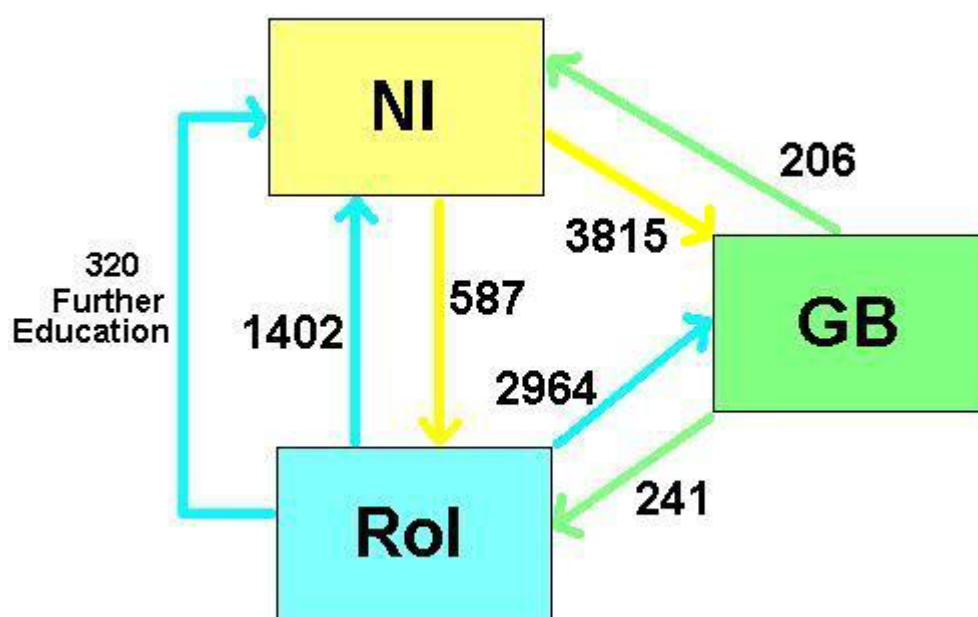


Table 3: Irish-British student movements, 1995 (full-time undergraduate entrants)

If little was happening at an official or strategic level, a shortage of third-level places in the Republic, plus a ruling from Brussels that all EU students had to be treated equally when it came to fees, started to bring about a new form of market-led cross border co-operation in the form of increased student flows to Northern Ireland and Britain (*see table 3*). The result of the EU ruling was that Southern students, most of whom were paying means-tested fees at that time, would pay no fees in the North and would also be able to take their maintenance grants with them.

This led to a situation where 17 per cent of full-time degree entrants to the [University of Ulster](#) in 1994-95 were from the Republic, many of them from the Southern border counties.

However with the abolition of undergraduate fees in the Republic in 1997, the numbers going North began to fall. At the University of Ulster, the most popular destination, full-time undergraduate entrants from the South fell from 846 in 1995-96 to 473 in 1997-98. This trend has certainly been exacerbated by the introduction of undergraduate fees in the UK in 1998. Overall, there has been a 50 per cent drop in the number of Southern students going

North in the past four years, from a peak of 1,359 new enrolments in 1995-96 to 681 in 1998-99. Similarly new enrolments of Northern students at Southern institutions has fallen by 70 per cent since the mid-1990s, although a large part of this is due to the ending of anomalous grants to private colleges (*see below*).

In the early 1990s there had been a temporary and anomalous increase in the numbers of Northern students going South. A small part of this involved students going to the universities, particularly TCD and UCD, often to do high prestige courses like veterinary and medicine. However there was a more dramatic increase—from almost nil to 850—in those going to study full-time at private third-level colleges in Dublin which were unregulated by the [Department of Education and Science](#) but some of whose awards were validated by the National Council for Educational Awards and the Universities of [Ulster](#) and [Glamorgan](#). The main attractions for Northern students were the lower entry requirements and the anomaly that the Department of Education for Northern Ireland and the Education and Library Boards paid their (expensive) fees and offered normal maintenance grants. DENI ended this anomaly in 1997.

Osborne notes that examples of student flows taking place as a result of deliberate cross border collaboration between institutions are rare. He notes the joint [University of Ulster/University of Limerick](#) MA in peace studies; collaborative arrangements between UU and Dundalk RTC (now [Dundalk Institute of Technology](#)) for part-time MBA studies; and Queen's University Belfast's arrangements allowing students from a number of RTCs (now ITs) to proceed to Queen's civil engineering courses. Since then one can add the joint masters degree in [science communications](#) between Queen's University and Dublin City University (taught in Armagh and Dublin); the M.Sc. course in [electronics and software systems](#) put on by Athlone IT, the [University of Ulster](#) and [National University of Ireland Galway](#); and the M.Sc. in biomedical engineering put on by the [University of Limerick](#), the University of Ulster, [Trinity College Dublin](#) and the [Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland](#).

One of the areas where there is more North-South interaction is in the more conventional academic activity of external examining. Most Irish universities have external examiners from across the border: in 1994 the [University of Limerick](#) claimed that 11 of its 49 external examiners were from the two northern universities.

Research collaboration

An area where one would expect a considerable level of North-South university collaboration is in the area of research. The Conference of University Rectors in Ireland put together a preliminary register of 127 collaborative research projects in 1997, and is currently engaged in updating that register. However it is accepted that a significant number of the projects listed in 1997 were aspirational or did not have funding. It is understood that the updated CRI draft register does not show any significant rise in the number of research projects compared to 1997.

Similarly Osborne, writing in the mid-1990s, noted that the level of research collaboration then was not much greater than a decade earlier when Williams examined North-South university interaction. "The absence of any upsurge in joint work on a cross border basis parallels the relative underdevelopment of cross border economic activity", writes Osborne.

Another reason is inertia in the South, he believes, citing the lack of interest among Southern researchers in a North-South social policy research initiative he and a colleague were seeking to develop in the mid-1980s.

There are, of course, a few outstanding exceptions to this general rule. The most notable of these is the [Irish Universities Nutrition Alliance](#), involving around 150 researchers in nutrition-

related areas at the [University of Ulster](#), [Trinity College Dublin](#) and [University College Cork](#). Another is the '[super computer](#)' link between Queen's University Belfast and Trinity College Dublin.

The [University of Ulster](#) is probably the Irish university which has been involved most in North-South research co-operation. In February 1999 it issued a 66-page publication detailing this research across a range of areas relevant to the Good Friday Agreement, and the North-South bodies which came out of it, and identifying other areas for future collaboration.

Osborne observes that the extremely poor research funding climate in the Republic until very recently forced universities to look to the EU, with its requirement that European funding be distributed to transnational consortia of institutions. While this made the two Northern universities obvious partners, the choice of 40 or more in mainland Britain provided far more options, quite apart from the institutions elsewhere in Europe keen to partner Irish universities in an Objective One region. With the attractions of pan-European programmes like [Socrates](#) and [Erasmus](#) there was no particular reason why developing links with the North should be a priority.

However in recent years, with the ending of the NIDevR fund—which had allowed the former [Department of Education for Northern Ireland](#) to bridge the gap caused by the relative under-performance of the two Northern Ireland universities in the UK-wide [Research Assessment Exercise](#)—the university research funding base in Northern Ireland has shrunk. It is understood that discussions are currently taking place about a once-off injection of research funding (believed to be in the region of £20 million) from the new [Department of Further and Higher Education, Training and Employment](#), to be matched by £20 million raised by the universities from the private sector.

In contrast, in the Republic, the huge revenues brought in by a booming economy have allowed the [Department of Education and Science](#) and the [Higher Education Authority](#) very significantly to increase the Republic's hitherto—by international standards—poor third-level research funding base. The result is that between 1999 and 2002 the Department of Education and Science has £220 million to spend on third-level research.

However there are still few incentives for academics in the two Irish jurisdictions to collaborate on research projects, other than as part of the general EU requirement to seek partners in other European countries. Northern academics have their eyes firmly fixed on the extremely competitive Research Assessment Exercise, which now determines the bulk of UK universities research funding, while Southern institutions jostle for the large new funding coming out of the DES. Neither system has any cross border dimension.

In recent years there have been a number of suggestions for a dedicated North-South research fund. Professor Dermot Diamond of the [Biomedical and Environmental Sensor Technology](#) (BEST) Centre at Dublin City University—itself a pioneering North-South project—has lobbied for such a fund in the science area. He says that North-South scientific co-operation has been mainly *ad hoc*, with limited funding—typical grants are around £500—from the [British Council](#) and the Conference of University Rectors in Ireland.

The only programme which specifically encourages North-South collaborative research is administered by the Republic's [Health Research Board](#) (it recently offered funding of £26,000 per year for up to three years for a cross border medical research project). Professor Diamond believes the existing small-scale schemes actually cost the host university money in terms of lost bench fees and overheads and project running costs. He also suggests that the recent dramatic increases in research funding in the Republic will remove one of the main incentives for researchers to develop links with Northern-based colleagues: access to facilities and equipment.

He proposes the establishment of a dedicated North-South fund for collaborative research in science, with a panel drawn from existing research administrations to run it and a group of independent experts to grade applications. He says that "the amounts need not be excessive", with 10 projects costing £100,000 per year each for three years requiring a total fund over that time of £9 million.

Centre for Cross Border Studies

In a similar vein, the [Centre for Cross Border Studies](#) has recently put forward a more modest proposal to the Conference of University Rectors of Ireland for a 'seed fund' for North-South research across a range of areas, to which all the institutes of higher education on this island would contribute a small sum on an annual basis.

The Centre for Cross Border Studies, based in Armagh, was set up in September 1999 to research and develop co-operation across the Irish border in education, health, business, public administration, transport and communications and a range of other practical areas. It is a joint initiative between [Queen's University Belfast](#), [Dublin City University](#) and the [Workers' Educational Association](#) (Northern Ireland), and its pilot phase is funded by the European Peace and Reconciliation Programme. The Irish Government's 2000-2006 [National Development Plan](#) mentioned it as one of two "noteworthy examples" of significant recent developments in North-South co-operation, along with the development plan by the three cross border local authority networks for the border corridor region.

The Centre has commissioned a number of cross border and North-South [research studies](#) in education, health services, public administration, infrastructural planning and telecommunications. These involve researchers at the [University of Ulster](#), [Queen's University Belfast](#), [University College Dublin](#), [National University of Ireland, Maynooth](#), the [Dublin Institute of Technology](#), [St Patrick's College Drumcondra](#), the [London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine](#) and the [Institute of Public Administration](#).

The education research project is a study of how further education colleges in Northern Ireland and institutes of technology in the Republic can better co-operate and learn from each other in tackling the problems of bringing the long-term unemployed and young people with low skills and qualifications back into the education system (researchers: Dr Mark Morgan and Paul McGill).

Teacher training and exchanges

This is the only educational area which is mentioned in the Good Friday Agreement, which notes that in the education area, "areas for North-South co-operation and implementation" may include "teacher qualifications and exchanges". There are already a number of cross border initiatives between the colleges of education, North and South.

1999-2000 is the first year of a teaching practice pilot project which brings together all the major colleges of education on the island: [St Patrick's College](#), Drumcondra; [Mary Immaculate College](#), Limerick; the Church of Ireland College of Education, Rathmines; [Froebel College of Education](#), Blackrock; [Marino Institute of Education](#); [Mater Dei Institute](#); [St Angela's College](#), Sligo; [Stranmillis University College](#) and [St Mary's University College](#), Belfast. This involves trainee teachers doing their teaching practice in the other Irish jurisdiction. It is funded by [Léargas](#) and the [Central Bureau for Educational Visits and Exchanges](#).

A longer-standing initiative is the Wider Horizons project (funded by the [International Fund for Ireland](#)) which for the past decade has brought student teachers from both Irish jurisdictions to Lowell, Massachusetts every summer to work with children from multi-cultural and socially deprived backgrounds.

A major [conference](#) on North-South co-operation in teacher education will take place on 18-19 May in Belfast, organised by a broadly-based committee headed by Professor John Coolahan of [National University of Ireland, Maynooth](#).

A small North-South project on the evaluation of ICT applications in teacher training, [In-TENT](#) (Infusing Teacher Education with New Technologies), involves the four Northern training centres and the NUI Maynooth.

ADULT EDUCATION/LIFELONG LEARNING

The [International Adult Literacy Survey](#) second report in 1997 showed that both Northern Ireland (and Britain) and the Republic of Ireland were near the bottom of a sample of advanced countries (above only Poland) when it came to adult literacy. Both jurisdictions showed similarly high percentages of people at the lowest level of the literacy spectrum i.e. finding it difficult to read basic instructions on a medicine bottle or notices in a doctor's surgery. Some 24 per cent of those surveyed in Northern Ireland were at this level, and 23 per cent from the Republic of Ireland.

Given these disturbing findings, it is not surprising that the British and Irish governments have taken to the European Union's 'lifelong learning' agenda with particular enthusiasm. This agenda emphasises the need to upgrade people's basic skills—particularly literacy, numeracy and ICT skills—and by doing this, allowing them to find work, and in this way combat social exclusion. The British Government, with its [University for Industry/learnirect](#) initiative, has emphasised the use of new technology and individual learning as the way forward. A White Paper on lifelong learning is awaited in the Republic in the very near future.

These developments should have great significance for adult education in the two Irish jurisdictions, which until recently have been the 'Cinderella' sectors of their education systems, traditionally under-resourced and to a great degree run by non-statutory bodies. However there has so far been no thought about how these common problems on the island of Ireland might be approached, even in an exploratory way, within a co-operative framework. Extraordinarily, even though the first ever Green Paper on Adult Education in the Republic was being prepared at around the time of the Good Friday Agreement, there is no reference to Northern Ireland in it.

The only significant cross border collaborative project this researcher could find in adult education was one funded by the EU [Socrates](#) programme to develop a "quality framework" for adult basic education practice between Queen's University's [Institute of Lifelong Learning](#) (formerly the Institute of Continuing Education), the [National Adult Literacy Agency](#) in the Republic and two partners in Belgium. This tool for evaluating good practice is now being tested on both sides of the border, with a particular link-up between the [ICE](#) and [Donegal VEC](#).

However the further education colleges in Northern Ireland and the institutes of technology in the Republic—both seen by the governments as key players in the campaign for basic skills, ICT-based learning and against social exclusion in education—have begun to make contacts. Last year's annual conference of the [Association of Northern Ireland Colleges](#), which groups the further education colleges, met in Ennis, attracted by its success as Ireland's [Information Age Town](#). This was followed up by a two-day meeting of further education college and institute of technology heads in Athlone.

There have also been some contacts between the [National Adult Literacy Agency](#) and the new [Basic Skills Unit](#) in Northern Ireland.

ALL-IRELAND EDUCATION ORGANISATIONS

There are a number of all-Ireland organisations in the field of education. The teachers' union INTO has already been mentioned. At the other end of the spectrum is the [Union of Students in Ireland](#) (USI), which organises students jointly with the British [National Union of Students](#) (NUS) in Northern Ireland as [NUS-USI](#). Over 250,000 students in the island are members of USI-affiliated unions.

The all-Ireland student organisation originates from a network of student debating societies in the 1920s. USI was set up in 1959 and the link with the NUS was formalised in 1972. This unusual intersection of two national students bodies made NUS-USI the largest consortium of student organisations in Europe—with over 1,000 affiliated student unions—giving it a purchasing power which brought considerable material benefits to Irish students, whether it was in buying beer, air tickets, insurance or paper clips. At the same time, in a period of considerable student mobility in these islands, they were able to gain access to a broad range of student welfare benefits.

The representation of Northern Ireland students on both bodies has led to some unhappiness, particularly among students in the Republic. Special arrangements which allow 90 per cent of funds raised from students to stay in the NUS-USI Belfast office (with only 10 per cent going to USI's Dublin headquarters), while Northern student representatives have a full voice in the affairs of USI in the island as a whole, have been criticised, particularly in recent years.

One difficult area where the Northern Ireland office of the joint union has taken a strong lead is in anti-sectarianism work and promoting diversity on campuses. Staff and students have been trained to deal with controversial issues and sectarian incidents, and a model has been developed which has been copied across the border, in Britain and further afield.

In the 1990s a number of embryonic umbrella organisations have emerged in the education field, notably in tertiary education. The Conference of University Rectors in Ireland was started in 1992 to bring together the heads of the nine Irish universities on a regular basis. It has organised two conferences on university-industry collaboration with the CBI-[IBEC Joint Business Council](#), and following the appointment last year of a project officer, North-South gatherings of postgraduates and faculty deans. It is currently updating a draft directory of North-South university collaboration, with a particular emphasis on cross border research.

In 1996 the [Standing Conference on North-South Co-operation in Further & Higher Education](#) was launched to promote partnerships between third-level education institutions on the island of Ireland. This committee of academics and administrators in universities and further education colleges has organised a North-South [conference](#) on access to higher education, and a number of projects on promoting diversity and building student leadership skills (building on the NUS-USI work) and personal tutor training (building on a Trinity College Dublin model).

The Standing Conference on Pluralism in Irish Education emerged out of a call from the then president of [Dublin City University](#), Dr Danny O'Hare, in the mid-1990s. It brought together some distinguished educationalists on both sides of the border and held two conferences in Belfast ([1996](#)) and Cavan (1998) on pluralism in education.

In March 2000 a well-attended [conference](#) organised by an inter-denominational, cross border group of educationalists, under the auspices of the Christian Brothers' [Marino Institute of Education](#), discussed a wide range of issues under the title 'School Culture and Ethos'. Among them were core values in education, trusteeship, school development planning, school

effectiveness and improvement, pluralistic education, and how schools differ. This group has secured funding from the [Department of Education and Science](#) to expand the cross border dimension of its work.

A NOTE ON CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

One of the most interesting exercises in North-South contact between young people in recent years has been outside the educational mainstream. This is the 'Let's Talk' initiative, run by the Bray-based educationalist Colm Regan, director of the 80:20 development education project and former [Trócaire](#) education director, and funded by the [EU Peace and Reconciliation Programme](#). This has brought several thousand young people from the North, the Republic and the Birmingham area—as well as young Africans and Australians—together in a series of [conferences](#) to discuss peace and reconciliation in these islands and issues of human rights and justice further afield.

Regan outlines a number of lessons he has learned from the 'Let's Talk' experience. Firstly, he says, "partition has worked. The lack of face-to-face contacts and interaction has led to a high level of mutual suspicion and non-comprehension. The weakness of any links with northern Protestants in particular has meant that when genuine differences arise, for example, on the role of the Orange Order, we can't trust each other, we can't take each other at face value, and this reinforces the initial suspicion and incomprehension."

He gives the example of the utter incomprehension of most Southerners at Orangemen's demands to march along their traditional routes through largely Catholic areas. "We haven't had much practice at engaging with each other. It's like riding a bike—we have to learn the skills of North-South dialogue", says Regan.

In 'Let's Talk' the young people engage in drama and role-plays, with, for example, Southerners playing Orange marchers and Northern Protestants playing the nationalist residents. "Being open to people's personal and collective biographies is absolutely crucial. We all assume a lot of things. My grandfather was out in 1916; my parents are unthinkingly Fianna Fáil; I went to a Christian Brothers' school—so I have to unpack that in order to move forward", says Regan.

Similarly Southerners have to learn to treat Northerners as rounded people whom they can learn from—not just as the one-dimensional products of a violent society. Northerners, on the other hand—particularly Northern nationalists—have to learn to avoid the MOPE ('Most Oppressed People Ever') syndrome, and other weapons of a warped politicisation which they can use to berate and intimidate politically less well-informed young Southern and English people.

A third lesson—one that is echoed by all those involved in North-South youth and school exchanges—is the need "to engage with the difficult issues and not say 'let's not mention the war.' We need to find a language and methodology to engage with the issues of nationalism and unionism, Catholicism and Protestantism", says Regan.

It seems clear that until room is found on the mainstream curriculum in both jurisdictions for some element of civic and political education about the other, there will be little significant movement towards greater communication and common ground through the education systems. Moreover, the lessons of the flawed [Education for Mutual Understanding](#) (EMU) programme within Northern Ireland must be learned: the need for permanent and coherent structures to implement it; the dangers of a minimalist approach by teachers who find such programmes unclear and are untrained and unprepared to deal with controversial issues; the absence of a focus on human rights and political processes; and the lack of pre-service and in-service training for principals and teachers.

Cross-border civic and political education is one of the key ways forward, insist people like Colm Regan and Professor Alan Smith of the University of Ulster at Coleraine, who evaluated EMU and is one of the movers behind a new Social, Civic and Political Education (SCPE) study being piloted for 12-14 year olds in 30 Northern schools in the current academic year (1999-2000).

Already this is one of the relatively few areas where there has been concrete and practical co-operation at a curriculum level. Those involved in the Republic's equivalent four year old programme, [Civic Social and Political Education](#) (CSPE), notably its national co-ordinator Stephen McCarthy, have brought the benefit of their experience to assist the team from the University of Ulster's [school of education](#) who are setting up the northern pilot.

Professor Smith and his colleagues at Coleraine find the CSPE's emphasis on pluralism, social justice and human rights more suitable to Northern Ireland than the equivalent British programme, devised by the distinguished politics professor Bernard Crick, which concentrates more on how the political system operates. They also like its more applied and participatory approach, which they feel can be better adapted to dealing with the difficult issues of Northern cultures such as parades and policing.

Above all, Professor Smith emphasises the importance of teacher training, whether at pre-service student level or in-service staff development level. He is anxious to learn here from the Republic's earlier start in the citizenship education areas. Experience on both sides of the border has shown that student teachers and those already teaching civics, EMU or CSPE can be very resistant to taking on controversial issues to do with Northern Ireland in the classroom.

This new, expanding and fashionable part of the curriculum is one obvious area where the Departments of Education, North and South, could co-operate to their mutual benefit, both in terms of practical economies of scale and in the nobler cause of improving future understanding and relationships on this island.

Professor Smith also believes Northern Ireland can learn from the Republic's experiment in inserting a non-exam-oriented Transition Year programme into the first year of senior cycle. Even at a practical level, one of the enduring problems in cross border school exchanges is the lack of any 'learning through experience' period in the Northern curriculum to match this year, with the result that the students themselves are often mismatched in terms of age and maturity.

References

- 1** Dominic Murray, Alan Smith and Ursula Birthistle (1997) *Education in Ireland*, Irish Peace Institute Research Centre, University of Limerick: Introduction.
- 2** Andy Pollak (1988) '[A Tale of Two Communities](#)', *The Irish Times* 16 June.
- 3** Dr Thornhill warned at the time that some simplification of this data was necessary because of the difficulty of direct North-South comparisons due to different accounting systems, different financial years and differences in currencies and inflation rates.
- 4** Robert Osborne (1996) *Higher Education in Ireland: North and South*, Jessica Kingsley, p138.
- 5** Estimated full-time undergraduate movements 'in these islands', 1995, in *Access to Higher Education in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland: Promoting Co-operation, Pluralism and Student Mobility*, [Standing Conference on North-South Co-operation in Further & Higher Education](#), Report of the Proceedings of the Second Conference, 1998, p12.
- 6** Osborne, work cited, p140.
- 7** Figures from Queen's University/University of Ulster, Professor Bob Osborne and Dr Brian Caul of the [Standing Conference on North-South Co-operation in Further & Higher Education](#).
- 8** Osborne, work cited, p143.
- 9** Osborne, work cited, p143.
- 10** For an evaluation of EMU, see Alan Smith and Alan Robinson (1996) *Education for Mutual Understanding: The Initial Statutory Years*, Coleraine: Centre for the Study of Conflict, University of Ulster.