

Sustainability Learning Review **2015**

Integrated Education Fund



The
ATLANTIC
Philanthropies

Grant history and the role of Atlantic

Atlantic funding has played a long-term role in leading education reform in Northern Ireland. Largely through its thematic work on reconciliation, which began in 1996, Atlantic has supported the growth and development of integrated education. This has been directed through the Integrated Education Fund (IEF), an independent charitable foundation, and totals almost £8.5m over 18 years.

Atlantic investment has included organisational capacity building through initial consultancy followed by core cost support to the IEF. The main thrust of this intervention has been to help increase the number of integrated school places and challenge the segregated nature of the education system. This has been through funding to enable the IEF to provide grant-making programmes, as well as communications and advocacy strategies.

Atlantic's initial involvement encouraged the IEF to consider a longer-term strategy, and produce a 10-Year Development Plan in 1998. This plan sought to provide clear aims and objectives for increasing the number of integrated school places and outlining the need for fundraising to support it. There was also an urgent need to replenish and rebuild a capital base following IEF support for independent integrated schools, which were turned down by the government at the time for Ulidia, Oakwood, Malone and Strangford.

Key impacts and successes

Atlantic's support for the IEF helped to lay the foundations for an organisation that would evolve from a team of committed volunteers, largely working from an endowment, to being a proactive grant-making, campaigning and fundraising organisation supported by a team of professional staff. IEF now raises around two-thirds of its annual funds from sources other than Atlantic and has distributed more than £20m in grants to schools and other organisations.

It has a growing global network of advocates and donors, which was made possible through substantial core investment from Atlantic over time. The condition of 'matched funding' has been attached to almost every Atlantic grant received. While presenting a challenge, this also had the positive effect of ensuring the IEF would have to secure the support of others. Every £1 donated became £2, and sometimes £3 if the Department of Education (DE) agreed to also match. This has diversified funding streams and encouraged a wider network of donors and supporters.

Growth in integrated education

In 1996 there were a total of 33 integrated schools; in 2014 there were 62. Atlantic's contribution has helped to establish 21 new integrated primary and eight new second-level schools. Grant making helped to increase growth by over 200% within an 18-year period (7,000 pupils in 1996 to 22,000 in 2014). In addition, Atlantic helped the IEF to fund a further 12 new integrated pre-schools attached to integrated primaries.

Leverage

All these schools and pre-schools represent a sustainable investment. The schools are now fully state funded and receive their capital and recurrent budgets through the Department of Education or the relevant Education and Library Board (ELB). This increase has helped to secure over £80m of public funding in terms of capital commitments alone for school sites and buildings.

One additional place in primary education equates to about £3,182 in government funding. At second level this is about £4,617 per pupil. Therefore the increase in school places by 14,000 levers at least £44m in additional public funding in one year alone.

Yet £20m over 18 years is small in comparison to wider EU and IFI investments in education in Northern Ireland – the new EU Peace 4 funding alone will be three or four times larger and over four or five years. Will it achieve as much in terms of sustainability, public funding commitments or mainstreaming?

Taking just two examples, Ulidia Integrated College in Carrickfergus and Rowandale Integrated Primary School in Moira, demonstrates significant leverage and return on investment. Ulidia is an integrated school established in 1997 with an initial intake of 130 students but with no government funding, not even for teacher salaries, books or desks. It relied on philanthropy to open and function as an independent school.

Today the school is fully funded, has more than 570 students and a recurrent budget from the Department of Education in excess of £2.5m per annum. The school has just been granted a further 100 places (May 2015) subject to DE capital funding being made available.

Rowandale Integrated Primary School was established in 2007 with just 18 children. The IEF purchased the site for the school at a cost of £1.05m and provided additional classroom accommodation and a new pre-school to support growth. Today the school has 193 children with a recurrent budget from government of about £400,000 per annum. The Department of Education has since returned the cost of the school site to IEF upon the completion of the school's vesting. The school has just been granted a double enrolment by DE to grow to almost 400 children over the next seven years.

The signing of the Stormont House Agreement in December 2014 created potential for £500m capital investment in shared and integrated education. Despite representing a significant opportunity and return for investment, the failure of local parties to reach agreement on other contentious areas could jeopardise this funding commitment.

Social impact

In addition to increased places and public funding leverage, Atlantic's contribution has also had a social impact. Independent research by Ark shows children attending an integrated school have more friends from across the community in Northern Ireland than any other type of school. Integrated education is seen to positively impact on social attitudes and improve community relations. Pupils within integrated education "have more consistent and meaningful patterns of contact with peers of the other religion both within and outside the school and are arguably more likely in their adult life to adopt more accommodating approaches to issues that have divided the two religious groups in Northern Ireland" (Stringer, 2000).

Political advocacy and public awareness

Atlantic's contribution to the growth and development of integrated education has included a significant amount of advocacy work. This has culminated in a corresponding increase in public and political awareness. Eighteen months after Atlantic's initial investment, integrated education featured in Article 13 of the Good Friday Agreement. While this did not result in significant action or changes in education policy from local political representatives, the Irish, British and United States governments have offered their international backing and financial support.

More recently, advocacy support has contributed to a significant shift in local political party positions on integrated and shared education. The First Minister described the education

system as a 'benign form of apartheid' and has promoted the idea of a single, shared and integrated system, with other political parties such as the SDLP taking more advanced and positive positions.

There is also evidence of changes developing in party manifestos as shared and integrated education represent a recurring issue in opinion polling and surveys. These include various IEF surveys, polls and micro-polls as well as contributions to province wide surveys such as the Life and Times, and Young Life and Times.

Collaboration/Litigation

IEF became aware of Public Interest Litigation Services in 2010, thanks to its relationship with Atlantic, and met with them to discuss the concept of strategic litigation. All parties agreed that it was a useful tool but also that a very strong case was needed before any action was taken.

In May 2015, Drumragh Integrated College, working with IEF, brought a case to the High Court in Belfast, which gave a ruling on the Department of Education's refusal to allow expansion at Drumragh Integrated College, Omagh. The judgment has had significant implications for education strategy in Northern Ireland. Mr Justice Treacy held that the Department of Education had misinterpreted the scope and the significance of its statutory duty to encourage and facilitate integrated education.

It was also argued that the Government had failed to fulfil those commitments when drawing up area plans for the future of education provision in Northern Ireland. The department had stated, in rejecting the school's development proposal, that there were empty places in other local second-level schools (of other management types) and so there could be no additional places created at Drumragh IC.

The judge criticised the Department's "area-based planning" policy that had been used to

determine which schools will remain open, expand, close or amalgamate to meet future demand and concluded that the statutory duty to integrated education must be borne in mind "at all levels, including the strategic". The conclusion to be drawn from the judgment was that strategic planning without proper consideration of the need to develop integrated education is no longer an option for the department.

During the period of the judicial review a number of development proposals from integrated schools were approved with significant implications for each school's growth and consequently their entitlement to support from the DE, which in turn will lever millions of pounds of investment in both recurrent and capital expenditure. During the judicial review, the IEF set up a joint working group with the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education, PILS and Drumragh to ensure a co-ordinated approach in seeking implementation of the judgment.

Litigation has subsequently been used by other groups connected to integrated education, including parents of Clintyclay Primary School in Tyrone, who are seeking transformation to integrated status in preference to closure. This resulted in the quashing of a Ministerial decision to close the school in 2015. Their efforts continue today.

Challenges for achieving sustainability

Political realities

Unfortunately the divided nature of the education system across NI reflects the wider division in society. There is seemingly still the notion of ‘our schools’ with political parties attaching greater support for the different education sectors where they believe their voter base lies. Most parties, while starting to adopt more sophisticated education policies, tend to still view integrated education as neither a vote loser nor a vote winner.

Sector dominance

The education system remains dominated by the two main sectors – controlled and Catholic-maintained. The DE has largely delegated area planning to the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and Education Authority (EA). The DE rhetoric of co-operation and innovative cross-sectoral solutions is far from the reality where there have been precious few examples of cross-sectoral solutions in the area-based planning process coming from CCMS and the Boards.

In reality there is separate planning due to separate structures. The development of another sectoral support body for ‘controlled schools’ may further compound the issue if this new body places a key role for the ‘transferring’ Protestant churches that have taken a lead role in development to date.

Religious institutions

Lack of support for integrated education from churches across Northern Ireland has affected its growth and development. Church influence, although declining, is still a strong factor within communities and opposition can represent an impediment. Catholic church opposition to the transformation of schools to integrated status in turn encourages unionist opposition – ‘Why should it be ‘our schools’ transforming and not theirs?’ A proposed new model of a shared Christian church school may represent an alternative development. It will be interesting to see how such schools would differ in ethos and practice from integrated schools, which retain a Christian ethos.

Existing provision

For more than 100 years Northern Ireland has educated children separately. School traditions are therefore strong and valued. There are many schools of different types educating children to the highest standards and some schools manage to achieve this with little or no religious integration of pupils. Cross-community contact schemes have sought to address this but with little or no direct impact on the segregated nature of the wider education system.

Since 2000, the IEF-sponsored ‘Promoting A Culture of Trust Programme’ has provided small grants to hundreds of schools to work across the traditional divide. This has demonstrated a commitment from many schools to work more closely together on specific projects and has potentially encouraged other grant makers to develop their own responses, such as the Shared Education Programme.

Community engagement

The planning of education needs to take account of the views and needs of local communities.

A sector-dominated approach with little meaningful local engagement potentially results in the type of flawed and legally challenged approach of area planning to date, based largely on status quo provision and population trends/projections. Securing effective widespread community participation in a process involving existing educational institutions that are organised, influential and powerful is a challenge.

Implications for achieving sustainability

In the absence of meaningful local political support, sustainability will continue to depend on engaging and mobilising local communities. Grant making, supported by fundraising, will have to continue to have a key role. Securing support from external influences in Westminster, Dublin and Washington will remain important as seen with the Stormont House Agreement.

Key opinion formers in media and civil society, business, trade unions and other NGOs will all also need to be engaged. Strategic use of litigation, given past gains in international agreements and wider legislation, may also grow in importance.

Sustainability practices

Fundraising

The IEF has implemented a major gift fundraising strategy that has helped raise in excess of £25m. This has been a long-term development plan and has involved considerable investment in developing and nurturing relationships over a significant period of time. Funds have been secured primarily from private individuals as well as other trusts and foundations. The fund has had limited success in terms of corporate, community and event fundraising but this has also proved to have other benefits.

The fund has secured a small number of significant donors willing to invest in the core costs of the fund, including advocacy and campaigning, while others have directed funding to specific projects. There has also been an attempt to secure multi-year commitments, which assists with forward planning and long term financial viability.

The IEF strategy has also involved engaging significant donors in a Campaign Council and Volunteer Teams. As well as strengthening knowledge and capacity, this has also increased awareness and engagement.

Targeted grant making

The IEF's grant-making activities have been targeted primarily at growth in integrated school places with considerable success. This has been achieved through supporting new schools, transformations, new pre-schools, expansion at existing schools through double enrolment and/or extra accommodation/staff resources. The consequence of these actions is the contribution to a current network of 62 integrated schools, which are largely sustainable and now fully government funded.

Mainstreaming

The 1989 Education Reform Order provided a process to ensure that new integrated schools could win full government funding when full viability had been achieved. Moreover, lobbying, political engagement and working with Department officials have ensured that a level

of support for transformation, in the form of support grants from DE, have been maintained. Since 2000 the IEF has also been involved in supporting cross-community education projects across all sectors. Commitments in the Programme for Government, OFMDFM and DE-matched funding with Atlantic, as well as plans for EU Peace 4 funding to shared education projects, will ensure further capital investment for this work over the next four to five years.

Advocacy

IEF lobbying for integrated education has led to an increase in civic, media, business and political support. These actions have contributed to greater awareness and heightened debate. Lobbying and campaigning from the Integrated Education Movement contributed to the 1998 Good Friday/Belfast Agreement and more recently the Stormont House Agreement (SHA) in 2014, both containing specific reference and commitments to integrated education.

The Women's Coalition was instrumental in securing the recommitment of the existing 1989 Order's duty to encourage and facilitate integrated education into the Good Friday Agreement.

Litigation

The use of legal redress in support of integrated education is a fairly recent development with the IEF supporting the challenge by Drumragh. The judgment has served to strengthen the broader definition of integrated education and the significance of the existing 1989 duty to it. It may yet have further consequences through area-based planning.

To date, it has already resulted in some positive ministerial decisions that might not have been approved otherwise.

International practice

Partnerships with other integrated education groups in Israel, Macedonia and Croatia have increased in recent years through the formation of an International Peace Education Network. This has contributed to research as well as practical co-operation between groups sharing models of

good practice and providing moral support to one another in challenging circumstances.

The role of communities

Placing communities instead of existing institutions at the heart of education planning could influence a steep change. For example, parents can already initiate change through transformation by parental petition and ballot. Is it possible to integrate new technology so that this information can be shared more easily and generate more awareness?

New global networks

The IEF will look to create new networks and develop existing ones by promoting youth advocacy work and alumni development. The IEF will also look to build the capacity of the Integrated Education Movement itself and share experiences through marketing, lobbying and PR, especially by circulating information leaflets on issues such as the 1989 legal duty.

Challenging the divide

The IEF must continue to support policy change in an immature political system and also counter lack of awareness and understanding of the issues that surround integrated education. The IEF must also consider the economic and financial cost of inaction and gather more evidence and conduct more research on the lack of structural reform. Key questions to how this divide can be transcended remain unanswered.

