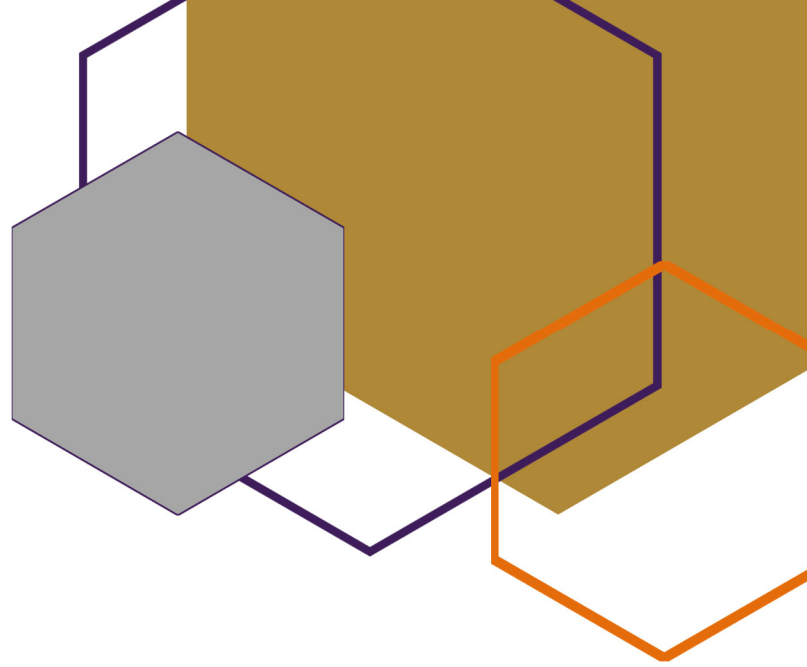




Special EU Programmes Body  
Comhlacht na gClár Speisialta AE  
Special EU Skemes Boadie



# Shared Education Impact Evaluation (Year 5)

PEACE IV Programme – Specific Objective 1

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



## I EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### I.1 Key Findings

- *The PEACE IV Specific Objective of providing direct, sustained, curriculum-based cross-community contact has been achieved as 'Sharing from the Start' (SFTS) and 'Collaboration Through Sharing in Education' (CASE) partnerships have completed five years of shared activity, and have progressed along the continuum of sharing from a baseline position of no/limited cross-community contact i.e. 'Defining' stage to subsequent stages of 'Developing', and 'Expanding', and in some cases 'Embedding' where in-depth and high-quality Shared Education has been achieved.*
- *Based on self-reported figures, over the last five years (up to June 2022), 214 partnerships (46 SFTS and 168 CASE) have been funded, involving **494 pre-schools/schools** representing different sectors (141% of 2023 target achieved); **2,360 teachers** are now equipped with the skills and capacity to deliver Shared Education (112% of 2023 target achieved) and **115,261 children** have participated in cross-community contact delivered via an enriched curriculum through shared class activity (80% of 2023 target achieved).*
- *Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with partnerships highlighting the significant benefit to those involved. Overall, PEACE IV Shared Education has had a positive impact on the following areas: cross-border collaboration, cross-community relations; and educational outcomes for children, pre-schools/schools, and practitioners/teachers, as well as societal outcomes for children, parents, and the wider community.*
- *Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic Project Partners and partnerships demonstrated resilience and perseverance to sustain Shared Education. Without the use of IT as an enabler, and the tailored training and mentoring provided by SFTS Early Years Specialists and CASE Development Officers, Shared Education could not have continued during the pandemic, instead the PEACE IV targets have been met/are on schedule to be met because of the creativity and dedication of Project Partners and participating settings and schools. The SEUPB's ongoing support has also helped Project Partners navigate uncertain times. The SEUPB have shown flexibility in approach with regard to timeline and budget extensions to facilitate meeting of targets within the parameters of the PEACE IV Programme to ensure the success of Shared Education.*
- *However, it is important to recognise that understandably outcomes were not as well developed in Year 4 and Year 5 when compared to pre-Covid levels, and it is evident from feedback that reconciliation and educational outcomes are better achieved through face-to-face contact which is important for social and emotional development of children.*
- *At the time of writing the Impact Evaluation, the project activity in pre-schools ended in June 2022 with SFTS project closure due by the end of September 2022 and CASE project activity in schools was due to complete by March 2023 with project closure by June 2023. It is important to note that as of September 2022, the following extensions have been granted by the SEUPB to facilitate Shared Education into another full academic year (September 2022 to June 2023) and a few months after to allow for project closure activities i.e.:*
  - *SFTS revised end date is now 30 September 2023.*
  - *CASE revised end date is 31 October 2023.*
- *Overall, there is an appetite for shared activities to continue and to build on the reconciliation and educational benefits achieved to date. A wider consideration is therefore the sustainability of connections and outcomes achieved as a legacy of PEACE IV funding and how key lessons can be considered for the future [PEACEPLUS](#) programming period.*

## I.1 Introduction

The EU PEACE IV Programme aims ‘To reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society through the promotion of reconciliation amongst all communities across Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland’. Shared Education is one of four Specific Objectives of PEACE IV, and its success is based on the achievement of the defined result and output indicators.

**Specific Objective 1 Shared Education, Action 1:** *The provision of direct, sustained, curriculum-based contact between pupils and teachers from all backgrounds through collaboration between schools and early years/pre-school settings from different sectors in order to promote good relations and enhance children's skills and attitudes to contribute to a cohesive society.*

**Result Indicator:** *The percentage of schools in the last academic year that have been involved in Shared Education with another school. The baseline value was 76% [later revised to 58%<sup>1</sup>]. The target value for 2023 was 88% [later revised to 69%]. For the Border Region of Ireland, the baseline value is 0% and the 2023 target value is 7.5%.*

**Output Indicators:**

- The number of schools involved in Shared Education (350 schools by 2023).
- The number of trained teachers with the capacity to facilitate Shared Education (2,100 persons by 2023).
- The number of participants in Shared Education classrooms (144,000 children by 2023).

Shared Education aims to:

- Meet the needs of, and provide for the education together of, learners from all backgrounds and socio-economic status.
- Involve schools and other education providers of differing ownership, sectoral identity and ethos, management type or governance arrangements.
- Deliver educational benefits to learners, promote the efficient and effective use of resources, and promote equality of opportunity, good relations, respect for identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion.

To deliver upon these aims, the SEUPB awarded €33.14m to two separate consortia – one focused on early years and the second on the primary/post-primary sector. Over the course of the PEACE IV Programme, the budget has been modified and as of September 2022 the final funding award total is €29.23m. This represents an uplift for SFTS (+13%) and a decrease for CASE (-16%) to take account of changes in delivery emanating from the Covid-19 pandemic and project extensions granted, facilitated by underspends.

Table I.1: Shared Education Projects funded

Project Name	Lead Partner (LP) and Project Partners (PP)	Funding awarded	Funding (revised Sept 2022)	Difference
Sharing from the Start (SFTS)	Early Years – the organisation for young children (LP) The National Childhood Network (PP) The Fermanagh Trust (PP)	€4,256,007 (13%)	€4,827,084 (17%)	+€571,077
Collaboration Through Sharing in Education (CASE)	Education Authority (LP) Léargas (PP)	€28,890,790 (87%)	€24,411,446 (83%)	-€3,908,267
<b>2 projects</b>	<b>5 delivery agents</b>	<b>€33,146,797</b>	<b>€29,238,530</b>	<b>-€3,908,267</b>
*Note: since publishing the Impact Evaluation in November 2022, the budget figure for CASE has changed – the most recent figure, as of December 2022, is €23,973,086 (reflecting a variance of €4,917,704). The total award for Shared Education is now €28.8m.				

<sup>1</sup> The original baseline used the 2013 School Omnibus Survey figure of 76% for NI, which adopted a wider definition of Shared Education to include curricular and extra-curricular activities; compared to 2015 (59%) and 2016 (58%) which focused on Shared Education between the children and young people from different community backgrounds learning together in a shared class focused on curricular activities. In May 2018, the SEUPB made a formal request to the EC to modify the baseline from 76% to 58% and the target value from 88% to 69%.

Funding is targeted at pre-school settings (to include statutory and non-statutory provision) and schools that have not previously participated in Shared Education<sup>2</sup>. The delivery structure is based on partnerships comprised of pre-schools/schools from a predominantly Catholic and Protestant community background working in partnership to deliver shared classes.

Both Shared Education projects have been delivering project activity since 2018 and are scheduled to run until 2023 as per the timeline below:

- **Year 1** – 2017 to 2018: September 2017 to June 2018.
  - September 2017: Funding awarded by the SEUPB.
  - September 2017 to December 2017: preparation and recruitment of first cohort of pre-schools/schools.
  - January 2018: commencement of project activity in pre-schools/schools.
- **Year 2** – 2018 to 2019: project activity from September 2018 to June 2019.
- **Year 3** – 2019 to 2020: project activity from September 2019 to June 2020 – impacted by Covid-19 (March 2020 onwards).
- **Year 4** – 2020 to 2021: project activity from September 2020 to June 2021 – impacted by Covid-19.
- **Year 5** – 2021 to 2022: project activity from September 2021 to June 2022 – Academic Term 1 and Term 2 impacted by Covid-19. By Term 3 many of the partnerships were able to resume face-to face activities i.e., pre-pandemic format.
- **Year 6** – 2022 to 2023: project activity from September 2022 to June 2023 – SFTS to close by 30 September 2023<sup>3</sup> and CASE to complete by 31<sup>st</sup> October 2023<sup>4</sup>.

## I.2 Approach

SJC consultancy, in partnership with the National Children’s Bureau, was commissioned by the Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) to conduct a three-year evaluation to assess the impact of Shared Education (PEACE IV Specific Objective 1). This executive summary reflects the Impact Evaluation for project activity from **September 2021 to June 2022 (Year 5)**.

For this final phase of research, a mixed-method approach was adopted to deliver the Impact Evaluation for 2021/2022 period, to include the following quantitative and qualitative research:

An online survey of SFTS early years practitioners and CASE principals/teachers was carried out between May and July 2022. In total 226 responses, representing 134 unique partnerships, were received as part of the Phase 3 research. This is an excellent **response rate of 86%**, based on those partnerships ‘active’ in Year 5. It is reflective of the partnerships’ positive experiences and desire to provide feedback to inform the Year 5 evaluation.

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<sup>2</sup> Schools in Northern Ireland may have been involved in various pilot Shared Education Programmes, and/or involved in the Delivering Social Change Shared Education Signature Project (DSC ESP) delivered by the Education Authority. Details available at <https://www.eani.org.uk/parents/shared-education>. PEACE IV specifically targets schools which have had **no experience** of these interventions.

<sup>3</sup> SFTS was originally contracted to run until December 2021 and project closure by March 2022. In August 2021, the SEUPB granted an extension for project delivery to continue to June 2022 and project closure to take place by September 2022. A further extension was recently granted to allow project activity to continue until June 2023 and project closure by 30 September 2023.

<sup>4</sup> In December 2021, the SEUPB also granted permission for an extension to CASE for project activity in schools until March 2023 and project closure to take place by June 2023. A further extension was recently granted to allow project activity to continue until June 2023 and project closure by 31 October 2023.

It is a significant uplift from last year (2020-2021), where partnerships were hampered by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the challenging times in which settings and schools were working.

*Table I.2: Online survey response rate*

	2019-2020 Phase 1 – Year 3 survey (pre-Covid-19)			2020-2021 Phase 2 – Year 4 survey (during Covid-19)			2021-2022 Phase 3 – Year 5 (emerging from Covid-19)		
	SFTS	CASE	Total	SFTS	CASE	Total	SFTS	CASE	Total
No. of individual survey responses	83	133	216	24	45	69	40	186	226
No. of partnerships represented	40	86	126	20	45	65	27	107	134
<i>TOTAL number of partnerships 'Active'</i>	46	168	214	32	146	178	33	122	155
Response rate (based on no. of partnerships)	87%	51%	<b>59%</b>	63%	31%	<b>37%</b>	<b>82%</b> <sup>5</sup>	<b>88%</b> <sup>6</sup>	<b>86%</b>

In addition to the online survey, the following research was also undertaken:

- Review of Project Partner monitoring data and partnership progress reports.
- Discussions with SFTS and CASE Project Partners.
- Interviews with Senior Early Years Specialists (SEYS) and CASE Development Officers (DOs).
- Development of 11 case studies (8 CASE and 3 SFTS) – involving a review of monitoring data, interviews with the principal/manager (39 individuals), focus groups with parents (x12 parents), and a creative engagement exercise with children (44 children aged 9 to 11 years old).

Some of the recommendations outlined in this Executive Summary relate to the SEUPB specifically and other 'key lessons' relate to project development and can be passed on from the SEUPB to inform Project Partners of the new [PEACEPLUS Programme \(2021 – 2027\)](#). Recommendations are therefore stated as for the 'SEUPB' and key lessons for future PEACEPLUS applicants.

In terms of the research approach, it is important to note that the original SFTS and CASE projects were due to close by March 2022 and the evaluation timeframe aligned to this. However, due to project extensions agreed by the SEUPB for SFTS (to 30 September 2023) and CASE (to 31 October 2023), there is an identified gap in the planned research schedule for the extended programming period. The SEUPB is aware of this gap but has requested that SJC consultancy proceed with the original three phases of research (Year 3 to Year 5), acknowledging that the final year of SFTS and CASE (Year 6) will not be captured by an external evaluator. Project Partners will submit monitoring data and a final Post Project Evaluation to the SEUPB at project closure, however this will self-reported and not an independent evaluation.

- **Recommendation 1 (SEUPB):** In response to the project extensions described above, it is the evaluator's recommendation that further consideration is given to extending research activities into Year 6 (2022-2023), as part of an independent evaluation, to ensure that outcomes are captured for the end of the programming period. This is particularly important as partnerships have been negatively affected in Year 3 (Term 3), Year 4 (Term 1, 2 and 3) and Year 5 (Term 1 and 2). Year 6 (2022-2023) presents an opportunity to capture outcomes in a post-pandemic era, where partnerships will resume Shared Education activities which are more aligned to what was originally planned at the outset of the PEACE IV Programme. At a minimum, it is recommended that the same online survey be re-run for the final year, with the option of case studies to supplement this work.

<sup>5</sup> This is based on 33 partnerships (72 settings) 'active' in 2021/2022.

<sup>6</sup> This is based on 122 partnerships being 'active' in 2021/2022 (NB. There are 189 partnerships (379 schools) in total).

- **Recommendation 2 (SEUPB):** Due to the time required for procurement of evaluation expertise, evaluators were commissioned to carry out research activities from Year 3 (2019-2020). Earlier commission (from funding awarded in 2017) would have been beneficial to capture a baseline and to reduce duplication<sup>7</sup> in monitoring activities and to minimise the admin burden on both Project Partners and participating settings/schools. For PEACEPLUS it is recommended that procurement of independent evaluators begins as earlier as possible to launch in time to agree output and outcomes indicators and research tools to capture same. This will also ensure a close working relationship between evaluators and Project Partners in the planning and implementation of research activities.

### I.3 PEACE IV – Achievement of Indicators

#### Output Indicators

It is evident that SFTS and CASE projects have demonstrated excellent progress against the PEACE IV output indicators set for 2023, with outputs having already exceeded the respective number of pre-schools and schools participating. School/pupil participation began in January 2018 and by June 2022 there were:

- 494 pre-schools/schools taking part in Shared Education, exceeding targets (141% of 2023 target achieved).
- 2,360 early years practitioners and teachers having completed training and now have the capacity to facilitate Shared Education (112% of 2023 target achieved).
- 115,261 children have now participated in shared class activity (80% of 2023 target achieved).

*Table 1.3: Output indicators – target and achieved (up to June 2022)*

CASE/SFTS combined Output Indicators	SFTS			CASE			TOTAL		
	SFTS Output Target	Total	% achieved	CASE Output Target	Total	% achieved	PEACE IV output (2023)	Achieved (up to June 2022)	% achieved
Number of pre-schools/schools involved	99	106	107%	280	388	139%	350	494	141%
Number of trained teachers/ practitioners with the capacity to facilitate Shared Education	157	228	145%	2,000	2,132	107%	2,100	2,360	112%
Number of participants/pupils in Shared Education classes	9,914	11,381	115%	135,000	103,880	77%	144,000	115,261	80%

*Source: Participation figures are self-reported by SFTS and CASE Project Partners. Year 5 participation figures are pending verification by the SEUPB's Joint Secretariat.*

*NB. The combined CASE/SFTS outputs are slightly greater than the overall PEACE IV outputs for 2023 to allow for non-achievement. For example, the SFTS output target for pre-schools involved is 99 plus the CASE output target for schools is 280 which is equal to 379, however the overall PEACE IV output target is less at set as 350 pre-schools/schools overall.*

The output indicators for the number of pre-schools/schools and the number of teachers trained have been achieved, which is a testament to the commitment of SFTS and CASE Project Partners, as well as participating pre-schools and schools.

Participation levels for children is on target to be met by the end of the programme period. CASE participation levels for children will continue to be closely monitored by Project Partners in the final phase of funding. It is noted that the PEACE IV Programme output indicators focus on the numbers participating (children, pre-schools/schools and teachers/practitioners trained), and therefore SFTS/CASE monitoring focuses on capturing project data for each of these outputs to report back to the SEUPB. This means that there has been a gap in monitoring data with regards outcomes and impacts.

<sup>7</sup> For example, Project Partners created monitoring forms to capture feedback from partnership from Year 1 onwards – whilst this is clearly good practice in terms of continuous monitoring, it created an additional layer of monitoring when the Impact Evaluation commenced in Year 3. The Project Partners and Evaluators worked together to minimise this burden on participants - for instance CASE and the Evaluators combined monitoring tools in Year 5, which resulted in a high response rate as partnerships had only one evaluation survey to complete



- **Recommendation 3 (SEUPB):** There is a need for a greater focus on defined outcome/impact indicators (rather than solely outputs) in the future programming period (PEACEPLUS), and how the intervention contributes to the overall aim of peace and reconciliation. For instance, our survey results and evaluation findings provide evidence of the types of societal and educational outcomes achieved and could be considered as indicators<sup>8</sup> for any future Shared Education Impact Evaluation Plans, with a focus on research capturing attitudinal and behavioural change. It is envisaged that these outcome indicators will be set as part of Evaluation Plans, rather than specific targets at an overall PEACEPLUS Programme level. Project Partners and project beneficiaries should be asked to consider these indicators when devising action plans and delivering shared activities.
- **Recommendation 4 (SEUPB):** For the future ‘Shared Learning Together’ project<sup>9</sup> as part of the PEACEPLUS Programme, consideration should be given by the SEUPB to aligning objectives and the evaluation Terms of Reference to the ETI Shared Education Framework (and related standards)<sup>10</sup>, which will provide a consistent approach to Shared Education and to evaluating the shared/reconciliation and educational outcomes of Shared Education.

### **Result Indicator**

In terms of the result indicator, there is no current reading for the number/percentage of schools involved in Shared Education as a proportion of all schools, as the 2020 Department of Education Omnibus Survey was delayed but is due to take place in October 2022 (results available from January 2023). The most recent reading (September 2018) indicated that from a baseline position of 58%, there are now 63% of schools involved in Shared Education indicating a positive direction towards the final target of 69% within the Shared Education theme in Northern Ireland. The School Survey equivalent for the Border Region, whilst it has not yet taken place will be available prior to the end of the programming period.

- **Recommendation 5 (SEUPB):** The result indicator has been difficult to assess throughout the duration of the Impact Evaluation due to delays in the identified measurement instrument being administered. It is noted that results will be available in time for the end of the PEACE IV Shared Education initiative, and therefore will provide a useful renewed ‘baseline’ for the forthcoming ‘Shared Learning Together’ project as part of PEACEPLUS. It is recommended that the SEUPB considers a range of measurement tools for potential future result indicators to ensure that they are readily available to assess achievement at more regular intervals.

## **I.4 Impact of Covid-19**

The emergence of Covid-19 has been an unforeseen and unprecedented disruptor to Shared Education, having a profound impact on the momentum gained for Shared Education over the last number of years under PEACE IV. From the latter stage of Year 3 (March to June 2020) and Year 4 (Sept 2020 to June 2021) partnerships experienced closures, restrictions and staff shortages resulting from the pandemic. In Year 5 the restrictions resulting from Covid-19 continued to hamper progress of shared sessions in Term 1 (Sept to Dec 2021) and Term 2 (Jan to March 2022), with a focus on virtual contact remaining as the main channel. However, by Term 3 (April to June 2022) partnership were able to resume face-to-face shared classes. Given this context, it is not surprising that almost all (97%) respondents to the survey highlighted Covid-19 as the biggest challenge. Related to Covid-19 is the high level of staff illness (48%) and staff turnover (37%).

Project Partners have demonstrated resilience and perseverance to ensure the sustainability of activities, and as such agreed with the SEUPB new proposals to advance shared activity. This involved re-allocation of funds towards IT equipment (webcam, laptop, TV stand, data projector, broadband) to facilitate virtual training and

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<sup>8</sup> Sample indicators are listed in the main report (Chapter 10, page 82).

<sup>9</sup> Shared Learning Together Programme details can be found in the PEACEPLUS 2021-2027 Programme Overview, available [here](#) (pg 23)

<sup>10</sup> Refer to Chapter 3 of main report for details.

shared classes, as well as an extension of activities to meet original PEACE IV targets, and importantly to ensure that pre-schools/schools maintain momentum for Shared Education to reap the societal and education benefits that have been achieved to date. Partnerships have generally adapted well to Covid-19 conditions, and whilst some settings/schools withdrew or 'paused' shared sessions in Year 4 due to feeling overwhelmed by the pandemic (14 SFTS and 22 CASE partnerships), the vast majority continued their Shared Education projects (to varying extents). Many of the partnerships that withdrew/paused activity in Year 4 have re-engaged in Year 5 (from September 2021) and were supported by SEYS and DOs, and as such there has been a strong retention of participating pre-schools/schools.

Overall, IT has acted as a significant enabler to allow Shared Education to continue. It is also acknowledged that the SEUPB showed flexibility in supporting Project Partners to change approach during the pandemic and in facilitating the distribution of funds for IT equipment to maintain virtual shared activities. This, along with the commitment of Project Partners and the willingness of partnerships to engage in extraordinary circumstances, is a positive testament to the SFTS and CASE projects and recognition of the importance placed on continuing Shared Education. By the last Term (April to June) in Year 5, partnerships welcomed the opportunities to resume shared classes and collaboration on a face-to-face basis.

Given the experience of using IT to facilitate sharing during the pandemic, there is a shift towards this model and recognition of the benefits of a 'blended approach' to include a combination of face-to-face and online/virtual contact as part of the delivery model. It is noteworthy that qualitative data for Year 4 and Year 5 suggests weighting towards face-to-face contact as the preferred method for children to achieve social and emotional development.

The future PEACEPLUS (2021-2027) Programme references that *'digital based approaches will be used as a means of developing and sustaining Shared Education partnerships'*. In line with the PEACEPLUS approach, it will be important to explore a range of digital based approaches and various 'blended' delivery models. This has been foreseen in PEACEPLUS and will be considered in future projects. PEACEPLUS applicants should consider the pros and cons and weighting of face-to-face and virtual contact for each stakeholder group (i.e., children, teachers/practitioners, parents, wider community) and the model selected for each stakeholder that will best achieve meaningful shared/reconciliation and educational outcomes.

## **I.5 Implementation Support**

The CASE and SFTS projects provide a good balance of support to allow partnerships time to plan shared activities, access teaching resources to enrich the learning experience, as well as opportunities to avail of training to deliver Shared Education. Access to a comprehensive training programme to include the concepts underpinning Shared Education, followed by more practical sessions on implementation, help to support the effective roll-out of projects.

Furthermore, support is also provided in the form of ongoing mentoring i.e., for SFTS, five Senior Early Years Specialists (SEYS) support approximately 20 settings each; and for CASE, eight Development Officers (DO) support approximately 50 schools each. 91% of respondents either strongly agreed (54%) or agreed (37%) that continuous mentoring support provided by SEYS and DOs has helped to build early years practitioners' and teachers' capacity to implement Shared Education. The SEYS and DOs play an instrumental role in helping their respective SFTS and CASE partnerships to engage in reflective practice, identifying strengths and areas for development to enable corrective action to be made, where relevant, to enhance the self-evaluation process and the impact of the Shared Education activities.



## I.6 Evidence of Impact – Key Findings

Feedback from participating settings and schools recognised that the level of impact decreased during the Covid-19 pandemic, however despite challenges encountered the feedback on delivery during this period is still strongly positive. Overall, PEACE IV Shared Education has had a positive impact on the following areas: reconciliation and educational benefits for children, practitioners/teachers, parents, and the wider community; as well as enhanced cross-border collaboration. There is an appetite for this work to continue to allow partnerships to progress and complete their shared activities.

The below describes how each of the three Shared Education aims have been met.

### **Aim 1: Meet the needs of, and provide for the education together of, learners from all backgrounds and socio-economic status.**

The PEACE IV Specific Objective of providing direct, sustained, curriculum-based cross-community contact has been achieved as SFTS and CASE partnerships have completed five years of shared activity, and have progressed along the continuum of sharing (as per ETI's Shared Education Framework<sup>11</sup>) from a baseline position of no/limited cross-community contact i.e. 'Defining' stage to subsequent stages of 'Developing', and 'Expanding', and in a few cases 'Embedding' where 'in-depth and high-quality Shared Education' has been achieved. There is also year-on-year progress across each of the Síolta five standards for early years settings<sup>12</sup>. Despite the impact of Covid-19, pre-schools and schools have demonstrated their desire for progression and improving standards.

The inclusion of Shared Education in the PEACE IV Programme has provided a significant uplift in the number of pre-schools/schools having the opportunity to experience Shared Education. By targeting pre-schools/schools with no prior experience of Shared Education, PEACE IV contributes to meeting the aims outlined in the Shared Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 – therefore positively contributing to the legislative and policy focus in Northern Ireland to encourage, facilitate, and promote Shared Education. Whilst there is no similar legislative or policy focus specifically on Shared Education in Ireland, there is increasing recognition by Government officials (evidence by the Department of Education's contribution to PEACE IV Shared Education) of the benefits of Shared Education in meeting a range of relevant policy objectives, contributing to enhancing learning and achievement, well-being, identity and belonging and the wider diversity and inclusion agenda particularly given changing demographics.

### **Aim 2: Involve schools and other education providers of differing ownership, sectoral identity and ethos, management type or governance arrangements.**

Over the last five years, there have been 214 partnerships (46 SFTS and 168 CASE) involving 494 pre-schools/schools representing different sectors, therefore this aim has been achieved. The geographic spread reflects a split of 74% within Northern Ireland and 26% in the Border Region of Ireland. The majority (71%) of partnerships are comprised of a North-North collaboration; 20% of partnerships are comprised of a South-South collaboration; and 9% relate to cross-border partnerships. Shared Education is based on a partnership between schools that are predominantly associated with one community (Catholic) joining with another community (Protestant) with the aim of building sustained cross-community relationships as well as contributing to improved educational outcomes.

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<sup>11</sup> The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) Shared Education Framework outlines stages of progression to effective Shared Education against four pillars: (1) learner-centred (2) high quality learning and teaching (3) leadership and management and (4) community connections. The Framework for Schools is available online at <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/developing-shared-education-framework-school-partnerships-november-2014> and the Framework for Early Years Settings is available at <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/developing-shared-education-early-years-settings-framework-collaborative-partnerships-2016-2017>

<sup>12</sup> The Síolta Standards - the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education outlines 12 principles and 16 standards of quality, details available online at <https://siolta.ie/about.php>. The five standards relevant to Shared Education include: (1) Rights of the Child (2) Parents and Families (3) Professional Practice (4) Identity and Belonging (5) Community Involvement.

**Aim 3: (a) Promote equality of opportunity, good relations, respect for identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion, (b) Deliver educational benefits to learners, (c) promote the efficient and effective use of resources.**

Based on Impact Evaluation findings (summarised below), there is strong evidence of improved shared/reconciliation outcomes being achieved through the development of cross-community relationships and friendships between children, and between practitioners/teachers in partner schools, as well as enhanced educational outcomes (for example increased confidence working in a diverse classroom, improved educational experiences achieved by access to educational resources/ equipment to enhance curricular subjects, which would not be available in the absence of funding). This coupled with wider cross-community and cross-border connections being established will create a legacy of the funding.

Overall, PEACE IV Shared Education has had a positive impact on Aim 3, to include:

**(a) Promote equality of opportunity, good relations, respect for identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion**

- A wide range of **shared/reconciliation outcomes** have been achieved over the last five years, to include: enhanced cross-community and cross-border collaboration at a strategic and operational level; cross-community friendships developed, and supported children's ability to acknowledge and promote differences; increased opportunities for parents to generate cross-community connections; and increased community connections with and across the wider community through the involvement of parents and use of local facilities/community venues.
- Involvement of children in Shared Education as part of their overall education has contributed to positive behaviours and attitudes towards different communities, with evidence of connections and friendships made. In Year 5, 73% of respondents to the online survey agreed that participating in SFTS/CASE has led to **children making friends in the shared classroom**. This is a significant uplift from 44% reported last year (Year 4) during the Covid-19 pandemic when contact was limited to virtual/online means only, whilst this year (Year 5) most partnerships were able to reengage in face-to-face contact by Term 3. Reflecting on pre-pandemic results (Year 3), 93% agreed that children made friends as contact was entirely by face-to-face contact, thereby highlighting the need for this type of contact to build and cement bonds between children of partnering schools.
- One of the key success factors in developing friendships in previous years (pre-Covid-19) was opportunities for children to engage in more informal, natural mixing during leisure time (break/lunch and travel to joint outings) as a means of creating and sustaining friendships. Team working tasks and informal interactions were regarded as the optimum approach for nurturing friendships. However, these opportunities were stifled in Year 4 and the start of Year 5, with only a small number of partnerships being able to see each other face-to-face from a distance, with mixing only occurring via virtual means.
- As Covid-19 restrictions eased this year, 70% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that **these friendships extended into home/community life**, which again shows a significant increase from the previous year (Year 4) where only 19% agreed with this statement as contact was restricted at this time due to Covid-19 removing opportunities for children to interact outside of their immediate family 'bubble'. Interestingly, the results show an uplift in friendships being developed within the community to above that of pre-pandemic levels in Year 3 (61%). Opportunities for children to meet outside of school (with support from parents) will contribute to the longer-term benefits of sharing.

- Reconciliation benefits in terms of enhanced mutual understanding and tolerance is also evident from evaluation findings. For example, participants reported that Shared Education enabled children to feel comfortable and at ease when in their partner pre-school/school (79%); and 72% agreed that **children can describe ways that they are similar and different to others** in a shared classroom. The positive starting position of children was noted, with children’s willingness to engage in shared activities and that stereotyping and negative attitudes were not (or less) apparent among young children. Importantly, engaging with children in their early/formative years through shared activities will help prevent such stereotypes developing in the first instance, which if formed are more difficult to change. For older children it has helped to reinforce the importance of accepting differences to help positively influence attitudes and behaviours, thereby contributing towards a shared society.
- There is evidence from SFTS and CASE partnerships that Shared Education complements and contributes to meeting the aims and objectives stated in pre-school/school **shared/inclusion policies**. The SFTS model has a more specific focus on working with Boards of Governors/Management Committees to develop and implement a Shared Education Policy for each institution to promote the sustainability of Shared Education.
- **Community Connections** is one of the four pillars of the Shared Education Framework. The involvement of the wider community ensures that Shared Education extends beyond the confines of the immediate pre-school/school community.
  - Practitioners and teachers reflected on the method(s) that worked best to engage/communicate with parents, governors, and/or the wider community. Parental engagement was ongoing with updates and exchanges using applications such as Seesaw/Tapestry. Governors engaged via emails and meetings. Communication with the wider community was through a more passive form of information sharing, with updates provided on Settings’/Schools’ Facebook/Twitter pages and/or newsletters and local newspapers (where relevant).

#### *Governors*

- Practitioners and teachers were asked to comment on the views of their Boards of Governors/Management Committees, with 90% of online survey respondents describing the general feedback from their governors on the impact of Shared Education as ‘very positive’ (59%) or ‘positive’ (31%). Furthermore, respondents (71%) accepted the positive impact that Shared Education has brought in developing governance and leadership skills, with governors showing their buy-in to the initiative and providing their support to the partnership at a wider community level.
- SFTS committed to an additional output relating to a target of ‘93 Pre-school Boards of Governors/Management Committees will be engaged in workshops and supported to develop and implement a Shared Education Policy for each institution’. SFTS monitoring records indicate that 90+ pre-school governors/management committees have engaged to date i.e., representing almost all the participating settings. This has helped to build support for Shared Education and to develop the capacity of leaders and management.

#### *Parents*

- There are differences between the models with more parental engagement evident as part of the SFTS project. The SFTS model has an intentional focus on parental and community engagement, whereas CASE did not focus on delivering activities specifically for parents. The involvement of parents has the potential for greater impact and achievement of PEACE IV peace and reconciliation aims as parents’ support or otherwise is an important influencing factor on their children, and with their support can continue to drive forward Shared Education and contribute to the longevity of the outcomes achieved.

- 93% of SFTS respondents (practitioners and teachers) agreed that parental involvement is particularly important for *young children* as shared and educational outcomes are more likely to be achieved with parental engagement.
- Prior to Covid-19, parents volunteered to attend/support shared sessions, as well as volunteering to facilitate demonstrations e.g., fitness, preparing food, ‘show and tell’. There were also other more passive forms of parental engagement, involving parents attending shared events such as: launch event, concerts, fundraising events, sporting activities, celebration event/showcasing children’s work. In Year 4 and Year 5, parental engagement was understandably limited, with engagement relating to updates on shared sessions. Interestingly, some partnerships commented that parental engagement has actually improved and increased in Year 4 and Year 5 (when compared to pre Covid), as online methods are easier for working parents to engage via mobile apps and zoom meetings.
- The online survey respondents (practitioners and teachers) were asked to comment on the views of the parents of participating children. In Year 5, 89% of respondents agreed that feedback they gained from parents was ‘very positive’ (55%) or ‘positive’ (34%). Whilst clearly a positive result, it does represent a decrease from Year 4 (96%) and Year 3 (97%).

#### *Wider Community*

- 70% of practitioners/teachers responding to the online survey agreed that feedback from the wider community (based on informal discussions and anecdotal evidence) was ‘very positive’ (40%) or ‘positive’ (30%). Connections with the wider community can provide an important vehicle in which to build a shared and cohesive society.
- School-community linkages gained momentum in Year 3 prior to the Covid-19 pandemic with a greater use of local facilities/community venues. Children had opportunities to explore their local area through shared learning activities (e.g., nature trails and various team building excursions within their locality), travelling on a bus to partner pre-school/school, and gaining awareness of different areas and confidence using different community venues in their locality and beyond. Unfortunately, progress was impeded due to the impact of Covid-19 and the move to remote working at the end of Year 3 and all of Year 4.
- When restrictions eased in the latter part of Year 5, there is evidence of community contact increasing once more, with examples of children using local facilities, beach clean-ups with the community, concerts delivered by partnerships now open to wider community to attend. Many partnerships noted that wider community engagement represents untapped potential to promote the shared/reconciliation benefits of Shared Education and remains a development area.
- The PEACEPLUS Programme overview outlines the direction of travel for Shared Education under a new ‘Shared Learning Together’ Programme. Importantly this outline references a broader participant base to include the **wider community** and following principles within the SFTS model with a focus on the wider family.
  - **Recommendation 6 (SEUPB):** Whilst shared/reconciliation outcomes were achieved over the course of the last five years, these were somewhat hampered by the pandemic. When considering the ETI Framework for Shared Education, along with the Siolta Standards<sup>13</sup>, it is evident that partnerships have not progressed along the continuum of sharing for Community Connections as well as expected/conceived at the outset of PEACE IV Therefore, it is considered that this is unmet potential of Shared Education, which could potentially be pursued as part of the future PEACEPLUS Programme i.e.,

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<sup>13</sup> Project Partners used the ETI Shared Education framework to support implementation and self-assessment across a range of pillars (1) Learner Centred (2) High Quality Learning & Teaching (3) Leadership (4) Community Connections; as well as the Siolta Standards – please refer to Chapter 3 of main report for details. Progress along the Shared Education continuum is not formal target or requirement of the PEACE IV Corporation Programme or the Project Partners letter of offer requirements but provides a useful guide to aid monitoring in terms of baselines and stages of progress each year.

it is recommended that the SEUPB consider renewed investment in current PEACE IV Shared Education partnerships to build on the collaborative relationships developed to date.

- **Recommendation 7 (SEUPB):** A parental/community engagement model (such as that currently adopted within the SFTS model) should be more widely adopted as a means of embedding the ethos of Shared Education. The SEUPB should consider the inclusion of an outcome indicator, as part of any future Impact Evaluation, to capture the extent of parental/wider community involvement, which is desired to have longer lasting peace and reconciliation outcomes.

**(b) Educational benefits**

- Shared Education has enriched the CCEA Curriculum (NI)<sup>14</sup> and NCCA Curriculum (Ireland)<sup>15</sup> offering and has had a positive impact on helping to address curricular priorities in relevant Pre-school Development Plans; Síolta Baseline Assessments; or School Development Plans. Aligning Shared Education to existing priorities has proven to be a key success factor to ensure that Shared Education is not regarded as addition but is strategically aligned to the agreed curriculum focus, recognising that they are intrinsically linked.
- There is evidence that Shared Education is being translated into quality standards<sup>16</sup> for teaching and learning that enable its values to be embedded into practice in pre-schools and schools. Inspection reports also provide evidence that Shared Education is recognised as a valuable intervention to improve teaching and learning.
- One of the key outputs is the number of participants in Shared Education classrooms, with **115,261 children** having participated in shared class activity (80% of 2023 target achieved).
- Over the last five years, on average, children have participated in 23-26 hours per child per year of contact via curriculum-led shared classes, from a baseline position of no/limited prior cross-community contact among children and/or education providers. The original target was 30 hours; however, this requirement was reduced to take account of Covid-19. NB: Year 2 (Sept 2018 to June 2019) was the only year the 30-hour target was met, with subsequent years negatively impacted by the pandemic.
- In Year 5, 94% of respondents agreed that CASE/SFTS has led to **improved educational outcomes** for participating children (i.e., increased confidence, improved educational experiences achieved by access to additional educational resources/ equipment, which would not be available in the absence of funding). This is an increase from 71% the previous year, which is reflective of partnerships emerging from Covid-19 restrictions and re-engaging this year. The results are on par with Year 3 (95%) i.e., prior to Covid-19 restrictions.
- Other educational benefits reported in Year 5 include improved communications skills (91%); improved confidence (85%); and improved social skills (74%), as well as comments highlighting that it has helped to ease children's transition between pre-school to primary and primary to post-primary.
- 96% of practitioners/teachers responding to the online survey strongly agreed (47%) or agreed (49%) that Shared Education supports, and fits with/complements existing policy and day-to-day practice in education, with respondents commenting on how Shared Education has contributed to meeting the objectives of each of the pre-school/school's curricular focus and learning outcomes.

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<sup>14</sup> CCEA – The Northern Ireland Curriculum [Online] available at <https://ccea.org.uk/about/what-we-do/curriculum>

<sup>15</sup> National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) - Aistear the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework; Primary Curriculum, Junior and Senior Cycle [Online] available at <https://curriculumonline.ie/Home/>

<sup>16</sup> The ETI Shared Education Framework for Schools and Early Years Settings (NI); The Department of Education and Skills (DES) Inspectorate's Quality Framework for Schools, and School Self-Evaluation (SSE) (RoI); and The Síolta Standards for early childhood care and education services (RoI); are key national frameworks and quality standards adopted by SFTS and CASE to support the implementation and self-assessment of Shared Education.

- A key output of Shared Education is enhancing the capacity of practitioners/teachers to deliver Shared Education i.e., the PEACE IV target of 2,100 practitioners/teachers trained with the capacity to facilitate Shared Education has been met with a total of **2,360 teachers** now experienced in delivering 20+ hours of shared classes.
  - Overall, Shared Education has had a positive impact on practitioners'/teachers' continuous professional development. Using the self-evaluation frameworks and standards, pre-school and school leaders engaged in reflective practice to assess educational and shared outcomes achieved against their Action Plan. As a result, the capacity of pre-school and school leaders has developed through Shared Education, with increased confidence in the use of quality frameworks to self-evaluate teaching and learning.
  - In Year 5, 93% of practitioners/teachers, who responded to the online survey, agreed that involvement in SFTS/CASE has **enhanced their ability and confidence to lead Shared Education initiatives**. This is a marked increase from 61% agreeing with this statement in Year 4, which reflected respondents' experiences during Covid-19. Results for Year 5 are more in keeping with results in Year 3 captured pre-Covid (96%).
  - CASE and SFTS provide ongoing training and professional learning initiatives. For example, CASE's Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) training package and SFTS's Media Initiative for Children, as well as Peer Cluster meetings to support sharing of good practice.
  - 94% of respondents, reflecting on Year 5, strongly agreed (52%) or agreed (42%) that their **professional teaching skills and knowledge has improved** due to involvement in SFTS/CASE, compared to 69% in Year 4 (during Covid). Year 5 results are on par with that reported in Year 3 (94%) i.e., pre-Covid levels.
  - It is evident that practitioners/teachers gained new experiences in delivering new subject areas, as well as using new resources/IT equipment. However, challenges linked to Covid-19 and the move to online shared sessions and training has somewhat hampered professional development for some individuals, as they have missed opportunities for networking and sharing good practice. The recent CASE dissemination events (May-June 2022) and SFTS celebration event (June 2022) proved to be a welcome opportunity for partnerships to meet and network on a face-to-face basis.
  - The turnover and changes of staff were more apparent due to the outworking of the Covid-19 pandemic. This has resulted in the need for an uplift in the level of support required by partnerships to sustain Shared Education. Time pressures and competing demands have meant that it is not always the lead practitioner or principal attending the training, which can sometimes limit buy-in from other staff. Turnover in staff has also meant that training cycles have been repeated to ensure adequate coverage and that individuals feel confident in the Shared Education delivery model.
  - Key learning for PEACEPLUS applicants:
    - The Shared Education model relies on effective leadership from pre-school/school management, senior leadership teams, and being able to generate whole-school buy-in. Therefore, it is suggested that training is strongly encouraged for school leaders (e.g., principals, representatives from Management Committee/Board of Governors, lead coordinators etc.).
    - It would be beneficial if all staff involved in Shared Education take part in at least one information session and initial training to ensure 'whole-school' buy-in. Consider extending training to include support staff/classroom assistants, and special educational needs coordinators, as these individuals play an important role in the logistics and delivery of shared classes and would value training in Shared Education.



- Continual upskilling will be beneficial in instances of staff turnover/changes to ensure that shared classes are delivered to best effect to address attrition of staff experienced. Nb. Whilst staff attrition will always be a factor, feedback from practitioners/teachers noted that this was more pronounced during the pandemic.
- Consider extending the training and implementation offer to include training suggested by practitioners/teachers i.e., general implementation guidance on the type of shared class activities that work well; opportunities to share learning with other partnerships; using IT to deliver shared classes; incorporating mental health into activities; how to engage children; increasing focus on greater inclusion of children with special educational needs; how to engage parents/wider community.
- Suggested recommendation to evaluating training delivery:
  - **Recommendation 8 (SEUPB):** The Impact Evaluation focused on the overarching feedback about training and the achievement of the output indicators for PEACE IV. There is a potential gap in the review, where further consideration should be given to the specific training courses/modules delivered by SFTS and CASE and identification of those that contribute most to meeting the shared/reconciliation outcomes of PEACE IV. Further discussion on CASE Joint Practice Development and SFTS/CASE peer clustering endeavours should also be considered going forward.

**(c) Promote the efficient and effective use of resources**

- There are also economic benefits for participating pre-schools/schools. The evidence indicates that the aim to ‘promote *the efficient and effective use of resources*’ has been met via the following: sharing of resources and indoor/outdoor facilities; equipment purchased collectively and shared between partnering pre-schools/schools; shared trips/outings and access to external tutors with different specialisms; and joint shared practitioner/teacher training to enhance teaching and learning.
- To help sustain and extend partnership working in a cost-effective way, a key learning is the investment in IT infrastructure (and training in its use) and is in line with the new PEACEPLUS approach on digital development – this has proven successful during PEACE IV where budgets were realigned to provide partnerships with the necessary equipment to embark in virtual classes during the pandemic. Budget allocation and investment in training will also continue to be an important factor to help practitioners/teachers and school leaders to plan work together, with virtual options particularly beneficial when coordination of schedules prove difficult.
- Key learning for PEACEPLUS applicants:
  - Future Shared Education projects should consider the alignment of digital literacy/coding classes with Shared Education will also allow children to work together as part of a ‘blended’ approach, which will enhance efficiencies. For any future model, it is important that online collaboration complements/adds-value to shared classes rather than replace face-to-face contact.

## I.7 Key Success Factors

In achieving educational and shared/reconciliation impacts a range of key success factors was identified as to why project delivery has been effective. In summary, these include:

- Effective leadership generates whole-school buy-in and helps support implementation.
- For partnerships to appreciate that early stages of implementation will represent a learning curve and will require flexibility in approach to adapt and meet the needs of the individual partnership.
- Aligning shared class activities to the existing curriculum meant that practitioners/teachers were able to embed Shared Education into normal planning and curricular delivery.
- Providing engaging and enjoyable activities for children helps them to feel that sharing is part of their daily lives in pre-school/school and is 'normalised'.
- Effective implementation practices, such as sharing resources; focus on in-house delivery; format of shared classes to encourage natural mixing; face-to-face contact; delivery of blocks of shared sessions and consistency in mixing to allow for friendships to develop; partnering with pre-school/school within close proximity, and streamlining administration documentation, are all practical examples of what works well.
- Commitment to ongoing communication will lead to better and more effective partnership working between practitioners/teachers (and partnering settings/schools), this will lead to improved planning, sharing of resources/equipment to delivering shared activities.
- Professional development opportunities and access to support for practitioners/teachers leads to effective implementation of Shared Education.
- Dedicated time and space for partnerships to reflect and celebrate achievements will boost morale and motivation for continuing shared activities.
- Involving parents/wider community in Shared Education communications and encouraging their involvement (as passive or active volunteers) in shared activities has the potential to build community connections across diverse communities, which will positively contribute to longer-term shared and reconciliation benefits.

IT has acted as a significant enabler to allow Shared Education to continue during the pandemic, this along with the support of Project Partners and the willingness of partnerships to engage in extraordinary circumstances is a positive testament to the SFTS and CASE projects' commitment to Shared Education. The PEACE IV targets are on schedule to be met because of the creativity and dedication of Project Partners and participating settings and schools.

Both practitioners and teachers reflected on the importance of being flexible and willing to adapt to change and try new ways of working. This, along with effective planning and organisation as part of a collaborative approach, allowed Shared Education to continue, despite the challenges encountered through the pandemic. This demonstrates the value partnerships place on Shared Education as a vehicle in which to achieve shared/reconciliation and educational outcomes.

## I.7 Awareness Raising

Project Partners regularly capture benefits achieved by partnerships through the development of case studies and producing quarterly newsletters<sup>17</sup>, utilising respective websites<sup>18</sup> and social media platforms to promote the benefits of Shared Education.

- **The SFTS** Project Partners team has been proactive in its approach to raising awareness and promoting SFTS to a wide range of stakeholders and local government officials, with the goal of embedding Shared Education in current settings and promoting mainstreaming of this work across the pre-school sector. The Sharing of Good Practice Celebration Event (June 2022) was a great success, with a range of keynote speakers outlining their support for Shared Education. The event was well attended by the SEUPB, Senior Education Officials, and importantly the partnership themselves were given the opportunity to showcase and celebrate their work. Further details can be found [here](#).
- **CASE:** Project Partners have organised several 'Dissemination events' with the aim of partnerships coming together to share in their successes and to learn from each other. This has proven to be a valuable exercise, and one which offers great benefit to attendees. Closure events are scheduled to take place in February to March 2023 to give partnerships an opportunity to reflect on their Shared Education journey and celebrate their progression.

Both SFTS and CASE Project Partners provided insights on their respective projects to inform the recently launched [Mainstreaming Shared Education Strategy](#) for Northern Ireland (Sept 2022), demonstrating how the collective learning from PEACE IV has helped to raise awareness and influence policy development.

## I.8 Sustainability

PEACE IV Shared Education has helped to build capacity in cross-border working, to include between Department of Education (NI) and Department of Education (Ireland); and between cross-border SFTS/CASE Project Partners. The experience has facilitated relationship building between education authorities and key interested parties, which can be sustained and developed in the future.

Capacity has also been built at an implementation level, with EYS and DOs now equipped with the skills to work on a cross-border basis to manage the current SFTS/CASE projects and any potential future PEACE-funded, or other initiative, to support the advancement/mainstreaming of Shared Education.

SFTS practitioners and CASE teachers were asked to reflect on the sustainability of their partnership and shared activities in the absence of funding. For CASE, one-quarter (25%) of respondents felt that they could continue partnership working at the same level, compared to 5% of SFTS settings. One of the most frequently cited barriers to continuing Shared Education was the need for funding to cover transport costs for travel between pre-school settings/schools. The overall majority (62%) reported that they would be able to sustain their partnerships but at a reduced level of activity, for example, using video conferencing and ad hoc events.

To aid future mainstreaming activities, factors such as close proximity to partner, leadership and desire to advance Shared Education, linkages with school development plans/curricular priorities across the partnership, use of IT to supplement face-to-face contact, and funding are required. As a legacy of PEACE IV Shared Education, the key learning and good practice from Shared Education will be sustained and can continue to be embedded into the curriculum, school development plans and inclusion policies. Furthermore, practitioner/teacher training aims

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<sup>17</sup> Newsletters: Sharing from the Start <https://www.sharingfromthestart.org/publications/> and CASE <https://www.sharededucation.org.uk/newsletters>

<sup>18</sup> Websites: Sharing from the Start <https://www.sharingfromthestart.org/> and CASE <https://www.sharededucation.org.uk/>

to provide individuals with the knowledge and skills to ensure that sharing is sustainable once PEACE IV funding ends. Friendships and connections between early years practitioners/teachers across the partnerships have also been established and can continue to flourish post funding.

Project Partners were also reflective of the distance travelled and the achievements gained in the last five years, and whilst significant shared/reconciliation outcomes were achieved these were somewhat hampered by the pandemic, which can be considered as unmet potential of Shared Education, to be pursued as part of the future PEACEPLUS Programme.

## **I.9 Final Reflections from Participants**

*Shared Education has been invaluable to fostering relationships between our schools. It has engendered trust within a community with different cultural perspectives, by allowing pupils to share and learn together, in a non-threatening and very enjoyable environment. The commitment of staff has enabled Shared Education to be integrated into our school curriculum. It has forged lasting links between our pupils that will allow them to have a broader understanding of their community as adults - all of these are excellent achievements. (CASE teacher)*

*Settings pairing up together has challenged and strengthened the professional practice of each setting and provided strong leadership across the early childhood sector in both jurisdictions, and we see a legacy of reflective practice that we know will continue on. The programme has ensured that children feel included, visible, and heard in their own communities, and their families, and in the social cohesion the programme has harnessed for those who have made the island of Ireland their new home. Sharing from the Start has enabled us to place a wider focus on equality, diversity, inclusion, and social cohesion, and together, to push the envelope of policy and practice across both jurisdictions, to deepen our understanding and to contribute to the potential of the Good Friday Agreement. (National Childhood Network, SFTS Project Partner)*

*When an experienced teacher states that the Shared Education Partnership has been the highlight of their recent teaching years and a seasoned Principal says it has been the most exciting development in their 20+ years of their career, you know you have struck gold. The uptake and commitment of the school staff to CASE and the embedding of shared practice and professional dialogue between schools has been outstanding. It's been a pleasure to work with these great professionals. (Léargas, CASE Project Partner)*

*Shared Education adds to the educational experiences that schools offer and I wholeheartedly have never experienced such a rewarding, valuable and beneficial project like PEACE IV. Shared Education is the way forward, the way to promote good practice and to celebrate all that is good. (CASE teacher)*

*It is an extremely valuable programme that offers opportunities for communities to come together in positive way. A shared focus on providing the best start in life for our young children has enabled both staff and parents to work together, sharing ideas and good practice and celebrating achievements throughout this year. (SFTS Early Years Practitioner)*

*We loved this programme, and the Board of Governors and families are now in the process of engaging with Integrated Education status as a direct result of this Sharing from the Start as our mix of religion has changed dramatically over the past 3 years to the benefit of everyone. We also have received a rising number of children for whom English is an additional language and children with Special Educational Needs and this is without question the benefit of Sharing from the Start. (SFTS Early Years Practitioner)*

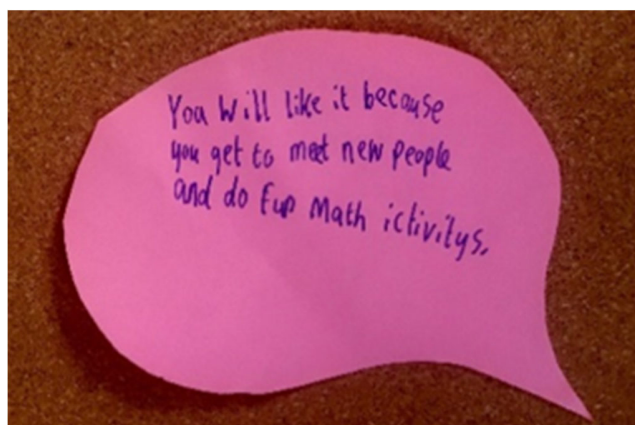
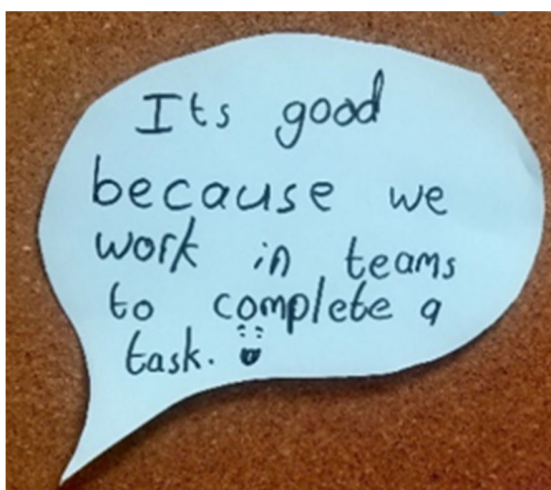
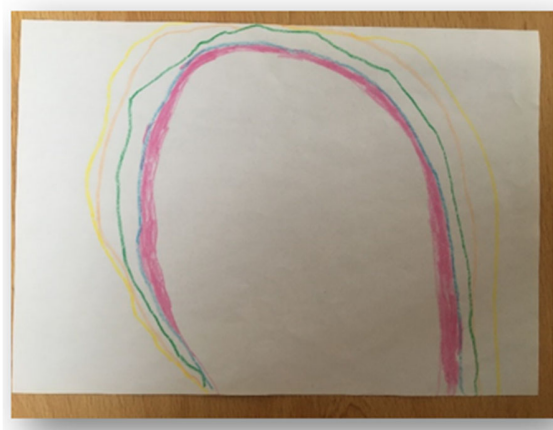
*I think we've moved far further on now after you know 10 years than people would have anticipated. Our children definitely would have no connection whatsoever between the religious backgrounds of different children, in fact now some of their best friends are from different religious backgrounds and I think we definitely need to be encouraging more of that within communities especially with us being so rural here and so many people coming from different backgrounds. Our children definitely wouldn't have made any connection whatsoever in regard to religious background. (Parent)*

**Photos: children's responses when asked to reflect on what they liked about Shared Education.**

*"Having great fun with our friends"*

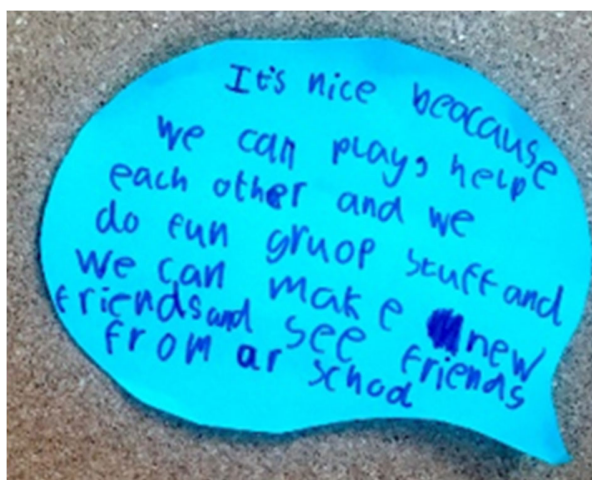


*"I like to play with the toys in [partner pre-school] and I like all my new friends"*

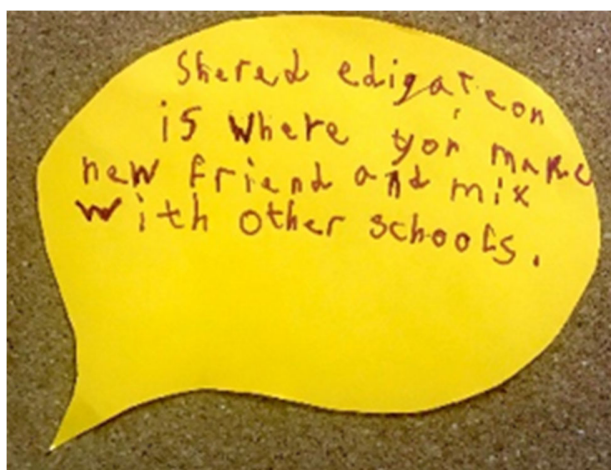




Photos: children's responses when asked to reflect on what they liked about Shared Education.



We get to make new friends  
We ate our lunch with them  
We shared our new friends  
We get to play in their playground  
We got to see what their school looks like  
We got to play games with them  
We got to ask each other questions



We made new friends. They shared their toys with us. We got to see their school. We had so much fun. They have a nice playground.

