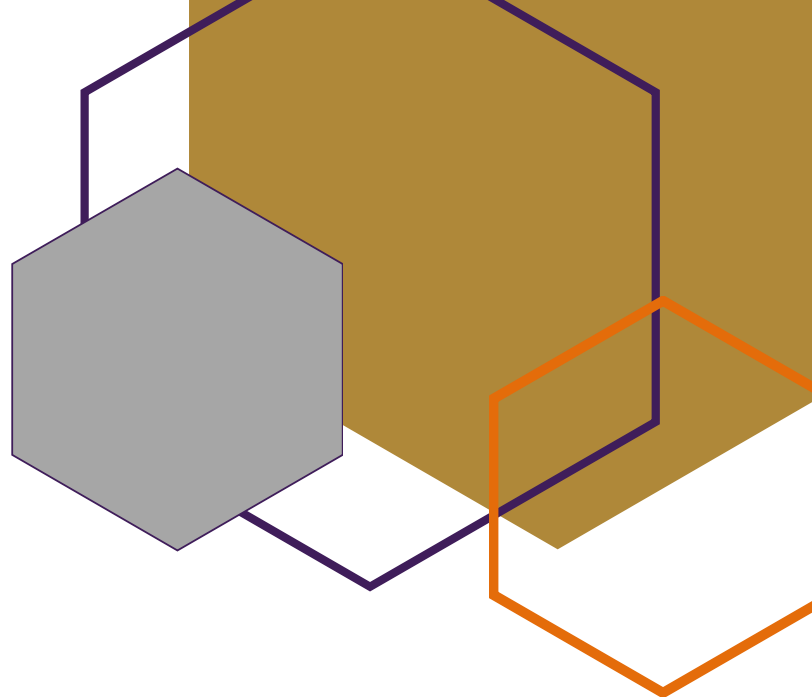




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Shared Education Impact Evaluation

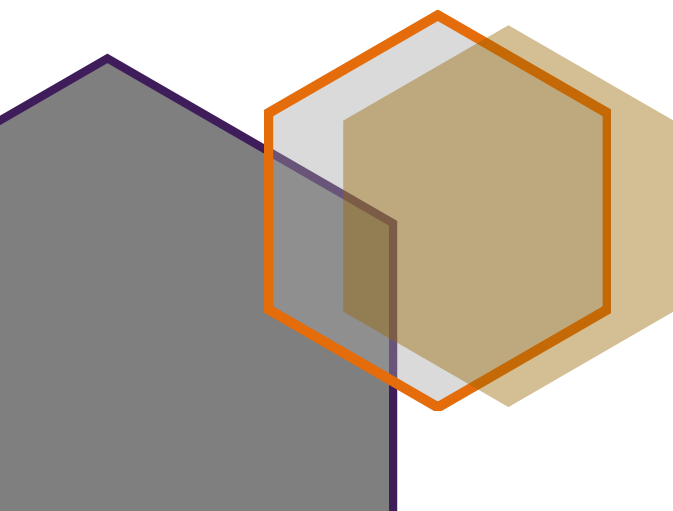
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PEACE IV Programme – Specific Objective 1

March 2021



**NATIONAL
CHILDREN'S
BUREAU**



Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all those who participated in this research, either through engaging in consultations, focus groups, and/or completing the online survey.

Given the uncertainty and pressures linked to the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, it is important that we acknowledge and express our gratitude to the pre-school settings and schools who took time to complete the online survey (June 2020). The excellent response rate demonstrates the goodwill shown by all, and willingness to provide feedback about their positive experience of Shared Education.

We would particularly like to thank the seven case study partnerships (comprised of six pre-schools and eleven primary schools), involving early years practitioners, teachers, support staff, and the children who engaged in research activities, and their parents who gave consent.

The research was overseen by a Project Board to include: The Education Authority; Léargas; Early Years – the organisation for young children; the National Childhood Network (NCN); and The Fermanagh Trust. We would like to sincerely thank the Project Board members for their contribution in engaging in interviews, as well as providing access to monitoring data and importantly their key role in providing strategic direction and examining the research findings and implications in terms of potential recommendations.

I EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I.1 Introduction

SJC consultancy, in partnership with the National Children’s Bureau, was commissioned by the Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) to assess the impact of the interventions within the EU PEACE IV Programme Specific Objective 1, Action 1: Children participating in Shared Education, which 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, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion.

To deliver upon these aims, SEUPB awarded €33.14m to two separate consortia – one focused on early years and the second on the primary/post-primary sector. These include:

| Project Name | Lead Partner (LP) and Project Partners (PP) | Funding |
|---|---|----------------------|
| 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%) |
| Collaboration Through Sharing in Education (CASE) | Education Authority (LP) Léargas (PP) | €28,890,790 (87%) |
| 2 projects | 5 delivery agents | €33,146,797 |

Funding is targeted at pre-school settings (to include statutory and non-statutory provision) and schools that have not previously participated in Shared Education¹. The delivery structure is based on partnerships comprised of pre-schools/schools from a predominantly Catholic and Protestant community background collaborating to deliver shared classes. SFTS partnerships comprise of 2-3 pre-schools². CASE partnerships comprise of 2-5 schools³. Both Shared Education projects have been delivering project activity since 2018 and are scheduled to run until 2022, as per the timeline below:

- **Year 1** – 2017 to 2018:
 - September 2017: Funding awarded by 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.
- **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 – SFTS to complete by March 2022.
- **Year 6** – 2022 to 2023: project activity and project closure from September 2022 to June 2023 – CASE to complete by November 2022.

¹ Schools in Northern Ireland may have been involved in various pilot Shared Education Programmes, and/or involved in the current 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.

² SFTS 46 partnerships: 85% comprised of two pre-schools in partnership; and 15% three pre-schools.

³ CASE 168 partnerships: 75% comprised of two schools in partnership; 18% three schools; 6% four schools; and 1% five schools in partnership.

This phase of the evaluation reflects project activity from **January 2020 to June 2020** (three months into the Covid-19 pandemic and school closures). SFTS and CASE projects were in the middle of Year 3 implementation at the beginning of the period under evaluation and at the end of Year 3 by the end of the evaluation.

Since reporting, the effects of the pandemic have persisted for a further nine months and are having a considerable impact on projects ability to deliver shared classes, the extent to which was not known at the time of completing this report. Subsequent evaluation reports will focus on this impact and how projects have adapted to meet objectives.

I.2 Approach

A mixed-method approach was adopted to deliver the Impact Evaluation to include:

- An online survey of SFTS early years practitioners and CASE principals/teachers was carried out in June 2020. Respondents were asked to provide feedback based on pre Covid-19 conditions. A total of 216 survey responses were received, representing 126 unique partnerships. A good response rate was achieved based on the total number of SFTS (87%) and CASE (51%) partnerships, particularly as schools were closed (March – June 2020), and demonstrates the goodwill shown by all and willingness to provide feedback about their experience.
- Interviews with SEUPB staff and case officers.
- Interviews with Project Partners.
- Review of Project Partner monitoring data, including pre-school and school baseline data; partnership progress reports, portfolios of evidence including photos and feedback from shared classes.
- Focus group with SFTS senior early years specialists (EYS).
- Interviews with CASE Development Officers (DOs).
- Attendance at two CASE 'Dissemination of Learning' events, involving observations and focus groups with attending teachers.
- Development of seven case studies involving contributions from 17 pre-schools/schools including interviews with early years practitioners/teachers, support staff and research with children.

There are several outputs, which collectively provide a robust Impact Evaluation of Shared Education, to include: (1) Overall Programme Report (2) SFTS Survey Results (3) CASE Survey Results (4) Case Studies (x7) and Summary Report of Case Studies.

To aid the dissemination of learning, the evaluators also created a short video animation [\[click here\]](#) to summarise the report findings, an infographic, and a video showcasing SFTS/CASE shared class activities [\[click here\]](#). These outputs will be promoted as part of a week of focused social media activity (scheduled for April 2021).

I.3 PEACE IV – achievement of 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, with remaining outputs on schedule to be met (pre Covid-19).

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. Milestone target of 19,200 by 2018).*

School/pupil participation began in January 2018 and by June 2020 there were:

- 482 pre-schools/schools taking part in Shared Education, exceeding targets (138% of target achieved – recruitment of schools is now complete).
- 1,409 early years practitioners and teachers having completed training and now have the capacity to facilitate Shared Education (67% achieved and on track to meet target).
- Almost 73,000 children have now benefited from shared class activity (51% of target achieved).

| Output Indicators | Overall (CASE & SFTS) | | |
|--|---|----------------------|------------|
| | PEACE IV output (2023) | Achieved (June 2020) | % achieved |
| Number of pre-schools/schools involved | 350 | 482 | 138% |
| Number of trained teachers/ practitioners with the capacity to facilitate Shared Education | 2,100 | 1,409 | 67% |
| Number of participants/pupils in Shared Education classes | 144,000 (milestone target: 19,200 by 2018) | 72,752 | 51% |

The above targets were achieved within 2.5 years (up until June 2020), therefore if project activity remains at the same pace it can be assumed that within the next 1.75 years for SFTS (21 months until March 2022) and almost 2.5 years for CASE (29 months until November 2022) the output indicator for the number of teachers/practitioners trained and children participating in Shared Education will be achieved (pre Covid-19).

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.

The PEACE IV Specific Objective of providing direct, sustained, curriculum-based cross-community contact has been achieved as SFTS/CASE partnerships have completed three years of shared activity, and have progressed along the continuum of sharing (as per ETI's Shared Education Framework⁴) from a baseline position of 'Defining' to subsequent stages of 'Developing', and 'Expanding', and in some 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 settings⁵.

On average, children have benefited from 23 hours each per year of sustained contact via curriculum-led shared classes.

- Year 1 – 2017/18: 20 hours per child (6 months activity from January 2018 to June 2018).
- Year 2 – 2018/19: 30 hours per child (10 months activity from September 2018 to June 2019).
- Year 3 – 2019/20: 18 hours per child (5 months activity from September 2019 to February 2020).

In Year 3, pre-schools/schools closed for the final term (from early March to June 2020) due to the Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdown measures, greatly inhibiting Shared Education activities. However, the overall net result is positive, as the baseline position was no/limited prior cross-community contact among children and/or education providers.

Result Indicators: *The percentage of schools in the last academic year that have been involved in Shared Education with another school. The baseline value for 2013 is 76% [later revised to 58%]. The target value for 2023 is 88% [later revised to 69%]. This baseline is derived from the School Omnibus Survey 2013 figure. For the Border Region of Ireland, the baseline value is 0% and the 2023 target value is 7.5%.*

The data for the PEACE IV result indicators is collected by the biennial Omnibus Survey of Schools in Northern Ireland. The Department of Education and Skills (DES) intend to conduct a similar survey in the Border Region.

There is evidence that the result indicators are on schedule to be met. From a baseline of 58%, there is now at least 63% of schools in Northern Ireland involved in Shared Education (against a target of 69%), as per the most recent Omnibus Survey which took place in September 2018.

This percentage increase can be attributed to the PEACE IV Shared Education on-the-ground activity commencing from January 2018 and may also reflect other factors such as increased uptake of non-PEACE IV funded Shared Education activities such as the Delivering Social Change Shared Education Signature Project (DSC SESP). Whilst the 2018 figure of 63% is now dated, it is considered that there is a positive shift in the overall proportion of schools involved in Shared Education, which will increase further, i.e., as of June 2020, a total of 482 schools are now participating in PEACE IV Shared Education. The result indicators will be validated upon completion of subsequent School Omnibus Surveys in Northern Ireland and the Border Region i.e., the 2020

⁴ 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>

⁵ 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) Identify and Belonging (5) Community Involvement.

School Omnibus Survey was delayed, but is due to take place in 2021/22, and the School Survey equivalent for the Border Region, which it has not yet taken place yet will be available prior to the end of the programming period.

In terms of ‘non-participating’ schools i.e., those not involved in Shared Education, there are some disparities in the figures from various sources⁶. It is evaluator’s estimate, using these sources, that there are approximately 657 ‘non-participating’ schools across the PEACE IV eligible area (to include Northern Ireland and the Border Region). These could represent latent/unmet demand, and a potential pool of schools for future EU funding linked to Shared Education interventions.

I.4 Evidence of Impact – Key Findings

Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with partnerships highlighting the significant benefit to those involved. There is an appetite for this work to continue to allow partnerships to complete their shared activities, and to build on the educational and reconciliation benefits achieved.

Overall, PEACE IV Shared Education has had a positive impact on the following areas: cross-border collaboration; and outcomes for children, pre-schools/schools, practitioners/teachers, parents, and the wider community.

Impact on Cross-border Collaboration at a Strategic Level

PEACE IV Shared Education has helped to build capacity in cross-border working, to include between Department of Education (NI) and Department of Education and Skills (RoI); 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 SFTS Early Years Specialists (EYS) and CASE Development Officers (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.

Benefits for Children

Educational

One of the key outputs is the number of participants in Shared Education classrooms, with almost **73,000 children** having benefited from shared class activity (51% of target achieved). Shared Education has had a positive impact on the curriculum by helping to enrich the curricular focus of the CCEA Curriculum (NI)⁷ and NCCA Curriculum (RoI)⁸

Most significant is that almost all (95%) of respondents agreed that SFTS/CASE has led to **improved educational outcomes** for participating children. For instance, core subjects have been enhanced with the addition of new resources acquired, the access to other teaching staff and in some cases external tutors providing specific expertise, which would not have occurred in the absence of funding. Other key educational benefits reported include improved communications skills (93%), improved social skills (88%); improved confidence (94%); enhanced learning experiences (94%); and eased transition process (78%).

⁶ Sources include: (1) School Omnibus Survey (2) Education Authority study and events for non-participating schools (3) PEACE IV result indicator baseline assumptions.

⁷ CCEA – The Northern Ireland Curriculum [Online] available at <https://ccea.org.uk/about/what-we-do/curriculum>

⁸ 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/>

Feedback also highlights the year-on-year progression, with an increased number of children and/or year groups involved, with some adopting a whole-school approach and embedding Shared Education into the ethos and workings of the pre-school/school.

Cross-community Friendships

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. 93% agreed that participating in SFTS/CASE has led to **children making friends in the shared classroom**, with practitioners/teachers observing social development and many close relationships emerging over the duration of the projects. 61% agreed that **these friendships extended into home/community life**.

This experience will positively influence children's behaviours in the future in terms of building cross-community links and friendships. Opportunities for children to meet outside of school (with support from parents) will contribute to the longer-term benefits of sharing.

Dealing with Differences

Reconciliation benefits in terms of enhanced mutual understanding and tolerance is also evident. For example, participants reported that partnership enabled children feel comfortable and at ease when in their partner pre-school/school (93%); to meet other adults and become comfortable with them (95%); describe ways that they are similar and different to others in a shared classroom (85%), as well as having increased empathy for others with different needs/abilities.

The positive starting position of children was noted as a contributing factor to the success of SFTS/CASE projects with children's willingness to engage in shared activities; 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.

Benefits for Practitioners/Teachers

One of the key outputs of Shared Education is the development and delivery of related teacher training and professional learning initiatives i.e., the PEACE IV target of 2,100 practitioners/teachers trained with the capacity to facilitate Shared Education is on schedule to be met with a total of **1,409 teachers trained to date**.

Shared Education has had a positive impact on practitioners'/teachers' continuous professional development. **96%** reported that they are **more confident in their ability to lead Shared Education activities**, consequently adding to the sustainability of such activities in the future.

Other key benefits include improved professional teaching skills and knowledge (94%); increased access to curriculum resources (93%); increased access to external professional expertise (89%); increased access to CPD opportunities and training (87%); enhanced teaching and learning in your pre-school or school (95%); provided opportunities for peer support and sharing good practice (96%).

Benefits for Pre-schools/Schools

Shared Education 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 additional but strategically aligned to the agreed curriculum focus, recognising that they are intrinsically linked.

There is evidence that Shared Education is being translated into quality standards⁹ for teaching and learning that enable its values to be embedded into practice in pre-schools and schools. The capacity of pre-school and school leaders has also developed through Shared Education, with increased confidence in the use of quality frameworks to self-evaluate teaching and learning. A review of inspection reports provides evidence that Shared Education is recognised as a valuable intervention to improve teaching and learning.

There is also evidence from SFTS/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 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.

There are also economic benefits for participating pre-schools/schools. The evidence indicates that the aim to *'promotes 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 shared practitioner/teacher training to enhance teaching and learning.

Benefits for Parents & Wider Community

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. Results are positive with 92% of practitioners/teachers agreeing that children now have a greater sense of the wider community; 75% agreed that due to Shared Education there has been an increased integration of the respective pre-school/school within the wider community; and 95% agreed that Shared Education has improved cross-community understanding and relationships.

89% of respondents described the general feedback on the impact of Shared Education from Boards of Governors/Management Committees as 'very positive' (41%) or 'positive' (48%). This positivity extends to parents with 91% of respondents agreeing that feedback from parents was 'very positive' (40%) or 'positive' (51%).

Support from parents is evident as they have given their consent for their child to be involved in SFTS/CASE shared classes, with increased visibility of parents at various shared events – showing a tangible support for SFTS/CASE.

There are differences between the models with more parental engagement evident as part of the SFTS project i.e., **85%** agreed that SFTS increased opportunities for cross-community engagement for parents, compared to CASE where **56%** agreed with this statement. The SFTS model has an intentional focus on parental and community engagement (parents attending training/workshops), whereas CASE did not focus on delivering activities/workshops specifically for parents.

⁹ 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.

The involvement of parents has the potential for greater impact and achievement of PEACE IV peace and reconciliation aims. Benefits of parental involvement include:

- Parents' support or otherwise is an important influencing factor on their children, and with their support can continue to drive forward the premise of Shared Education and contribute to the longevity of the outcomes achieved.
- Creates a ripple effect so that Shared Education can be extended to home, where parents and children can openly talk about their shared experiences.
- Provides opportunities for parents to meet in a different pre-school/school, thereby creating the space to communicate with other parents leading to increased understanding and appreciation of different communities. This can help reduce attitudinal barriers to participating in Shared Education and minimise any concerns of parents/wider community.

Challenges

In terms of challenges, practitioners/teachers were asked to provide feedback based on pre Covid-19 conditions. Results highlighted that challenges related to general administration and planning, rather than issues underpinning the actual model and cross-community dimension of SFTS/CASE. The main challenge was the **time commitment** involved in planning and administering shared classes (50%), although, many appreciate that this is necessary to ensure the success of the projects. Collaborative working helped to ease the additional pressure on competing demands.

Feedback from key stakeholder interviews and focus groups with Project Partners, EYS, DOs, highlighted other challenges including: travel/transport in terms of planning, coordination and the administration burden surrounding gaining the required number of quotations (and evidence) to meet procurement requirements, noting that travel remains as one of the biggest costs, and consequently potential barrier to sustaining Shared Education activities; greater demand than expected from practitioners/teachers for Project Partners training events; ensuring that terminology used in training aligned to both NI/Rol context; competing pressures in respective jurisdictions; large partnership being more complex to coordinate; different size (number of children) of partnering schools making it more difficult to mix children; partnership breakdowns in a minority of cases; and some issues relating to staff (DO) turnover are now resolved.

Importantly, 80% agreed that the time spent working on Shared Education is proportionate to the benefits/outcomes achieved. Overall, the challenges outlined have not inhibited pre-schools/schools achieving their objectives (pre Covid-19). Comments acknowledged the added workload but felt it is commensurate to benefits and that the effort has been worthwhile given the educational and social benefits gained from participation.

Sustainability

As a legacy of the PEACE IV funding, 15% reported that 'yes, we will continue with our partner at the same level of activity' in the absence of funding. This is due to connections established via SFTS/CASE and will provide ongoing cross-community benefits for those involved. A further 61% agreed that a reduced level of activity would be possible, mainly involving ongoing practitioner/teacher contact (informal and formal) and ad-hoc events for children.

I.5 Conclusions & Recommendations

Improved cross-community relations

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*’.

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, and as such has positively contributed to meeting this Programme aim. Based on the impact data, there is strong evidence of improved shared/reconciliation outcomes being achieved through the development of cross-community relationships and friendships between children, as well as between practitioners/teachers in partner schools. This coupled with wider cross-community and cross-border connections being established will create a legacy of the funding.

Achievement of Aims & Output Indicators

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

With a starting/baseline position of no/limited cross-community contact, there are now 482 pre-schools/schools actively involved in PEACE IV Shared Education projects. These projects currently involve almost 73,000 learners from all backgrounds joining for curriculum-led shared classes.

Based on the achievement to date, SFTS and CASE have met or are on target to meet output indicators, therefore these benefits will continue to evolve, with building the capacity for partnerships to be sustainable a key focus of Project Partners.

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

There are 214 partnerships (46 SFTS and 168 CASE) involving 482 pre-schools/schools representing different sectors. 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.

Aim: Deliver educational benefits to learners, promote the efficient and effective use of resources, and promote equality of opportunity, good relations, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion.

Impact data (section I.4) on the educational benefits, economic benefits, and shared/reconciliation benefits provides the evidence that this aim has been achieved. Overall, PEACE IV Shared Education has had a positive impact, to include:

- Enhanced cross-community and cross-border collaboration at a strategic and operational level.
- Improved quality standards in teaching and learning.
- Enriched the CCEA Curriculum (NI) and NCCA Curriculum (RoI) offer, with subsequent benefits for children in improved educational outcomes.
- Contributed to meeting objectives in Pre-school/School Development Plans and Inclusion/Shared Policies.
- The efficient and effective use of resources through adopting a shared model (sharing equipment, resources, joint training).
- Developed cross-community friendships and supported children’s ability to acknowledge and promote differences.

- Increased opportunities for parents to generate cross-community connections.
- Increased community connections with and across the wider community through the involvement of parents and use of local facilities/community venues.

PEACE IV – to shift the focus to a more outcomes-based approach

The PEACE IV Programme defined output indicators focused on the numbers of participating (children, pre-schools/schools and teachers/practitioners trained), and therefore SFTS/CASE project data focused on measuring these outputs. **Recommendation:** There is a need for a greater focus on defined outcomes in the future programming period, and how the intervention contributes to the overall PEACE Programme aim of peace and reconciliation. For instance, the survey results provide evidence of the types of outcomes achieved and should be considered as indicators for any future Shared Education interventions.

The model adopted by SFTS includes a community development aspect, recognising the importance of actively involving parents and the wider community to enhance societal outcomes. A parental/community engagement model should be more widely adopted as a means of embedding the ethos of Shared Education – by promoting the benefits and allaying the concerns of those not receptive to the premise of Shared Education this will aid the sustainability of activities and will result in longer lasting peace and reconciliation outcomes. It is noted that some partnerships were beginning to develop these school-community links in Year 3 of the projects, however progress was impeded due to the impact of Covid-19 restrictions and the move to remote working. **Recommendation:** For any future Shared Education intervention, for SEUPB to consider the inclusion of an indicator to capture parental/wider community involvement, which is desired to have longer lasting peace and reconciliation outcomes.

Addressing implementation challenges

PEACE IV incorporated a range simplification measures to reduce administration for beneficiaries, to include the introduction of simplified costs. For Shared Education this related to the adoption of flat rates for staff costs, and unit costs per child participating. However, pre-schools/schools have raised issues relating to the administration burden of travel costs, for example sourcing quotes from several bus providers, and if the date/duration of travel changes having to source updated quotes.

Recommendations:

- Ensure that challenges relating to the administration burden are monitored by Project Partners to gain a better understanding of the time spent on tasks. This will allow Project Partners to understand any issues and work with pre-schools/schools to minimise the impact.
- Going forward, it is important that SEUPB and Project Partners ensure that this burden is reduced/not transferred to project beneficiaries, and the focus remains on achievement of outputs and outcomes. This could be achieved by introducing a unit cost for travel.

SFTS training and CASE Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) offer a comprehensive training package for participants. Furthermore, EYS and DOs provide valuable support to partnerships and feedback has been very complimentary. Whilst feedback was positive, suggested recommendations to improve training delivery include:

Recommendations:

- For Project Partners to endeavour to meet training demand and that content considers the context of both jurisdictions in both design (terminology used) and delivery (locations to cover spread across both jurisdictions).
- Consider extending the training and implementation offer to include training suggested by practitioners/teachers i.e. guidance on the type of shared class activities that work well; support accessing expertise/external tutors; opportunities to share learning with other partnerships; support using IT in the

delivery of shared classes (particularly important during Covid-19 restrictions on contact); incorporating mental health into activities; and increasing focus on greater inclusion of children with special educational needs.

- 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.

Quality cross-community contact is fundamental to the success of the projects, and there is evidence from the impact data this has been achieved in terms of educational and societal benefits gained. However, some feedback suggests the need for further guidance on how to mix children in instances where class sizes vary across schools within a partnership. **Recommendation:** Guidance for partnering pre-schools/schools of disproportionate size (in terms of number of children) on how best to mix children so they can develop quality contact and relationships.

Impact of Covid-19

The emergence of Covid-19 (from March 2020) 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.

This phase of the evaluation reflects project activity from January 2020 to June 2020 (three months into the Covid-19 pandemic and school closures). Since reporting, the effects of the pandemic have continued for another nine months and are having a considerable impact on projects ability to deliver shared classes. This poses a risk to achievement, as the extent to which progress can be made by SFTS/CASE in Year 4 and Year 5 is unclear, met with continuing uncertainty in the education sector under Covid-19 restrictions. Furthermore, prolonged lockdown presents a risk to the sustainability of relationships developed between partnering pre-schools/schools.

Despite these challenges, Project Partners have adapted and been responsive to help support pre-schools/schools to maintain linkages already well established.

The SFTS/CASE Project Partners submitted respective proposals to SEUPB outlining a blended learning approach to shared sessions to ensure that SFTS/CASE targets are met, and importantly to ensure that pre-schools/schools maintain momentum for Shared Education to reap the educational and societal benefits that have been achieved to date.

Practitioners/ teachers have endeavoured to use technology to maintain contact between partnerships, and there are good examples of this working. They are keen to work with the SFTS/CASE Project Partners and would welcome support and training as to how best to deliver Shared Education in the current climate and to maximise the use of technology/virtual classrooms to maintain linkages with children and staff.

Subsequent evaluation reports will focus on the extent of this impact and how projects have adapted to Covid-19 conditions to meet objectives.

Recommendation: The immediate sustainability of activities is dependent on when pre-schools/schools can resume normal routines, in a post Covid-19 environment. Timely guidance is required from SEUPB/European Commission on the model/likely future roll-out of Shared Education.