

Press Release

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HEALING THE DIVIDE THROUGH LEARNING – €35.3 MILLION OF EU PEACE IV FUNDING IS OFFERED TO PROMOTE SHARED EDUCATION

€35.3 million worth of EU PEACE IV funding has been announced today by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) to deliver ‘shared education’ bringing together school children and teachers from different communities and backgrounds, across the region.

‘Shared education’ is defined as bringing children from different religious and socio-economic backgrounds together in a shared learning environment. It is estimated that in Northern Ireland approximately 92.6% of children attend schools that are predominantly associated with one community.

The PEACE IV Programme has a target of reaching 144,000 young people in 350 schools, on a cross-border basis, with approximately 2,100 teachers trained with the capacity to facilitate shared education. Support will be targeted at schools and other educational settings with no, or limited experience of providing shared education opportunities to their children.

The funding will be used to support shared education within Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland and cross-border, through curriculum subjects including Literacy and Numeracy and STEM.

Staff of schools and other educational settings participating in the Programme will gain the skills necessary to positively engage in and lead shared education activities in pre-schools, primary schools and post-primary schools.

Pre-school shared education activities will be delivered by the Early Years Organisation, alongside the Fermanagh Trust and the National Childhood Network. Primary and post-primary shared education will be delivered by the Education Authority alongside Léargas, a not-for-profit organisation, based in Ireland.

Match-funding for shared education has been provided by the Department of Education in Northern Ireland and the Department of Education and Skills in Ireland.

Welcoming the funding, Richard Bruton TD, Minister for Education and Skills in Ireland said: **“This funding of €35.3 million will have a really meaningful impact on thousands of students in hundreds of schools north and south of the border, by giving them the opportunity to work with and learn from communities different than their own. The experience gained during participation in ‘shared education’ will ensure our students have a better understanding of communities on both sides of the border.**

“I have set the ambition to make Ireland’s education system the best in Europe within a decade and good relations with our neighbours in Northern Ireland is important to delivering on this ambition.” he continued.

Underlining the importance of the funding Gina McIntyre Chief Executive Officer of the SEUPB said: **“This funding will deliver one of the core objectives of the EU’s PEACE IV Programme, which aims to equip children with the skills and attitudes that will help in fostering a culture of good relations within the region. This positive approach will help in breaking a cycle of intolerance and sectarianism.**

“Not only will the funding provide opportunities for young people to have sustained and positive contact with children from differing backgrounds but it will also give them access to additional curriculum-based educational activities,” she continued.

Recognising the impact that the funding will make Derek Baker, Permanent Secretary of the Department of Education said: **“This significant investment will enable schools that have not previously engaged in shared education to do so, allowing many more children and young people to learn together on a cross-community and cross-border basis. It will complement the existing Delivering Social Change Shared Education Project that aims to further embed shared education in schools with prior experience. The Peace IV funding, which I welcome, will enable all schools in Northern Ireland to provide opportunities for our young people to learn about each other from each other in joint classes.”**

- ENDS.

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Notes to Editor:

SEUPB

- The Special EU Programmes Body is a North/South Implementation Body sponsored by the Department of Finance in Northern Ireland and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in Ireland.
- It is responsible for managing two EU Structural Funds Programmes, PEACE IV and INTERREG VA which are designed to enhance cross-border co-operation, promote reconciliation and create a more peaceful and prosperous society.
- The Programmes operate within a clearly defined area including Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and in the case of INTERREG VA, Western Scotland.
- The PEACE IV Programme has a value of €270 million and aims to promote peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland.
- For more information on the SEUPB please visit www.seupb.eu