

# **Written evidence submitted by the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE), relating to the funding and delivery of public services in Northern Ireland inquiry (FPC0027)**

## **1. Introduction to NICIE**

The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) was set up in 1987. It is a company limited by guarantee and a Charity. NICIE is also a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB). The Department of Education fund NICIE to promote the development of Integrated Education under the Education Reform Order (NI) 1989 Article 64<sup>1</sup> general functions of Department and boards in relation to Integrated Education

NICIE also accesses limited funding from other sources as a charitable body to help meet our Business Plan Objectives.

The Integrated Education (NI) 2022<sup>2</sup> will put further significant pressure on NICIE resources to support schools to comply with the new Act and to meet the unmet demand for Integrated Education which has already significantly increased in the last 8 years (9 schools have transformed to Integrated status in the last 8 years with a further 18 at different stages of the process including even Development Proposals that are awaiting approval by the Department of Education for NI.

NICIE has a board of 16 Directors representing the different constituencies including the founding TRUSTS.

We facilitate existing Integrated schools through staff professional learning, governance and support focused on the development of their Integrated ethos with an emphasis on an Anti-Bias Approach to education.

For Grant Maintained Integrated schools, NICIE provide a representation function on their behalf on several key educational forums including Area Planning<sup>3</sup>, Teacher's Negotiating Council, Local Management of schools to name but a few (See point 5 for a fuller list.) Integrated provision is grown and developed through work with parent groups who want to establish a new school in their community, and we support existing Integrated schools who wish to expand their enrolment as demand increases over time.

We enable further growth through providing support, advice and training to existing schools who want to 'Transform'<sup>4</sup> to Integrated status. NICIE have a staff team of 12 people, including four part-time members of staff.

### **NICIE Vision**

A society where children are educated together, confident to express their own identity and culture; and accepting of, and prepared to engage with, the identity and culture of others.

### **NICIE Mission**

To promote reconciliation in Northern Ireland through Integrated Education.

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<sup>1</sup> [The Education Reform \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1989 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2019/01/01/51501a0000010001/1-1)

<sup>2</sup> [Integrated Education Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2022 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2022/01/01/51501a0000010001/1-1)

<sup>3</sup> Note NICIE do not represent the 30 Controlled Integrated schools at Area Planning only schools going through the process of Transformation-once Transformed they are represented by EA as the Managing Authority of all Controlled schools

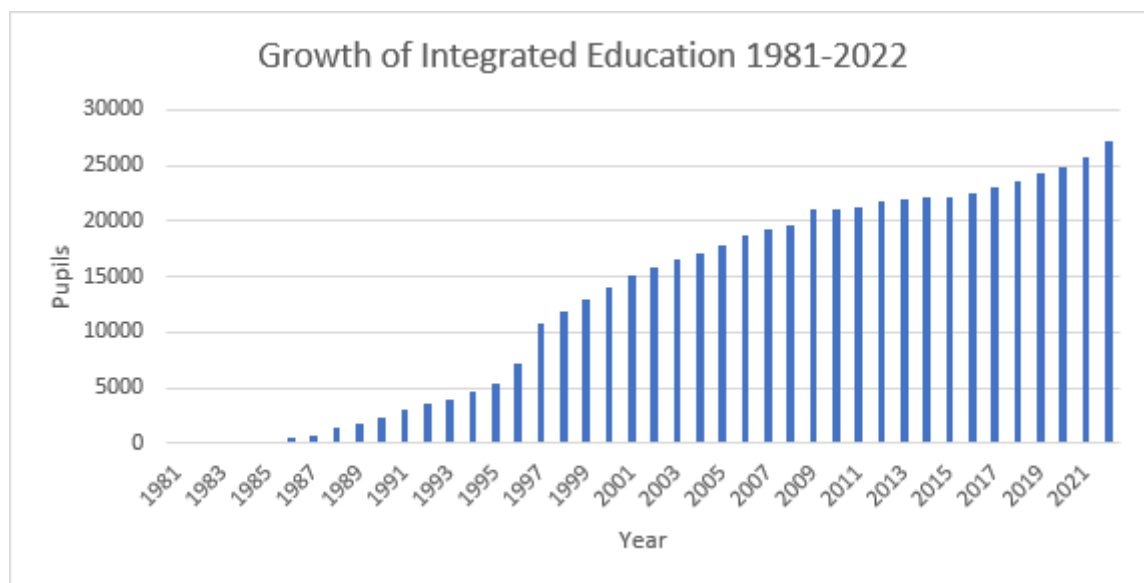
<sup>4</sup> <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Integration%20Works%20-%20Transforming%20your%20School%20December%202017.pdf>

NICIE have worked with the 8 CEOs of Education bodies in NI to outline the issues regarding the impact of the lack of a functioning Executive on budgetary management and strategic decision-making across Northern Ireland Departments. Paper is available on request but hopefully you have received this.

## 2. Growth of Integrated Education:

Since the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, the numbers of students being educated in IE has more than doubled. In 2021 24,900 students (in 68 Integrated schools) or 7.3% of the schools aged population (6% of the schools in NI) attend Integrated schools as demonstrated below.

Graph 1 showing growth of Integrated Education in last 40 years



Whilst the growth of the number of schools grew exponentially until the mid-2000s, it has begun to take incremental jumps over the last 10 years. This year four newly Transformed schools were established through successful Development Proposals including the first Maintained and the first Integrated Nursery schools.

NICIE wish to express to the NI Affairs Committee that we believe there is a huge adverse impact of the lack of a functioning Executive on budgetary management and strategic decision-making across Northern Ireland Departments, particularly in relation to the further development of Integrated Education.

NICIE also wish to ensure that the NI Affairs Committee are aware of the financial situation facing Northern Ireland's education services in particular with regard to Integrated Education and integrated schools and the consequences of budgetary pressures on the delivery of those public services.

We have outlined in the Financial Case below:

## 3. The Financial Case

NICIE has recently received an interim budget allocation of £547,000, a cut of £71k from the previous year from the Department of Education (DE) to carry out the statutory duties to promote, encourage, facilitate and support, Integrated Education. NICIE has relied on this budget to ensure that it can carry out these designated statutory duties. This allocation is similar to that which NICIE received in 2001, 22 years ago.

The functions, duties and demands from DE on NICIE have changed significantly over the last number of years, however, the NICIE budget has not been increased accordingly to reflect these additional ongoing functions, including area planning which are highlighted throughout our consultation document. The new Integrated Education (NI) Act will require significant effort from NICIE in supporting Integrated schools to comply with the law including increased need for staff, leadership and governance development and Teacher Professional Learning. The existing current budget is exceptionally challenging and over the past number of years we have introduced and investigated alternatives to add value to our existing budget and sought every opportunity to increase economies of scale.

These have included moving offices, reducing staff training, accessing funding from the Northern Ireland Office (£435,00 over 2.5 years to 31 March 2025) to meet bespoke, clearly identified Key Performance Indicators additional to delivery of DE's statutory duty to Integrated Education including research and the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs (who have provided funding for a Development Officer to support the promotion of Integrated Education until 1 May 2025), again additional to NICIE's contribution to DE's Strategic priorities. NICIE have also redirected funds to a Panel of Associates with specific skill sets that are required by the Integrated schools and for which NICIE do not have the skills or capacity within the current staff team due to budget constraints.

NICIE's budget represents a small proportion of the overall Education resource budget (.003%) and is responsible for the promotion and support of Integrated Education including 70 Integrated schools throughout Northern Ireland, 38 of which are Grant Maintained Integrated which means that they have to manage their budget as they hold bank accounts and therefore cannot go into deficit.

Additionally, NICIE is always looking at innovative ways to achieve savings and add value.

In reality due to the existing limited budget, we at this stage, find it extremely challenging to meet the demands from Integrated schools who themselves are also under increasing pressure and have to prioritise work on the basis of budget and resources available. A presentation is available from one such school on request showing how it, and many other such schools, are being forced into potential bankruptcy due to the budgetary situation.

NICIE has made numerous representations for an upward review of its existing budget and was dismayed to be advised that a proposed decrease of £71,000 had been proposed reducing our budget from £618,000 to £547,000, a reduction of nearly 12%. An independent organisational review has been conducted by DE which has included reviewing the internal resources and capacity of NICIE in 2014. The capacity and limited resources of NICIE have been reported at every level during recent years at NICIE's Irish Medium Integrated Education (IMIE) meetings, Governance and Accountability meetings and other appropriate forums.

Additionally, this has been highlighted and reported in great detail in NICIE's Corporate Risk Register and at the Audit and Risk Assurance committee.

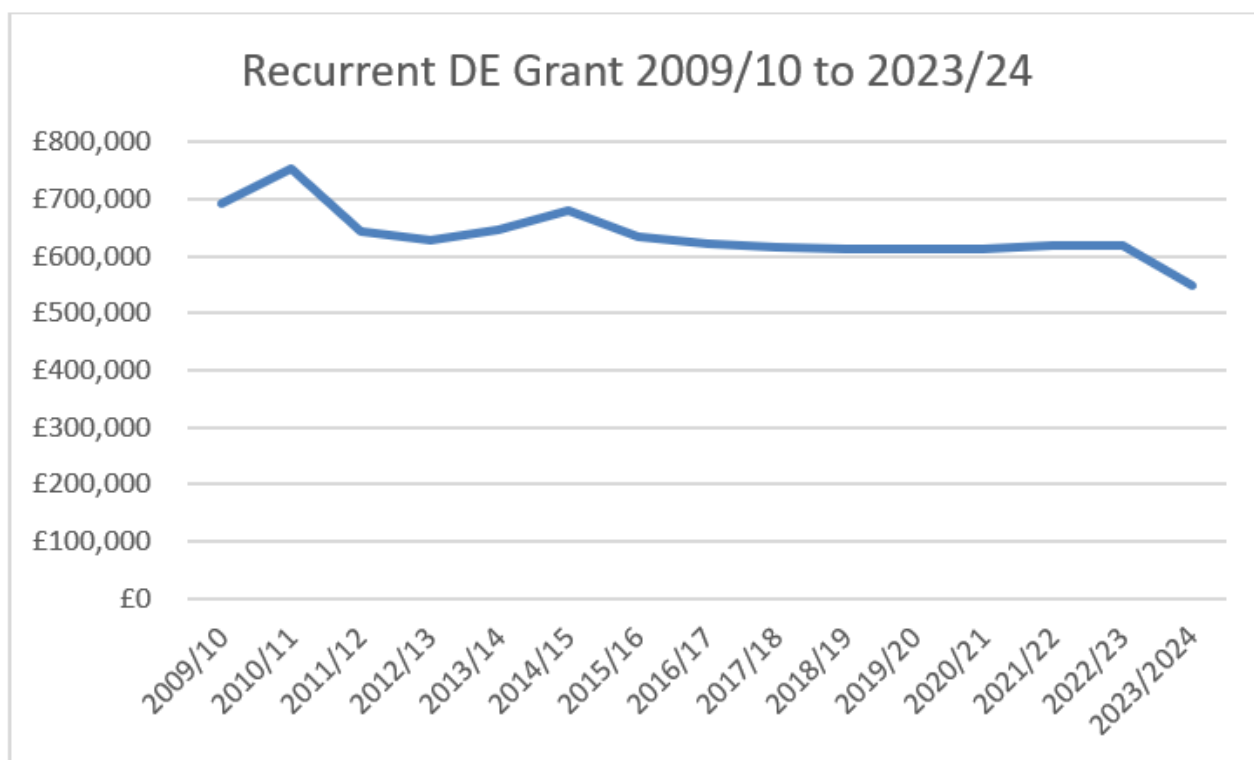
This risk itself regarding available resources and capacity has been increased during the last 12 months as a major concern and risk. This risk will now be subsequently reviewed and raised in accordance with this proposed budget decrease.

While NICIE understands and accepts the Minister's decision to accept front line services in this time of austerity, NICIE believes that the proposed decrease of 12% in monetary terms is unfair and disproportionate. We understand that other NDPBs who deliver different service to NICIE have had similar cuts.

This monetary proposed decrease does not take into account the cost of living and inflationary increases and the agreement of the increased NJC pay scales which are effective from 01/01/2023 and which NICIE are contractually obliged to pay.

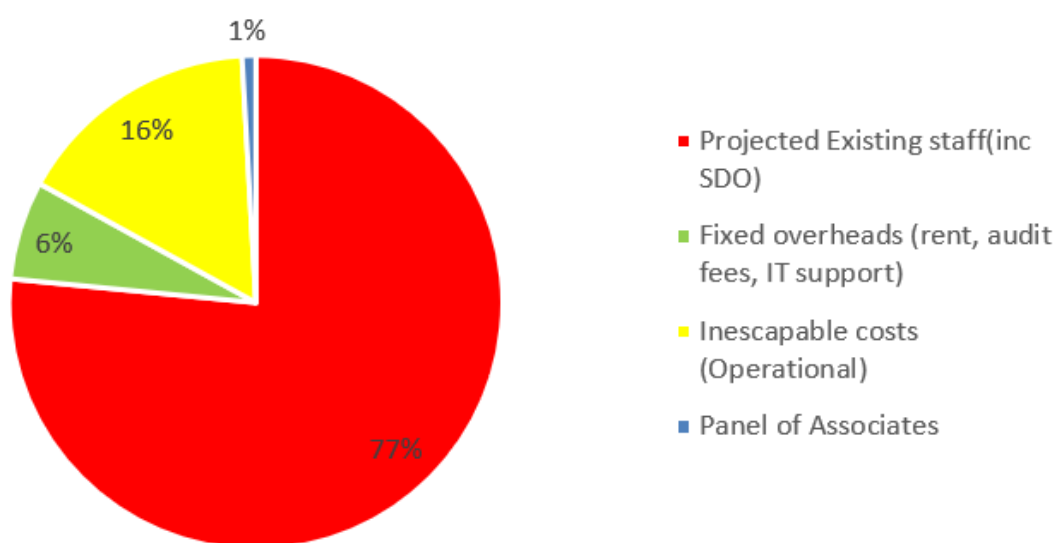
In real terms the overall percentage reduction equates to over 12%.

The chart illustrates the DE recurrent grant over the last three years and the proposed decrease in monetary terms.



As highlighted above NICIE is currently finding the existing budget very difficult and challenging to manage and has already had to implement restrictions on its services. The introduction of the proposed budget cuts would have a major impact on the capacity of NICIE and is reported in detail below. As you will note the major expenditure for NICIE is on staff costs

## Recurrent Budget 22-23

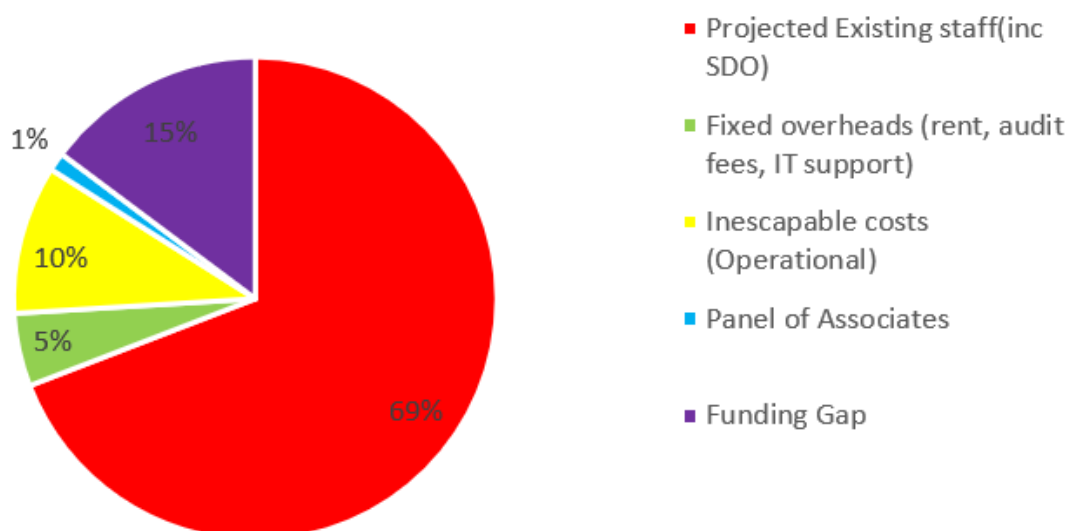


The following table illustrates the gap between DE Draft 2023-2024 resource budget Allocations and Anticipated Requirements at a minimum level.

*Please note these figures are estimates and do not include unexpected increases, additionally the following must be noted:*

- Limited external/ internal training for Integrated schools and staff.
- Limited Panel of Associates budget in 2023/24.
- Limited Subscriptions (cancellations of existing subscriptions).
- Limited external seminars and training for teachers new to integration and other areas such as leadership and governance etc.
- No contingency for additional HR/ repairs/ legal fees.

## Projected Recurrent Grant 23-24



| Actual Details                                            | £                                      |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Opening Proposed Budget 23/24                             | £547,000                               |
| Projected Existing Staff cost 23/24                       | £536,603 (includes SDO to be replaced) |
| Fixed overheads (rent, audit fees, IT support)            | £39,859                                |
| Inescapable costs (postage, light and heat, staff travel) | £81,078                                |
| Panel of Associates                                       | £10,000                                |
| <b>2023/24 Funding GAP</b>                                | <b>£120,540</b>                        |

In the 2022/23, the main costs of NICIE were staffing costs (77%) and it is clear that this is the area that funds will have to be saved. NICIE currently have two vacancies created by two staff resigning, which were unfilled in 2022/23 due to budgetary constraints. We will not be able to fill these two vacancies in 2023/24 if this interim budget allocation is finalised. We will not be able to use the Panel of Associates who have specific, vital skill sets to support the Integrated schools such as experienced former Principals, Independent Assessors for the Excellence in Integrated Education Award (EIEA) and skills in facilitation and Community Relations which are vital to ensuring support for the development of the Integrated Ethos in Integrated schools.

These potential redundancies and/or reduced hours will have a major impact on the level of services that we will have the ability to offer under our existing statutory duty to promote and encourage, facilitate and support Integrated Education.

We anticipate that we will have to make redundancies in both Development and Administrative staff posts going forward as a result of this exceptional budget decrease in 2023/24 in future years, if funding is not increased.

Obviously we will be finalising plans if and once the final funding gap is identified.

No final decision can be made and NICIE cannot start a formal consultation process until the final details are agreed and are based on information that we currently have available; however the impact of not being able to fill vacancies will result in the following risks if implemented:

- Loss of specialised staff resources and skills who have a wealth of experience in promoting and encouraging Integrated Education.
- Reduction in NICIE's ability to deliver on DE's statutory duties and programme for government duties.
- Lack of administrative support to integrated schools.
- Lack of resources to assist with transformation process.
- Severe negative impact on resources and capacity to develop and implement new initiatives.
- Inability to carry out and implement NICIE operational plan and strategy
- Total/Significant restrictions to call on the services of the Panel of Associates on an ad hoc basis who have diverse skills.
- Restricted ability to organise and implement External Leadership, governance and staff development sessions throughout Northern Ireland regarding governance, ethos, and other areas as they arise from direction of DE and The executive.

The proposed reduction in budget would ultimately focus on staff resources and would have a major impact on the ability of NICIE to carry out its duties and functions. Below are highlighted some areas which will be impacted if NICIE's proposed budget cuts are implemented.

#### **4. Transformation.**

Transformation support to schools exploring this status for their school community is a core duty of NICIE and is exceptionally labour intensive from initiation to conclusion.

Any reduction in staff would have a major impact in completing this area of work.

Allocation of Development Officer (DO) time includes preparation and planning and relies on experienced DO being in post and managing the day-to-day running of the project). Any reduction in staff would have a major impact in completing this area of work. NICIE work with schools in partnership with the EA to ensure schools work through the framework for Transformation so that the children and young people get the best Integrated experience possible.

EA and NICIE have collectively identified a concerning deficit in the level of funding that is presently available from DE to support schools through the process of Transformation. The total amount of annual funding offered to schools that have achieved Ministerial approval has remained static at £20k since 2015. This has been the case despite a significant increase in the numbers of schools since 2019 that have been through the Transformation process or are currently progressing a proposal for Integrated status. Over a 5-year period, between 2010 and 2015, two transforming primary schools received funding totalling close to £372k.

This is over 6 times the amount provided to two primary schools in the 5-year period between 2015 and 2020. In addition, the current situation, where schools may not be able

to access DE financial support to conduct the parental ballot required by legislation, presents a further challenge to Boards of Governors seeking to engage parents on the issue of Integrated Education

It is accepted that public sector budgets continue to be under intense strain and that public monies must be clearly focussed and targeted in order to ensure maximum impact. In recognition of this, NICIE and EA are proposing a formula-led approach to the allocation of future funding for Transformation. The rationale for the composition of the formula is based on experience gathered from current and former EA and NICIE officers responsible for supporting transforming schools. The needs assessments of transforming schools, as provided by school principals have also been taken into consideration as well as relevant learning gleaned from initiatives linked to the mainstreaming of shared education.

Further information on this is available on request.

### **5. Grant Maintained Integrated Schools (GMI)**

The process for managing and supporting a new parent group is much more labour intensive than for transformation. The process, over a period of 18 – 24 months requires significant input from the project team (i.e. SDO, DO and as required Associate). Parent groups have none of the structure of an existing school, they have no educational professionals such as a principal, staff or Board of Governors (BoG) – all these have to be created over the course of the project and NICIE is the only organisation to offer a comprehensive support programme that effectively creates a new integrated school from inception to completion.

There are 7 phases to support for GMI projects:

- Phase 1: Establishing a 'parent' group.
- Phase 2: Formation of group.
- Phase 3: Group Development (up to lodgement of development proposal)
- Phase 4: Group Development (up to conditional approval)
- Phase 5: Group Development (conditional to final approval)
- Phase 6: Group Development (final approval to Day One)
- Phase 7: New School (First Year)

While there are certain areas of cross over between both support programmes (e.g. awareness raising/marketing) NICIE staff are much more 'hands on' for a GMI project, for the reasons identified above. In addition there are key areas which are exclusive to GMI projects, for e.g. Site/accommodation search, design of school prospectus, responsibility for admissions criteria, recruitment of staff (principals, teachers, classroom assistants, and secretary), and constitution of BOG. In addition there are a greater number of meetings between steering group and NICIE staff, on average once a fortnight for the entire lifespan of the project.

NICIE represent GMI schools at a range of significantly important forums in NI:

- Area Planning (AP)
- Teachers Negotiating Council Management Side (TNC)
- Oversight Group on the 9 Workstreams from the last teachers' pay deal



- The Education Sector Managing Attendance Forum
- Pensions
- Local Management of Schools (LMS)• Pre School-Education Group (PEG)
- Cross Organisation Groups (COLO)
- Cross Organisation communications group
- Shared Education Communications Group
- School Restart Subgroup
- Performance Review and Staff Development (PRSD)
- Admissions Appeals Panels
- A number of other ad hoc groups

A GMI Consultative Group is in operation and an action plan is in place.

NICIE need to be properly resourced to carry out these crucial advocacy/management roles for Grant Maintained Integrated schools.

## **6. Area Planning**

The area planning process is now the key policy area in which Integrated Education is developing, (new schools/transformations or existing schools). NICIE support at AP forums is essential and specialised knowledge is required to help integrated schools navigate through the development proposal and consultation process. New guidance from DE has increased pressure on schools to produce proposals which adhere to a rigid format, and which require the interpretation of complex data. While controlled and maintained schools have statutory authorities to assist with this, GMI schools rely on the expertise and experience of NICIE staff. Furthermore, there are regular new iterations of area plans being produced at primary and post primary levels and NICIE needs to be able to update its own responses to these iterations when required. There is also a need to monitor and review the sector and identify opportunities where they exist for further growth (in line with Article 64 duty). These tasks are required to be carried out at Senior Development Officer (SDO) level as they relate to strategic direction.

## **7. Support for schools**

Article 66 of the 1989 Order states:

The scheme of management for a Grant-Maintained Integrated school shall require the Board of Governors to use its best endeavours, in exercising its functions under the Education Orders, to ensure that the management, control and ethos of the school are such as are likely to attract to the school reasonable numbers of both Protestant and Roman Catholic pupils and now with the new Act that 1) “Integrated education” means the education together, in an integrated school, of—

- (a) those of different cultures and religious beliefs and of none, including reasonable numbers of both Protestant and Roman Catholic children or young persons;
- (b) those who are experiencing socio-economic deprivation and those who are not; and
- (c) those of different abilities.

(2) An “integrated school” is a school which—

(a) intentionally supports, protects and advances an ethos of diversity, respect and understanding between those of different cultures and religious beliefs and of none, between those of different socio-economic backgrounds and between those of different abilities, and

(b) has acquired—

(i) grant-maintained integrated status, or

(ii) controlled integrated status under the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989.

NICIE support schools in doing this in various ways, the main elements are below:

#### Forums:

The SDO has the overview of all forum/ committee activity. The role of NICIE in all these cases is to encourage, facilitate, organise, update on current educational thinking and consultations. Where speakers or events need to be arranged out of these meetings, NICIE takes on that function.

#### **APTIS:**

The forum for Principals in integrated schools. An Association which is made up of all principals in Integrated schools. Activities include conferences sharing good practice in integration; responding to consultations; giving voice to the view of principals.

#### **Vice Principals Forum:**

This is a forum for VPs in integrated schools to come together and share good practice. They explore best practice and how this fits into the integrated ethos

#### **Teacher’s Committee:**

This is a committee which allows teachers, who have a responsibility for the integrated ethos in their school, to explore those elements of school life which are unique to IE

#### **Special Education Coordinators (SENCo) Committee**

This is a committee which allows teachers, who have a responsibility for the Special Educational needs in their school, to explore those elements of school life which are unique to IE

#### **Early Years Committee**

This is a committee which allows teachers, who have a responsibility for early years in their school, to explore those elements of school life which are unique to IE

#### **Excellence in Integrated Education Award EIEA**

The EIEA is a self-evaluating process for integrated schools to look at the good practice of integration in their schools and to identify the gaps. Once a school completes this, they build in an action plan to the School Development Plan to address the gaps. Once they feel they have identified and addressed these areas they apply for assessment which has a 5-year lifespan. This is an important process for schools as it allows them to explore what it is that makes them truly integrated and how this impacts on school life.

## 8. Governance

NICIE supports and advises schools in areas of governance. Due to the structure of GMI Boards of Governors and their relation to the Limited Company of the school, NICIE helps schools in understanding their role and signposting them to areas of best advice.

## 9. Leadership, Governance, Staff Development and Teacher Professional Learning Support

NICIE organises and facilitates development sessions in schools that compliments the ethos. This gives schools the time and space to revisit their ethos and see how they can make it more explicit and part of the school life. It is difficult to put a price on this as some schools will require one session with staff, whilst other schools will want to have training for all constituencies and have a specific goal in mind.

## 10. Summary

The above illustrations are only examples of some key pieces of work that are carried out on an annual basis; they do not include the operational duties of the Development and Administrative/ Finance team.

NICIE staff have remained loyal to the promotion and support of Integrated Education with limited funds and capacity. However this has been placing an ever-increasing demand on the existing workload over the past number of years. It is patently obvious that any proposed decrease will have a major detrimental effect on the ability of staff to carry out these duties.

In summary NICIE is dependent on the limited and modest budget it receives from DE to carry out its statutory duty.

Any reductions to the NICIE budget would undoubtedly result ultimately in staff redundancies in the longer term and reduced services. This is summarised in the impact matrix. Please note that this is for illustrative purposes as we cannot make any final proposals until the final budget is agreed and staff and Board of Directors have been consulted.

| <b>Impact Matrix<br/>Category</b> |
|-----------------------------------|
| Accounting Officer /CEO           |
| Finance Officer                   |
| Senior Development Officer 1      |
| Senior Development Officer 2      |
| Senior Development Officer 3      |

|                                          |
|------------------------------------------|
| Development Officer 1                    |
| Development Officer 2                    |
| Development Officer 3                    |
| Executive Assistant                      |
| Office Manager                           |
| Admin 1                                  |
| Admin 2                                  |
| Panel of Associates                      |
| Fixed Overheads                          |
| Inescapable costs                        |
| Internal /external Training              |
| School Support Services and Seminars     |
| Contingency Reserve (Legal Fees/HR etc.) |
| <b>KEY</b>                               |
| Green - Protected Resources/Services     |
| Amber- Restricted resources/Services     |
| Red - No Resources/Services              |
|                                          |

NICIE as per the terms of its Management Statement and Financial Memorandum do not have any reserves or contingencies to pay their staff redundancies. As stated above many staff have long years of service and this must be reflected in redundancy terms. NICIE therefore would be seeking these funds from Central Government.

We believe these proposed cuts are not proportionate and are unfair and would have a detrimental impact on NICIE’s ability to successfully carry out its statutory and core duty to support, encourage, facilitate and promote Integrated Education due to lack of staff capacity and resources.

*April 2023*