

Yellow Flag Submission to Ireland's Education for Sustainable Development Strategy to 2030

June 2021

Among the key recommendations outlined by the Anti-Racism Committee in the Interim Report, published in April 2021, was the prioritisation of education in the fight against racism. They wrote: *“education, while it cannot on its own eliminate racism, is crucial for addressing it, as well as being a key site for its reflection and reinforcement”*.¹

As a vehicle for life-long learning, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) has the power to equip our children and young people with the language and tools to navigate the diversity of the world, and to contribute towards a culturally competent society. Harnessing the principles of ESD to address issues of anti-racism, interculturalism and social justice in our schools, is pivotal in the creation of an inclusive, tolerant society.

Since 2009, the Yellow Flag Programme has been leveraging a practical 8-step framework to guide schools in becoming more inclusive of all cultures, ethnicities and religions, and to challenge racism. Informed by insights derived from working with over **93 schools, 37,000 students and 2,800 teachers**, the Yellow Flag Programme urges the Department of Education to include the following actions in the forthcoming Strategy on ESD, under the identified key priority areas.

Recommended Actions

- 1.1 Ensure Policy Alignment across Government Strategies
- 2.1 Introduce a Mandatory Anti-Racism Policy for Schools
- 2.2 Implement a Whole-school approach to Building Inclusive School Communities
- 2.3 Embed Intercultural Education in the Primary and Post Primary Curriculum
- 3.1 Further Develop Initial Teacher Training (ITE) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
- 3.2 Diversify the Teaching Force
- 4.1 Mandate a Diversity Committee in every School
- 5.1 Foster Cooperation between Civil Society, Community Groups, and Learning Institutions
- 5.2 Fund scalable, Community-led Frameworks for Implementation
- 5.3 Include the Yellow Flag Programme in Social Inclusion/Equality Policy Plans of Local Authorities

¹ Interim Report to the Minister of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, by the Anti-Racism Committee. 30 November 2020.

Priority Area 1: Policy

1.1 Ensure Policy Alignment across Government Strategies

Pursue an intersectional approach to initiatives that seek to foster intercultural competence and improve educational outcomes for marginalised groups, including access, participation, retention, personal development and achieving education credentials. To optimise the implementation of policies, and avoid siloed initiatives that ultimately aim to deliver the same impact, the State must recognise the alignment between the education commitments outlined in the *National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy* (NTRIS) and the *Migrant Integration Strategy* (MIS), and those likely to be designed under the second strategy on ESD and the expected *National Action Plan Against Racism* (NAPAR).

In delivering the roll-out and quality assurance of those policies on the ground, the Yellow Flag Programme proposes the engagement of implementing partners that take a whole-institution approach to addressing commitments across all complementary strategies.

Systems for monitoring, implementation and accountability should be introduced across all related strategies, with **robust oversight and KPIs**, to measure the effectiveness of actions under the new strategy, and to track the alignment between ESD and other policy areas.

Priority Area 2: Education and Training - Transforming Learning Environments

2.1 Introduce a Mandatory Anti-Racism Policy for Schools

In 2019, 53% of pupils who took part in pre-entry Yellow Flag Programme research, reported they had witnessed racist comments or behaviours towards others in their schools, and the National Traveller Community Survey 2017 found that 4 out of 10 Travellers said they were bullied in school.²

To educate on the principles of tolerance and equality, the new ESD strategy must introduce the **mandatory adoption and implementation of an anti-racism policy in every school**, independent of the anti-bullying policy, that defines racism, and outlines clear steps to recognise, prevent, and where necessary, manage incidents of racism within the school community and institution.

The *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* (2013) define racism in Irish education as a phenomenon that occurs between children and young people, therefore, allocating responsibility solely to the students. The importance of the concept of institutional racism, as defined by the Anti-Racism Committee in the Interim Report, lies in its rejection of the reduction of racism to the

² Traveller Community National Survey, 2017, John O'Mahony, Behaviour and Attitudes.

behaviour of individual students, and its focus instead on policies and procedures that may unintentionally exclude students of cultural, religious and ethnic minority groups.

A successful framework for direct comparison is the obligatory anti-bullying policy associated with the aforementioned *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*, and now present in all schools across the country.

2.2 Implement a Whole-School Approach to Building Inclusive School Communities

As a site of cultural and socio-political learning, the experience of a young person in school will inevitably shape how they see and interact with the world into the future. Building a school community that is inclusive of all ethnicities, cultures and religions, allows a student to positively develop a sense of identity, and learn to respect and value that of others.

Adopting a whole-school approach goes beyond teaching about equality and anti-racism as a lesson in the classroom, to embedding it in daily school life. It also involves the interrogation of school processes and procedures, to ensure that the institution is not (often unintentionally) excluding a particular group, or groups, through its governance practice.

Modelled on the framework of School Self-Evaluation (SSE), the Department of Education must ensure that all **primary and post-primary schools create a whole-school approach for advancing equality and ensuring inclusion**. Such an approach should mandate the involvement of all school stakeholders, but most significantly, parents/guardians. As a best practice, whole-school framework, 50% of participating schools engaged parents of minority ethnic groups in the Yellow Flag Programme, who cited feelings of empowerment, belonging and pride as a direct result.

2.3 Embed Intercultural Education in the Primary and Post Primary Curriculum

While the first Strategy on ESD emphasised global citizenship and environmental sustainability throughout the Primary and Post Primary curricula, the Yellow Flag Programme calls for the second strategy to introduce a **mandatory form of 'intercultural education' to the curriculum**, that combines learning from multicultural and anti-racist education approaches, as per NCCA guidelines. This should incorporate the inclusion of Traveller history and culture across curriculum learning, so that it holds equal value to other aspects of Irish history and culture.

The success of this action will hinge on the implementation of mandatory anti-racism and intercultural awareness ITE and CPD for teaching staff (outlined under Priority Area 3 below), so that teachers are adequately equipped to deliver on all aspects related to Intercultural Education, and most notably, Traveller history and culture, and curriculum features related to Travellers.

This action will necessitate the creation of learning resources that introduce concepts of social justice, and which visually reflect the diversity of Irish society, so that an inclusive learning environment for ESD is created.

Priority Area 3: Educators

3.1 Further Develop Initial Teacher Training (ITE) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

A review of the ITE programme guidelines in November 2020, conducted under *NTRIS*, Actions 19-21, and resulting in the *Céim - Standards for ITE*, was intended to increase the prominence of diversity and interculturalism in teacher education. However, the new guidelines focus primarily on diversity of learning ability, and do not explicitly address, or even name, racism. If racism is a learnt behaviour, it is vital that those being trained to deliver education are given the opportunity to **address unconscious bias, and are equipped with the practical skills to manage interculturalism and racism in the classroom.**

Similarly, acknowledging that ESD is a mindset, and a process of life-long learning, teachers must be provided with opportunities for CPD in the areas of anti-racism and interculturalism.

Upon entering the Programme, Yellow Flag schools undertake an assessment of teacher proficiency in equality, and over 90% of teachers reported not having received any form of previous equality training. Post the Yellow Flag Programme Intercultural Awareness CPD, schools reported that:

- 70% of staff had a better understanding of racism;
- 72% of staff had a better understanding of cultural diversity; and
- 63% of staff had the opportunity to discuss and raise relevant issues in the school.

Opportunities for CPD do not only proactively encourage school staff to interrogate their own behaviour and mindset towards children from minority ethnic groups. They also equip teachers with the skills to teach students about key ESD issues, such as social justice, equity and racism, and embed intercultural education into their daily teaching practice, so that students become global citizens.

3.2 Diversify the Teaching Force

The Yellow Flag Programme underlines the findings and recommendations made by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission to the UN CERD, where the issue of racism within the teaching profession was highlighted: *“While the crucial role of teachers in challenging such bullying was referenced, there were also calls for the issue of racism within the teaching profession to be addressed.”*³

³ IHREC (2019) Ireland and the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2019/11/IHREC_CERD_UN_Submission_Oct_19.pdf

Over 99% of entrants to primary teacher education in 2018 identified as ‘White Irish Settled’ and only 2% of secondary school teachers come from minority ethnic backgrounds⁴. The State must **promote affirmative action to support ethnic minority students, including Travellers**, to become involved in the teaching profession. This is essential in influencing the culture and ethos of schools, and bringing the message of ESD to life.

Priority Area 4: Youth

4.1 Mandate a Diversity Committee in Every School

Building on action 25 of the first strategy on ESD, that encouraged schools to establish a student council, the Yellow Flag Programme calls for the **mandatory establishment of a Diversity Committee** in every school.

As a key component of the Yellow Flag Programme, the Diversity Committee is made up primarily of students, but also teachers, parents and community members, and tasked with oversight and progress on issues pertaining to inclusion and equality in the school community. It creates a safe space for minority ethnic students, including Travellers, to discuss their experiences in school, and to have a voice in their school community. This results in increased confidence and wellbeing among children from minority ethnic groups, who feel heard, recognised and valued for their contribution to school life, and harnesses youth vision to progress ESD in schools.

Priority Area 5: Communities

5.1 Foster Cooperation between Civil Society, Community Groups, and Learning Institutions

The strategy must **introduce mandatory requirements for schools to engage with community organisations outside of their direct learning environment**, so that ESD is contextualised within real life experiences and local social dynamics. A school community does not exist in a vacuum, and to address social justice and anti-racism without engaging the wider community is a missed opportunity for ESD learning. This will require additional resourcing, such as the introduction of the Equality and Diversity Officer, outlined above.

The Yellow Flag Programme brings together teachers, with ethnic minority parents and community projects, including Traveller and Roma, and local government fora, such the Traveller Interagency Group (compiled itself of diverse child and youth services, e.g. Tusla), and the Migration Integration Forum, to foster a whole-community approach to anti-racism and equity work. In 2019, 79% of Yellow Flag schools

⁴ IHREC (2019) Ireland and the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2019/11/IHREC_CERD_UN_Submission_Oct_19.pdf

had engaged with local Traveller projects, and 69% had secured participation of black and minority ethnic parents in school life.

5.2 Funding Scalable, Community-Led Frameworks for Implementation

It is widely acknowledged that inclusion and integration initiatives are most effective when delivered at the local level, as has been the approach adopted in various government strategies, including the Migrant Integration Strategy, which leverages the local government structures and fora.

The State must ensure that **community-led, solution-focussed frameworks, such as the Yellow Flag Programme, are funded within national budgetary decisions, to ensure the meaningful implementation of ESD commitments across school institutions, and the sustainability of best-practice programmes.**

5.3 Include the Yellow Flag Programme in Social Inclusion/Equality Policy Plans of Local Authorities

The Social Inclusion Units of several Local Authorities across the country have included the Yellow Flag Programme in policy and budgetary planning, to ensure the delivery of ESD and interculturalism in local schools. **This has proven to be a highly effective model to both address local government commitments, and support local schools.**