

# Integrated AlumNI Annual Report

## 1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023

Board of Trustees 1 April 2022-31 March 2023:

Matthew O'Neill (Chair)  
Nicole McNeilly (Secretary)  
Michael Lynch (Treasurer and Chair Emeritus)  
Tara Curran  
Nicole McNeilly  
Lise McCaffery  
Shawn Clarke  
Sarah Christie  
Rosie Irvine  
Patrick Handley

## Overview:

Integrated AlumNI is a registered charity (NIC106805), forming a network of past students, ambassadors and campaigners of Integrated Education in Northern Ireland. We campaign and lobby for the further provision of Integrated Education in Northern Ireland and have networks established in various locations in the UK, Ireland and overseas. We support the work of the Integrated Education Fund (IEF) and the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE).

## Our message

The first integrated school, Lagan College, opened its doors in 1981 with 14 Catholic pupils and 14 Protestant pupils. Now, with 69 integrated schools in Northern Ireland, these schools educate those of all faiths and none, and from all traditions, together. However, being integrated is much more than the makeup of the pupil population. It's an ethos and commitment, it's a curricular approach, and it's inclusive in the make-up of teachers and the Board of Governors. The Council for Integrated Education supports the planning.

Integrated education, whilst being community-driven, has also been a recommendation of multiple reports and publications:

- 1998 Belfast / Good Friday Agreement;
- 2005 (Westminster) Northern Ireland Affairs Committee examining Hate Crime
- 2009 Consultative Group on the Past;
- 2020 New Decade New Approach Agreement
- 2020 Review of Hate Crime Legislation
- 2021 Executive Action Plan for Tackling Paramilitary Activity.

The Integrated Education Bill passed by the Northern Ireland assembly in March 2022 will create a clear definition of Integrated Education, establish a strategy to help develop Integrated Education and put parental choice at the forefront when planning to open new schools. It places greater accountability on the Department of Education to do all these things. Whilst the Integrated AlumNI celebrated the success of the Bill, it should be noted that many of the steps forward were already part of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and yet never delivered. There is a sense of disappointment and frustration amongst past pupils of integrated schools that we have needed to legislate for the education changes that Northern Ireland promised 24 years ago.

## Our Beneficiaries

During the 2022–2023 period, Integrated AlumNI continued to serve a growing and diverse network of beneficiaries, including past pupils of integrated schools, current students, parents, educators, and supporters of the wider movement. Our members span different regions, life stages, and political perspectives — all united by a commitment to inclusive, shared education. We also welcomed individuals who did not attend integrated schools themselves but support our mission of reconciliation and equality. As alumni of Northern Ireland's integrated sector, our lived experience contributes meaningfully to public understanding, sector development, and the long-term goal of a more cohesive society.

## Our Services

In 2022–2023, Integrated AlumNI provided opportunities for alumni to reconnect, contribute to the movement, and engage in advocacy, mentoring, and community building. Our services included regular member communications, regional events, school engagement, and contributions to policy conversations related to the Integrated Education Act. We also supported members' participation in sector-wide campaigns and collaborated with partners, including NICIE and the IEF, to amplify alumni voices. A commitment to accessibility, inclusion, and volunteer-led leadership across our network underpinned our work.

# A Note on 25 Years Since the Good Friday Agreement

April 2023 marked 25 years since the signing of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, a landmark in Northern Ireland's journey toward peace. The Agreement recognised the need to end violence and build a society grounded in mutual respect, equality, and human rights, where old divisions no longer defined future generations.

A quarter-century on, the Agreement's legacy is visible in our political structures and civic life. Yet the deeper work of reconciliation, the social and relational healing it envisioned, remains ongoing. Nowhere is that more evident than in our education system.

Today, over 90% of children in Northern Ireland still attend schools separated mainly along religious lines. While peace has held, separation in education continues to reinforce social distance, misunderstanding and inequality. Integrated Education offers a clear, practical, and hopeful alternative that speaks directly to the reconciliation commitments of 1998.

Integrated schools create shared spaces where young people learn from and about one another. They help foster friendships across differences, build empathy, and develop inclusive values that extend well beyond the classroom. Crucially, the integrated schools model the kind of society the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement aspired to: one where children are not asked to inherit division but given the tools to overcome it.

As alumni of integrated schools, we at Integrated AlumNI carry the lived experience of that alternative. We know firsthand the difference it makes to grow up in an environment that prioritises inclusion, questions stereotypes, and makes space for complexity. Our members come from across the political spectrum, from diverse cultural, racial and religious backgrounds, and are unified by a shared experience of what education can be when it brings people together rather than keeps them apart.

We believe the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement was not just a political compromise but a moral call to build a more equal, connected society. Integrated Education remains one of the most effective and underused vehicles for delivering on that call. As we reflect on 25 years of peace, we remain committed to ensuring the next 25 years are defined by connection, understanding, and renewed investment in our young people.

## Chair Transition

In April 2022, Michael Lynch stepped down as Chair of Integrated AlumNI after several years of committed service. His leadership was instrumental during a critical period in the movement for Integrated Education, particularly throughout the passage and implementation of the Integrated

Education Act. We thank Michael for his stewardship, vision, and enduring contribution to the growth of the organisation and the wider sector.

Following Michael's departure, Dr. Matt O'Neill was appointed Chair. Matt brings a deep personal and professional commitment to Integrated Education and experience in civic leadership and youth engagement. He focuses on building upon the charity's strong foundations, strengthening our strategic mission, and expanding our reach across Northern Ireland and beyond.

Under his leadership, the Board has renewed its focus on youth voice, regional engagement, and public advocacy, continuing to ensure that the lived experience of integrated school alumni informs and inspires the future of education in Northern Ireland.

## Our activities

Our key activities between April 2022 and March 2023:

**International Advocacy:** Our Chair of Trustees, Michael Lynch represented Integrated AlumNI at the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs, providing oral evidence on the role of young people in fostering peace in Northern Ireland (April 2022).

**Media Recognition:** Board member Tara Curran was featured in the BBC's centenary celebrations, highlighting the significance of Integrated Education (May 2022).

**Legislative Milestones:** Hosted a celebration event at Stormont Assembly Buildings to mark the passing of the Integrated Education Act 2022, with over 50 attendees (June 2022).

**Thought Leadership:** Our Chair facilitated sessions at the Wilton Park conference on "A More Confident and Inclusive Northern Ireland" (June 2022).

**Westminster Engagement:** Featured in a panel discussion on the importance of Integrated Education, sponsored by MP Tonia Antoniazzi (June 2022).

**Educational Outreach:** Attended the APTIS (Association of Principals and Teachers in Integrated Schools) conference to advocate for the Role of AlumNI in supporting integrated education (October 2022).

**Commemorating Contributions:** Members attended the House of Lords celebration, recognising the passage of the Integrated Education

Act and honour the late Baroness May Blood's legacy (November 2022).

Supporting Sector Partners: Collaborated with the Integrated Education Fund (IEF), contributing to a panel discussion on Integrated Education, featuring Shelagh Fogarty, Father Brian D'Arcy, and Dr. Anne Murray, with support from Irish Ambassador Martin Fraser (February 2023).

Political Advocacy: Engaged in party conferences to promote key messages about Integrated Education (February 2023).

Public Engagement & Academic Discourse: Promoted our work at various events, including the book launch of *Calming Conflict: Northern Ireland, Metaphor, and Migration* at PRONI (March 2023).

## Risk of harm and private benefit:

The charity trustees confirm that this purpose does not lead to any harm. There is no private benefit flowing from this purpose.

## Our obligations

We are pleased to submit our annual report from April 2022 to March 2023.  
Financial position

Our charity remains in a strong financial position at the end of the financial year. The initial grant received from our funders has extended beyond its original timeline, with an agreement in place with Integrated Education to carry this forward into the next financial year. This extension is largely due to reduced expenditure resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. While our financial standing is stable, we will seek additional funding opportunities in the next financial year to ensure long-term sustainability. A copy of our financial reports is included with this annual report.

At the end of the financial year, the charity did not hold any materially deficit funds.

The charity trustees confirm they have complied with their duty to have due regard to the Commission's statutory public benefit guidance.

Signed: 

Dated: 22/05/25

Chair of the Board of Trustees, Integrated AlumNI