



**Joint Committee on Education &  
Science**

**Teaching History in Areas of Recent  
Conflict: The Irish Context**

**July 2008**

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The Irish Context**

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**Executive Summary:** *History is like a Knife – It can Kill or Cut Meat*  
(Marc Bloch)

Throughout the world there are changing dynamics with migration, emigration and immigration. This challenges our sense of identity as nations. There are religious or territorial disputes that contribute to long standing conflicts in a number of specific countries also. To assist in minimising the impact of these factors into the future and to maximise the potential for peace, there are major roles for everyone be they politicians, community groups, educationalists or individual students. There are lessons to learn and lessons to exchange. The fundamental message at the core of that education and community work is the need to develop a sense of understanding of oneself which will assist, through the development of self-confidence, having a respect for difference. This must be supported by politicians and their political policies given that it was underscored in the Council of Ministers Recommendation back in 1996 [Appendix 1].

Ireland is an island evolving out of historical conflict. There is a new dynamic due to the Peace Process but also in the ethnic diversity of the communities that now make up the island. As political resolutions bed down we still see that there is a distance to go in relation to overcoming bigotry and sectarianism. Many people in the Republic point the finger to the six counties when those issues are mentioned. However, our understanding of those whom we share the island with, and our collective place in the history of Europe and the World, is not always as good as we would like to think. Identity and tolerance are issues for all the people of the island and particularly those upcoming generations that are currently in the school system, if peace is to reign.

History offers a key subject that, if resourced and supported, can start to address this challenge of “who we are”, and indeed who “the others” are. Indeed the definition of what is History is a study in itself but the consensus would appear to be that the 30 year rule ensures that the raw emotion of some events can be militated against with the passage of time. With that in mind, through looking to our collective pasts we can examine how that past has influenced what we have become. It can also help us appreciate our interdependence. In many respects there has been an avoidance of dealing with Irish history to date and it can be argued that this “Irish solution to an Irish problem” is not necessarily healthy.

Ignoring the past, or focusing on partisan versions of it, is equally dangerous as can be seen in many conflict zones around the world. Therefore the concept of multi-perspectivity has gained credence as we struggle to strike the balance between the past that we cannot change; the

present that we exist in and the future we wish to see for ourselves and others.

If given the opportunity, students can gain respect for difference through seeing events from more than one perspective. They can be equipped with new analytical skills, if exposed to more than one source and to a variety of historically significant events. There must be a conscious decision to pursue that agenda however, and the lead must be seen to come from political policies and from willing teachers. To put oneself in another's shoes is not to "sell out" ones own beliefs; rewrite history or belittle the traumas experienced by any one community. This is a fundamental blockage that some people have presented with through the course of the investigation of this Report and is a reflection of the need for Multi-perspectivity to be spoken about and this Report to be both written but also acted upon.

Modern Irish history did not take place in a vacuum and therefore it must be placed in the wider context, so that the identity issues of here, and now, relate to the bigger picture outside Ireland. This approach has the potential to open upcoming generations to see events from another persons perspective and in so doing begin to chip away at the remaining bigotry and sectarianism. Being confident about ones own identity and broadening that from the introspection which is the most comfortable location for teacher and student alike, is a challenge worth taking up for a number of reasons.

Learning through interactive teaching methods that espouse multi-perspectives, helps develop critical thinking skills. Making Peace with the Past (Healing Through Remembering, Oct. 2006) states: "*...it is precisely the capacity to distinguish between the truth and the lies of the past that is required to build the trust required for a stable political future*" (p.7). The student cohort emerges from the education system with independent, creative and inquiring minds which is an important added by-product they learn from "examining the evidence". The ability to analyse sensitive issues is a core future need for Employers in many fields. Thus it is a "win/win" situation for politician and general public alike, should it be embraced.

In the context of the new curriculum changes, driven by the new political climate and, given the lack of research that exists in relation to why modern Irish history is deemed unpopular by the Departmental statistics, it is time to ask some questions of those who have the answers. This report examines the approach and attitude of Irish history teachers to

teaching modern Irish history in the classroom and the support that they are receiving.

A survey was conducted amongst all second-level history teachers in Ireland. Ninety-five were returned completed. The questions related to whether teachers teach modern (from 1960 on) Irish history; if they feel well resourced to teach modern Irish history; if there is an apathy to modern Irish history; whether history should be taught purely as an exam subject; the role of civics and politics in modern Irish history teaching and whether or not the current assessment reflects the aims of the curriculum.

This report reflects the information received and while not all forms were returned, all data to date has been consistent in its findings. It gives a snapshot in relation to what is going on in the history classroom particularly in the Republic but relates this to research already carried out in the North. It also indicates that there is change occurring across the island of Ireland that is welcomed by teachers and more change is sought. It encompasses some responses to the recent in-service activity that was carried out and evaluated by the Department in the Republic and indicates new efforts being made to work on common themes across the island of Ireland and the UK, which also teaches Irish History modules.

Fundamentally all sectors see modern Irish history as an important subject in the context of our new political dispensation but also as a subject for personal skill development too. The changes being made to the Leaving Certificate have been warmly embraced but the recommendations at the end of this report need to be taken into consideration by those with the power to change things further.

## **And The Survey Says:**

**1.1 Background:** *“If we are to have real peace in the world we will have to begin with the children”* Mahatma Gandhi.

This report will feed into a Report for the Council of Europe - titled *“Teaching History in areas of recent conflict.”* The full report seeks to explore the use of history teaching in supporting the development of peace, by promoting respect for difference, through gaining critical thinking skills. To get students to see sensitive issues with a broader, more inquiring mind, it looks to the use of multi-perspective methods of teaching history, as the mechanism to drive that creative thinking, in areas that have experienced recent conflict. The particular countries which the bigger report focuses on are the North of Ireland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus and the South Caucasus region but there is a resonance for many countries that are struggling with the concept of citizenship now with migrations; immigration and the globalisation of the world. Ireland is one such country.

To maximise the opportunities of the new peace process on the island of Ireland it is important, as part of the overall report, to research the current history curriculum in the Republic of Ireland and in the North of Ireland. Too often reports rely on statistics gained from sources other than those people at the core of the issue. In this instance, alongside gaining a sense from the Departmental personnel, there is an emphasis specifically on the views of those who teach history in Second level schools in the Republic of Ireland.

The senior cycle for the Leaving Certificate in history has been under review and a new programme is set to roll out throughout the country for 2009-2011 [Appendix 2]. This new curriculum will make it compulsory for students to study the history of the *North of Ireland*. This research project therefore will explore the findings of the research based on the history teacher’s opinions on the current history curriculum in Ireland and will compile and analyse this data – lessons from which will be used in the overall report for the Council of Europe.

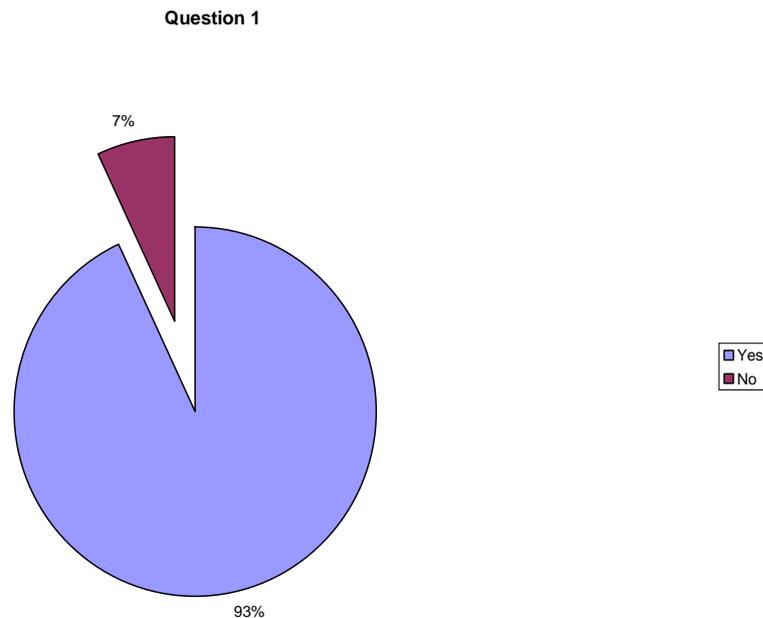
### **1.2 Objectives**

It is essential to gain the view of those who teach history in Ireland in order to understand the challenges that the curriculum in Ireland faces. It is also important to promote the value of history teaching at a time when identity and defining “who we are” is an international issue for many nations, but even more pronounced where there is a legacy of conflict.

### 1.3 Findings

The survey was conducted by mail in March and the research for this report began in January 2008. The following are the findings on a question, by question basis. The survey, which was sent to history teachers in secondary schools in Ireland, asked six questions. The survey itself is found in Appendix 3.

#### Question 1: Have you taught modern Irish History (from 1960 on)?



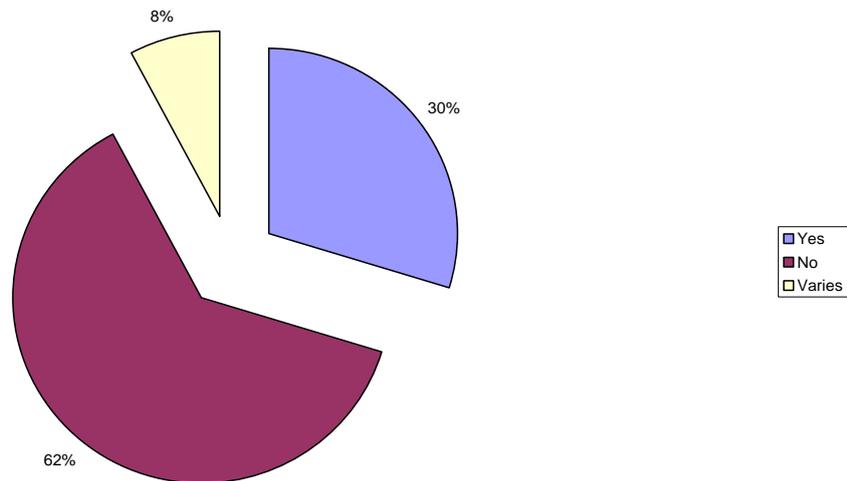
The majority of teachers, 93% have taught some aspect of modern Irish history. Although significantly, the majority of those who have taught modern Irish history stated that they only taught it at Junior Certificate Level, and only up until 1966. Most teachers however commented that the new Leaving Certificate curriculum history makes teaching modern Irish history, including Northern Irish history obligatory. The implication is they will do it now because they have to.

#### Question 1 (b) Do students react more positively to modern Irish history than to other sections of history?

62% said that students did not react positively to modern Irish history and the main reasons for this was deemed to be that students find World Wars and European history more interesting than Irish history which is considered boring as it becomes bogged down with politics and the “many changes of government since its foundation”.

30% said that students reacted positively to modern Irish history as students find it more relevant to themselves as, particularly in the senior cycle they hear about it both at home and on the television. 8% said that it varies in the classroom.

Do Students react more positively to modern Irish history than to other sections of history?



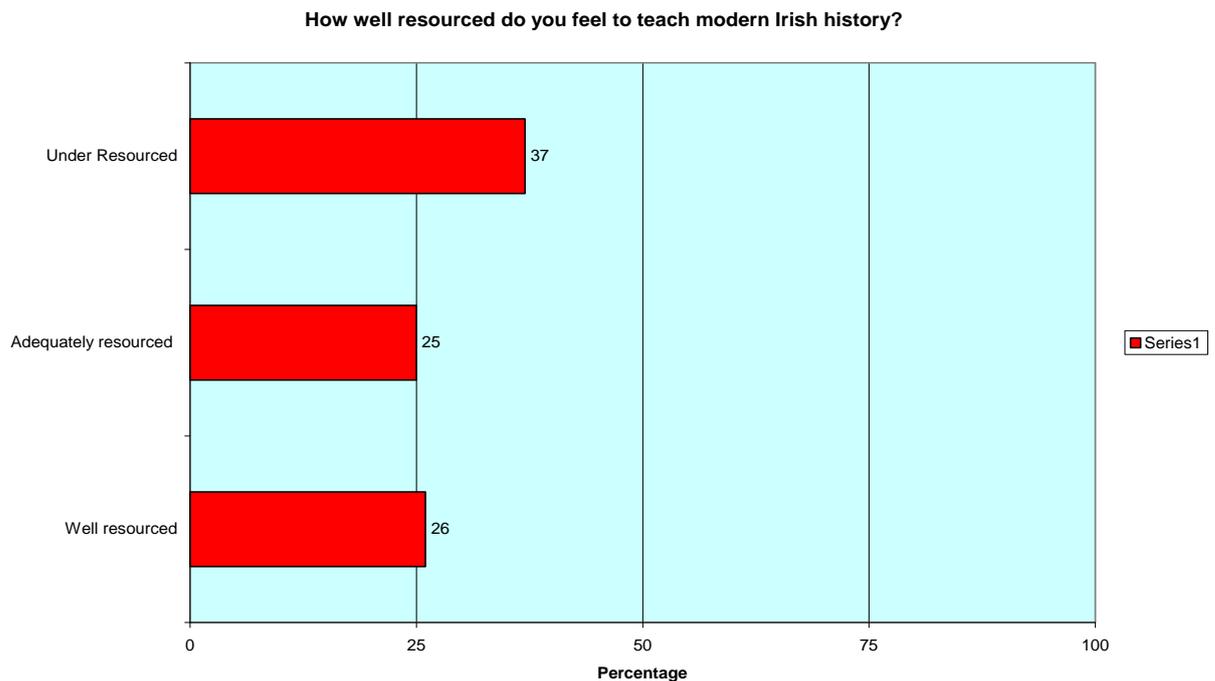
### My Commentary:

These answers are important as it points to teachers feeling that only one third of students currently find modern Irish History relevant to them. Ireland “fighting the Empire” in 1916 was what other countries were doing in 1914-18, and yet, it would seem students do not see that link and prefer “other peoples battles”. History should not be solely introspective. It should show each nation in the context of Europe and even the world. In these answers there is a gap between the issue of relevance and Ireland’s place in the “bigger picture” which needs to be bridged.

History must be shown to have relevance for the student and part of this involves moving History beyond politics into the other elements of “people” – culture; economics; social issues and so forth. If subjects engage their interest and they are given tools that develop skills, students can analyse the information that they then receive from multiple sources – be that at school or outside the school environment. In this way the relevance of the past to the present is able to be presented. There was a drop of 0.9% in students taking Leaving, and 1% taking Junior Certificate History between 2003 and 2004, and while it was the 9<sup>th</sup> most popular subject, relevance is key to student subject choice.

**Question 1(c): If you answered yes to Q1, do you feel well supported by the resources to teach modern Irish history?**

There were very mixed feelings on the question of the level of resources available to teach modern Irish history. Over a third of those who taught it felt under-resourced. Some teachers add their own resources to those that are provided because of their own interest in history. A quarter of respondents said that they felt adequately resourced to teach modern Irish history, while just over a quarter said that they felt well resourced. A particular problem identified, however, was for those teachers who teach in Irish Language Secondary schools.



**My Commentary:**

The availability of resources are essential to the teaching of any subject and the wider the variety of source, the more interesting the learning experience will be for both teacher and student. It would be felt that the recent in-service has been a particularly effective method of supporting the resourcing of the teachers. The newer media of film and internet are being sought out and archival material (from national broadcasters) is one example of potential sources for schools that has been identified by some teachers in their response to this questionnaire. There is, however, an issue internationally of supplying those sources and resources in the languages of the minorities, who equally want access to information.

**Question 1(c): If you answered no to question 1(a) could you outline the main reasons why you have avoided teaching modern Irish history from 1960's on?**

7% of teachers stated that they do not teach any modern Irish history due to the lack of resources; the fact that it is not on the Junior Certificate curriculum in detail and is only worth ten out of 180 marks. They feel that there is no significance given to events given the manner of the syllabus and this is a huge problem.

It is felt that Northern Ireland is still a very sensitive and delicate issue. Teaching modern Irish history, these teachers feel, can raise discriminatory attitudes in class and name calling and so, as it was not compulsory to teach on the Senior Level Curriculum it was avoided due to a lack of knowledge and a preference for other areas of history. The resources issue is central to the problem in that it is felt that current books are one dimensional and stereotypical.

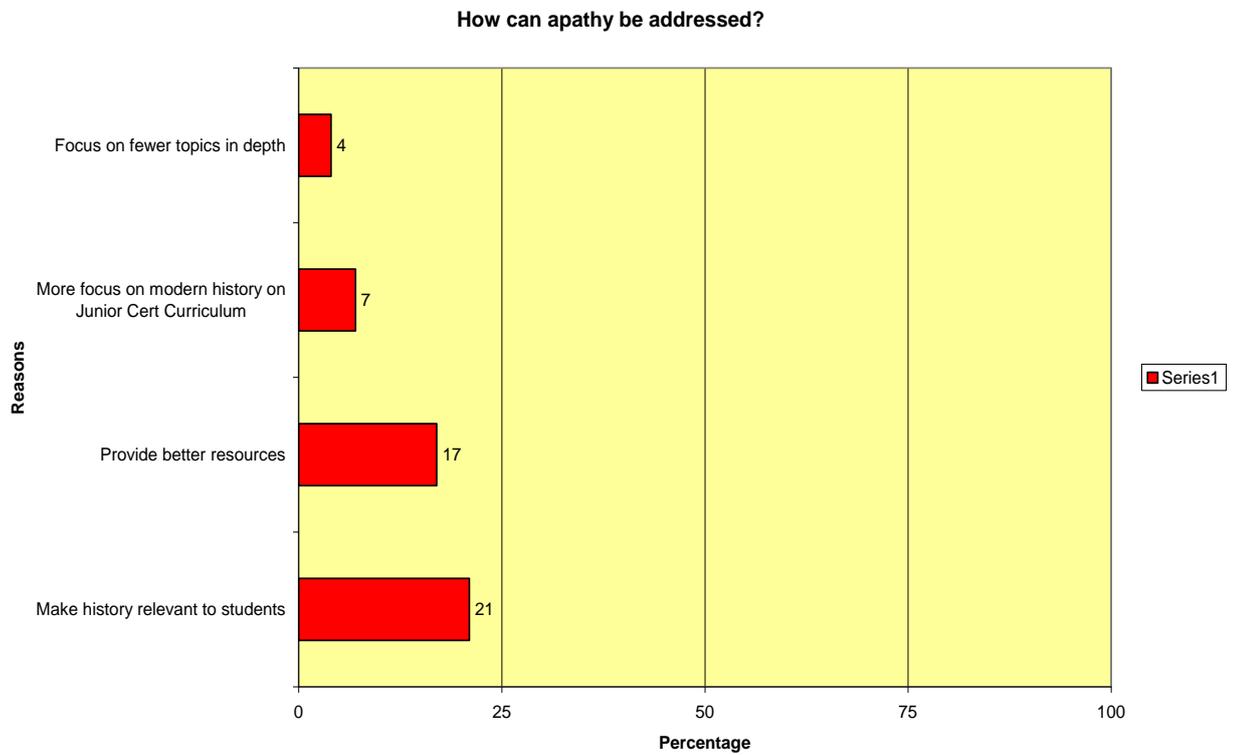
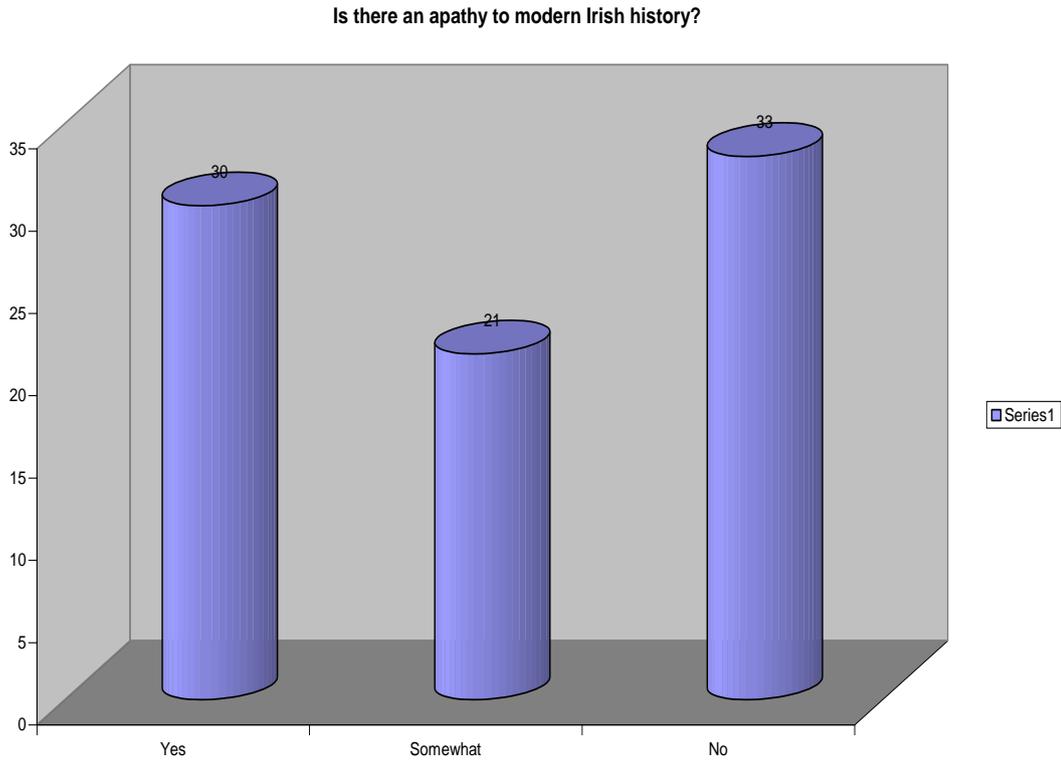
### **My Commentary:**

If there is no sense of importance given to modern Irish History in the Junior Cycle and it is not felt to be well resourced, then there is no incentive to teach it. The majority of those who said they taught Modern Irish History said they only did it at Junior Cycle which puts a different complexion on the response to Question 1a. And yet, if students are not introduced to issues that show Ireland's place in the movements and events across Europe or issues that help them relate the past to their own lives, it challenges the question as to whether they will take history in the Senior Cycle.

If students do not learn about Modern Irish History in a school context will they be skilled enough to interpret what they see in media outside school? If, in Senior Cycle, teachers are not supported to take on sensitive issues are they abdicating an important duty to give impartial information on topics? These are topics that students gain partial information on from media or family and the objectivity of critical thinking is needed.

If we wish to deal with post conflict situations and empower upcoming generations, we cannot ignore the difficult and sensitive events that have impacted upon us. This leads to the whole concept of multi-perspectivity, whereby teachers are supported and resourced to take on sensitive topics and give a sense of their complexities. This challenges students to think beyond the one dimension that they may be familiar with. Surely getting to know who we are and what made us who we are in a rounded sense will assist us in developing a sense of "the others" also. To look to a more informed future relationship between people who differ, students and teachers alike must be fully supported and encouraged in this endeavour.

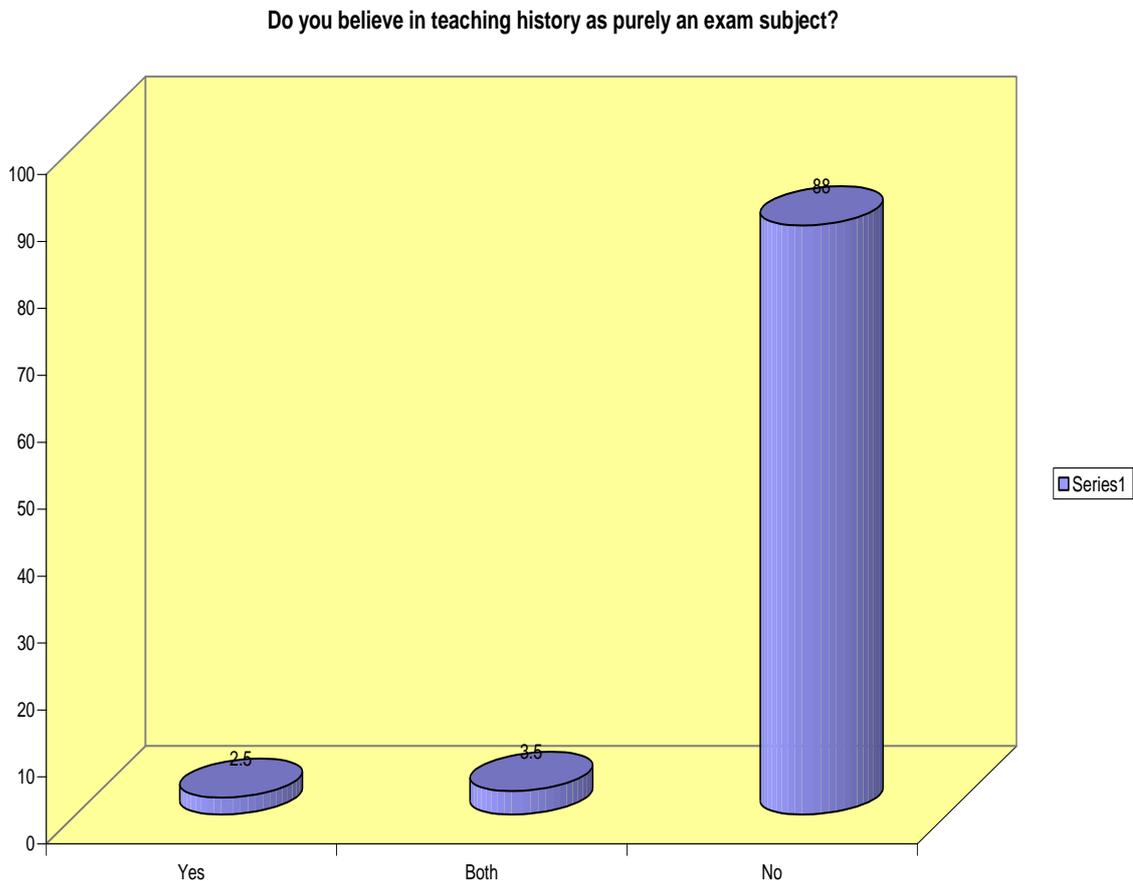
## Question 2: Some would say there is apathy to modern Irish history.



36% of respondents did not answer this question but over a fifth of teachers who did answer were of the opinion that history should be made more relevant for the student in order to overcome apathy. Indeed a further 17% felt that by providing better resources apathy could be addressed. There were 7% felt that there should be more of a focus on modern Irish history on the Junior Cert Curriculum, while 4% felt that fewer topics should be studied in depth in order to overcome apathy.

Importantly, all those surveyed were of the opinion that efforts should be made to overcome apathy, but over a third of teachers did not, or could not provide possible solutions to this problem.

**Question 3: Do you believe in teaching history as purely an exam subject? (I.e. Students are given “facts” to learn and regurgitate on the exam day.)**

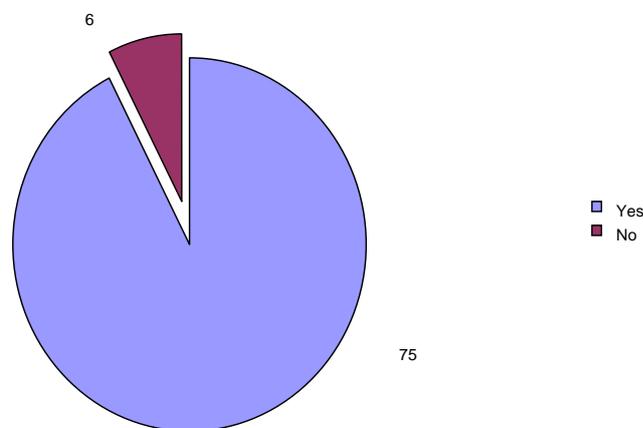


88% of those surveyed believe that History should not be taught purely as an exam subject. They feel students should be encouraged and supported in a student-friendly manner to research the topics to obtain their own opinions and explore different views on history. In making the topic more relevant for students, they learn about the positive impact that history has

on their lives. The difficulty identified is that the syllabus is too wide and time constraints make it hard to teach all of the course content.

Those who thought that history should only be seen as an exam subject pointed to the realities of assessment being a yardstick by which the teacher can measure the learning in the classroom and the “focused march to the Leaving Certificate”.

**Question 4: Should history have a social and societal role in ensuring that the next generation gain skills to analyse events from many perspectives?**



75% of respondents feel that history should have a social and societal role. This is not helped it is felt, by the Junior Certificate focusing too much on ancient history. It is felt that the new Leaving Certificate syllabus to be implemented for the coming term September 2009, will deal positively with this goal. Few teachers commented on whether achieving that aim of having a societal role would undermine the focus for teacher and student but the time and syllabus are both seen as constraining and restraining factors.

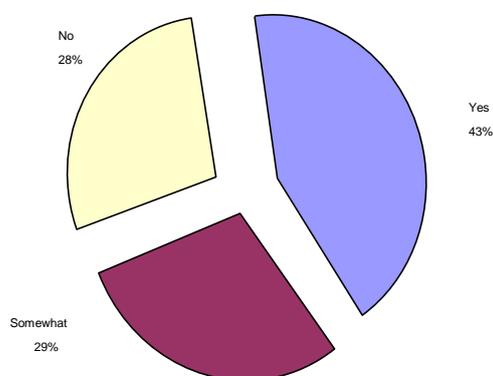
**My Commentary:**

These answers show a strong acceptance of history as an important subject beyond its examination function. They also show a need for change to support this goal. The Junior Certificate Curriculum is core to that need for change now.

Having read research in the North [Appendix 4], there has been, in the past, a sense with some teachers but also with some politicians that

education had not got a societal role. Recently, while meeting with the Education Committee in the new Executive in the North, it was disappointing to hear schools still being described as “safe havens” for students. Research already done in the North indicated that students felt it important to be given tools to equip them to deal with real life in school and not to be secluded in mere “safe havens” to hide from the “bad world outside”. The time has certainly come to tackle those issues and see the education of the child, as the preparation of the adult, with the skills to deal with, whatever life is going to throw at them.

**Question 5: If the process of teaching history is evolutionary does the current assessment process reflect the aims of the curriculum?**



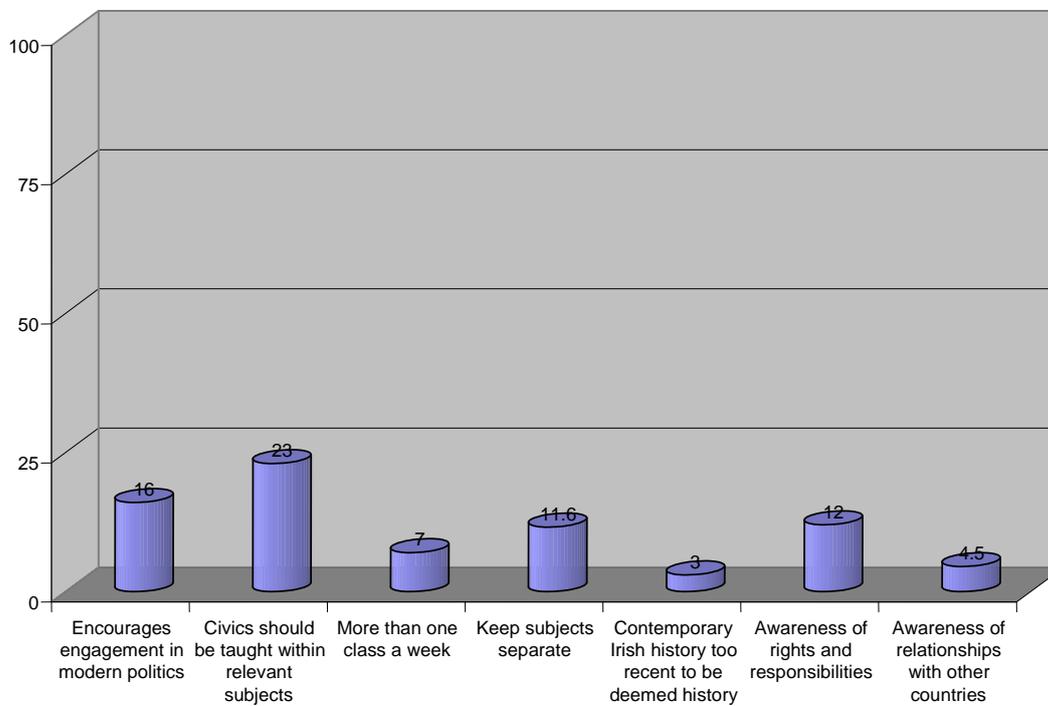
The answers given to this question were quite divided with 43% of those surveyed feeling that the current assessment process reflects the aims of the curriculum, while 29% of those surveyed said that it somewhat does and 28% of those surveyed said it does not.

The question sought to establish whether there was an appetite to change the assessment process and it would seem that this is not a core issue for teachers. Again, the changes to the Leaving Certificate would seem to address the type of concerns that had existed.

**Question 6: What role do you think civics/politics have in the school curriculum?**

This final question was asked due to the fact that there is often an overlap between Civics, History and Politics. Many societies internationally are now focused on the link between, what has happened in our past – which is our history – and what issues impact on our sense of citizenship which will exert an influence on our country in the years to come. It is of interest therefore to have some information from our History teachers on

this matter. As one can see in the diagram below there are various roles teachers see civics and politics having in the school curriculum. This issue elicited the strongest, most varied response. A more comprehensive list is contained in Appendix 5.



Citizenship and “who we think we are” is a theme becoming more and more thought about by government. It is expected to be taught to the students. There has been a breakdown in what was known and accepted as “community”; “family” and “spirituality”. These represent huge changes in all the various cohesive forces that existed before. How we define and cope with those new challenges ties into the very pertinent question that arises at a school level: how can we teach "who we are" if we ourselves don't know the answer? Such a fundamentally important aspect of “self” must become core to our curriculum and teachers and students alike, be guided through these social evolutions.

### **Request for Additional Commentary:**

Teachers have had the benefits of in-service in recent years and embraced it strongly. The History Support Service has gained significant praise. There is a strong sense that this service should not now be withdrawn but be retained to support the teachers implement the curriculum in an evolving rather than static manner. It is recognised by teachers that history and history teaching, like any other subject, is best exposed to regular review. To close down a support mechanism as teachers gain the

confidence of using it and appreciate the work that is being done is deemed wrong.

There is a reiteration of the fact that the Junior Certificate needs to be reviewed, due to its exhaustive nature already. Course size militates against the teaching of it in a multi source manner that would develop the skills of critical thinking and the ability to detect bias and so forth. The need for those sources, in the form of, for example, new textbooks and workbooks are seen as urgent requirements by many.

Some teachers wish to see the Leaving Certificate gain two document questions as they see those as valuable learning experiences for the students and this ties in with the sense that to do a smaller number of areas but in depth would help maintain standards in the constant race against time and help develop the analytical skills that are so important in life, as well as examinations. The use of RTE archive material, should it be indexed was identified as a good source underutilised at present.

Teachers want to see the Teacher Associations supported and funded. This would be in keeping with recommendations already made by the Council of Ministers which looked to national governments to assist history teachers forge links with their European counterparts.

### **The History In-Service Team Report:**

The Departmental evaluation of how the History In-Service sessions met their aim after each phase of training, both reflected and supports further, what was said by the teachers in response to this current survey. Phase 5 (2006) in-service responses show that the lowest “excellent” rating was 60% and the highest was 71%; added to this is that 22% to 30% people rated the results “very good”. The fact that only a high of 12% to a low of 5% found the sessions effective to a “fair” to “good” level, speaks for a successful in-service intervention. This 90% aggregate for high satisfaction extended over all phases of the training. The quality of the presentations was deemed very good or excellent by 89-95% of participants. When it came to the quality of support by the HIST, including the quality of the materials produced and distributed to teachers, there was a 92% “good” and “very good” combined score (94% for the actual HIST website). An example of an In-Service Seminar in Mayo is presented in Appendix 6 but overall it points to the value of a good In-Service programme being delivered to teachers.

### **The All Ireland Dimension:**

The island of Ireland has a shared past. The peoples of the island do need to explore this past within the bounds of the geographical mass and beyond, to see how Ireland fits into European and World history. Former Taoiseach and leading architect of the Irish Peace Process, Bertie Ahern, T.D., recently talked about that “bigger picture” Ireland identity:

*“A more thoughtful approach to the history of conflicts on this island leads us to realise that we can best understand our history in the context of wider issues and forces which operated across Europe. In fact, long before we became one of the world’s most open trading nations, we formed part of an international network. At all stages of our history, from early trading contacts, through waves of migration across Europe, and from the early monks who set forth to preach the gospel in Europe to the network of Irish colleges which remain part of our European heritage, Ireland and her people have been an integral part of a wider European identity. Our membership of the European Community and the development of the institutions and policies of the Union in the context of our shared values are the modern expression of that identity”* (Seanad Speech, April 2008)

This is manifesting itself now in, for example, the History Inspectorates of the Republic and the North working together in terms of cross border exchanges. There is also co-operation in relation to the Irish History that is taught in the UK curriculum. This will have a tangible realisation in the form of an Irish representation at a UK meeting on the History Curriculum in July 2008.

The curriculum in the North has recently changed to bring in new Modern Irish History elements. Schools are encouraged to breach old boundaries and reach out in cross community and cross border visits. These are things that need to evolve further. In the Dead Sea and locations such as Bosnia and Herzegovina teachers have been involved in working together to take on sensitive issues and develop both text books, and teacher manuals, that treat the subjects in ways that are not offensive. There may well be a need for this in Ireland even at this stage of the Peace Process.

The more face to face meetings between students and between teachers the more opportunities for taking on sensitive matters that can only truly be tackled when trust and confidence has evolved within groups from different backgrounds, class and geographical locations. Returning to the “win/win” concept, this type of activity places a new freshness into both teaching and learning. New perspectives are possible merely because of the use physically, or through the use of technology, of such cross border

or cross community links. This has the capacity to cross many boundaries and enables big historical issues to be explored on an international level too – not even just an all island basis.

When this Report began there was a Departmental sense that students are not interested in modern Irish history. This was supported by the statistics in respect of the level of students taking those question options in the Leaving Certificate. However, having studied the work carried out by Alan Mc Cully and others out of the UNESCO centre in the University of Ulster at Coleraine [Appendix 4], I feel that the experience in the North is not unlike our position in the Republic.

Many teachers avoided teaching modern Irish history for various reasons – fear of student reaction in the classroom; lack of knowledge of the subject itself; a sense that their views could not begin to compete with the information that the student was gaining from their communities and families; a feeling that a teacher’s role was not a societal but exam based one, and so forth. When teacher and student comments in the North were collated it was seen that contrary to the teachers’ assumptions, students wanted to learn about modern history in the classroom. They knew “who they were” and did not necessarily want that changed, but they also were aware that there was a bigger picture and they wanted to know about that. It is this need to open students up to the “bigger picture” that is fundamental to the developing of the sense of “self” and the sense of respect for difference. It is core to why teaching modern history in as wide a manner as possible is crucial in this era of change.

The experience in the North is not that different to the Republic. To date statistics on uptake are low but when you speak to students there is anecdotally a strong interest in history. It would be a valuable exercise to formally survey their views and thus tie it into the new approach to the history curriculum.

The North at present is looking at fundamental issues within Education. There are more school rooms than there are students to fill them. There are economies of scale that need to be made. There is also a question over how students should be evaluated for Grammar and Non-Grammar school places. Economically there is an argument put forward by some to look at the configuration of schools and amalgamate where possible. These are usually the supporters of Integrated Education, which has not had a large uptake to date. This question strikes to the core of the religious divide that is so much more pronounced than is seen in the Republic. Outsiders looking on usually offer the “solution” of integration to areas rising out of

conflict too, whereby if all students learned in mixed schools then they would get to know each other in the most positive manner. It is certainly easier said than forced. Maybe there are opportunities in this time of flux for both Education Committees to interact and exchange ideas.

The concept of total integration may well be one that some in our communities are ready for and in the Republic it is a regular phenomena to have more than one religion in a school - however, there is a dominant religion in these schools and what defines integration must be more than people sitting side by side. There has to be recognition of difference and thus the Republic cannot be complacent in relation to teaching about respect for difference. They must ensure that there is a multiple source approach to history.

Integrated schools have had a very small uptake in the North (c60 out of 1300 schools) and yet other schools have the religious mixed schools like the Republic but a prominent lead religion and ethos. For others the new concept of Omagh and the suggestion that a number of schools would locate on one site and share facilities is being embraced by many.

For those who find either true integration or shared facilities steps too far, there is still the reality of the need to recognise the need, within the school system, to find a way to deal with sensitive issues and open them up to discussion, investigation and understanding. Studies have shown that contrary to past beliefs by teachers and current beliefs of some politicians (across the island) the students want school to be the safe location to get the "full picture" and not the "safe haven" away from community and life realities.

In that context it is of interest to look to the work of teachers within the integrated school movement and the training that they have through their experiences, dealing with the multi religious student cohort. Hazelwood primary school in North Belfast, has worked on their history curriculum to present sensitive issues from more than one side. They have developed a teaching pack to support this concept.

It obviously links into the issue of where teachers are trained also. In the North, like in so many aspects of life, there were separate Catholic and Protestant teacher training colleges. This situation seems to be changing with the future of Stranmillis being linked now to Queens University, but again, wherever teachers are trained there needs to be recognition of the importance of balanced portrayals of history and historical events. This

equally applies in the Republic as the make up of the class profile constantly expands.

### **Final Thoughts:**

Teachers could become more aware of the medium of humour in its many guises, for engaging the interest of students in elements of Irish history. Whether Ireland is unique in this potential or not, humour is rampant in practically all corners of the island and humour has seen many citizens through the bleakest of times. Taking that thought further is the concept that humour may be a subtle inroad to getting to exploring sensitive issues directly or indirectly for our students.

We saw the evolution of the Fr Ted television series which challenged many in society when it first came forward as a concept. It is possibly a tool for examining the cultural changes of Ireland, from it not being socially acceptable for RTE originally to buy it, to its being bought back at a later date having been a huge success for another station.

The Hole in the Wall gang has done significant work on what may well be considered as stereotypical reconstructions of events in the North whether in the form of “Give Me Head Peace” or the “Folks on the Hill” series. The bigotry and sectarianism has been “sent up” by comedians past and present such as Des Bishop, Patrick Kielty, Nuala Mc Keever or Jimmy Young. They have pushed boundaries in a manner that have been embraced by many both in the television and live stage formats and have had people laugh at themselves as well as at “the others”.

In recent years books by people like former journalist, turned novelist, Colin Bateman, have explored issues around “The Troubles” in a manner that is masked in humour, but with serious undertones or messages, in their own way. His style of writing captures the mannerisms of many of the characters of the region and their naturally funny use of the language:

*“I grew up in a part of Belfast where there was very little cross-community activity. Just two cross communities” (p.49 of “Turbulent Priests”, his novel from the year 2000).*

However, with the advent of technology the speed of the transfer of humour alters too and younger generations engage with these faster mediums. There has been the evolution of the use of text humour that is almost instantaneous to, and totally irreverent in its response to significant and often sensitive events. One such example of a sensitive

issue being exposed to that medium would be the text that ran at the time of the England v Ireland rugby match in Croke Park:

*“Ireland may well be without Horgan and O’Driscoll, two players that most teams would be loathe to be without, but England will be without their tanks and machine guns from their last visit to Croke Park.”*

The speed of texts and their spiky humour is something that could be deployed as a tool that students can immediately relate to. It is vital to recognise the change that has occurred over time so that historical events, having been exposed to humour, can have their sensitive edge paired even slightly. This then links into the new confidence inspired by membership of Europe and our achieving an economy surpassing many of those who would have felt superior in the past. In that humour enables us, through our own national self-confidence, to laugh at ourselves as well as at the other, indicates that it could be used to engage our students with difficult topics – while, of course, knowing that not everything can be reduced to a joke but can start with a little bit of humour [More on this topic in Appendix 7].

## **Conclusions:**

This report has analysed the 95 surveys which have been returned and the answers have been consistent. The majority of history teachers in Ireland have taught modern Irish history but mainly to a junior level and to a minimal degree. Many feel that students react more positively to modern European history. The statistics would show that the number of people choosing the questions pertaining to the modern Irish History section have in the past been low. This will change somewhat with the compulsory element in the new Senior Cycle curriculum but there is a way to go for the Junior Cycle which is overloaded it is felt, at present.

Some teachers feel well resourced (26%) while others do not feel (37%) well resourced to teach modern Irish history, whereas the other quarter feel only adequately resourced. They want support to move history into a more relevant subject for those students who wish to take it. Teachers do recognise that the subject has the capacity to develop critical and inquiring minds in their students that would support the goals within society to support peace in our communities, in our countries, between our countries and throughout our world. The road to the future does involve the dealing with our collective pasts through glasses made up of many lenses. Recent changes will have helped but so too will the following recommendations.

## **Recommendations:**

- There needs to be a full acceptance at political level that History is a subject that can assist in a very vital part of a child's development in this era of changing dynamics and continue to support changes that are still deemed necessary.
- Former approaches to History stressed a single interpretation of events as being "the Truth". It is now internationally accepted that there can be many views and interpretations, which are based on evidence, and there is validity to the Multiple Perspective approach that assists and encourages students to respect diversity and cultural difference rather than reinforce the more negative aspects of Nationalism.
- This report has sought to take on board the view of Teachers. There needs to be more research into the views of teachers but also research undertaken with students to have their thoughts on the curriculum, its relevance and its delivery.
- Teachers are at the core of education delivery. They should be at the core of curriculum development and resource designing to assist in those materials being age appropriate as well as interesting for the students. They must be facilitated in curriculum timing terms to be allowed to disseminate new ideas outside the class and try out new practices in the classroom.
- The recent review of the Senior Cycle in History has been supported by resources of many types and has generally been welcomed but any teething troubles should be monitored and addressed. The inclusion of personalities such as the Nobel Prize winning poet Seamus Heaney, is an important move from political exclusivity.
- There is a strong sense that the Junior Cycle would need the same level of review, change and support. The feedback of how difficult it is to cover the current course needs to be heard and teachers should have an input to the question of what is taught and how it is examined. There should be regular reviews to take on board new circumstances; technology or information. Trimming down the content can yield better skill development and aid motivation for students to further evaluate and explore topics themselves.

- Interactive teaching works best with as low class numbers as possible and therefore there should be a striving for reductions in class sizes.
- Multi-perspective History teaching relies on primary and secondary material availability. Historians must be supported to document current events that will be the history of the future. Currently media is deemed the “immediate history” and yet it is the historians training to work through various sources to bring forward evidence based conclusions that have the benefit of hindsight.
- Schools must all have the capacity to access primary and secondary source information no matter how big or small the school or its location. This is a logistical issue that includes the resource of broadband for internet accessibility. The internet offers vast potential for sourcing information. It offers the challenge of identifying appropriate sites. However, easy communications between both students and teachers from different backgrounds and cultures opens up new potentials for History projects with multiple country involvement.
- Irish history as a subject is thought to focus too much on politics. There needs to be more focus on the curriculum on the socio-economic history of Ireland, the development of Irish culture and the arts and heritage. A focus on local history will hold a particular relevance for young students and many things at local level can relate to bigger events and topics.
- Modern Irish history should be taught in such a way that reflects the international situation of the time period that is being taught and the role Ireland played on the international stage. Right through the ages, the Irish influence is seen in many countries, in many spheres.
- The fundamental aspect of resources needs to be addressed and more resources provided to schools for teaching history. The Centre for Baile Mhuirne was to resource Irish Language Schools and the need for this Centre is deemed urgent.
- History teaching needs to be more interactive. This could be achieved by project-based research and work, class debates, visits to museums, more utilisation of primary sources and also the use of guest speakers to make modern history more relevant. The Oireachtas outreach to schools is an important initiative which engages young people with

how the country is run and crosses the history and civics boundaries in a student friendly manner.

- The current In-Service for Leaving Certificate history which is due to end should be continued. This personal development should be supported also at an international level. Currently the Euro Clio annual conference is recognised at Departmental level but consideration should be given to expand the number of participants from Ireland so that Irish History teachers are kept updated on practices and priorities abroad and vice versa.
- The History Support Service should remain operational and could expand into helping teachers in other subjects develop cross curricular themes – for example music has a historical context as do the genres, instruments or dances used within and between countries. A study of instruments used in Ireland would involve the music teacher but would lead into the social context of varied communities and in the most modern context would evolve into many different cultural influences being dealt with in the history and geography classes.
- Teachers could become more aware of the medium of humour for engaging the interest of students in elements of Irish history. It would appear to be a unique medium to the Irish both during, and post conflict situation. It is an inroad to capturing student attention equal to the use of films and other technologies.
- Cross border and cross community activity is popular in some areas. There needs to be a support of this activity to strengthen opportunities and encourage those who could gain most from pairing with each other to move in that direction without fear of reprisal from any quarter. This activity should be for both teachers and students and should have a capacity to be a long term initiative as trust is only built over time – working towards tangible results.
- The North/South Ministerial Council already meets at Departmental and Ministerial level on Educational matters. This exchange of information, ideas and expertise within policy making could be complimented by similar activities between the Joint Committee on Education and its equivalent in the Executive.
- Cross Curricular themes such as “Education for Mutual Understanding” and “Cultural Heritage” were embraced in the North to

cut across the curriculum. There are obvious links that can be exploited but teachers must be given the opportunities to co-ordinate cross curricular themes during staff planning days.

- There is definite scope for a subject on Politics/ political systems to be implemented on the senior cycle. A committee was established in 2006 to introduce *Social and Political Education* and a draft syllabus was to be implemented in the summer of 2007. This has not been the case and it needs to be done.
- Civics at Junior Certificate level needs to be taken more seriously. Although it is an exam subject many teachers feel that they are “landed with” the subject to teach and have no interest in the subject or adequate training in the specifics of the subject area. Teachers who have been supported in the North to deliver the Local and Global Citizenship training programme have felt better equipped in the classroom methodologies.
- Civics and Citizenship are becoming increasingly important in societies worldwide. It should be compulsory for all our young citizens, both as a subject in itself but also in a cross curricular manner. Citizenship involves looking at the make up of our communities, beyond their ethnic affiliation, to community relations and conflict resolution. It involves explaining the positive contributions of minority groupings not just exploiting the negative. By gaining multi-perspective views on ones history we can recognise the various diverse cultures that are now in place in society. Therefore there are links between the two related, but separate, subjects. The alternative is that citizenship is equalled to the notion of Patriotism in its most negative aspect.
- Civics and active citizenship can help people find their place in the wider world but can also lead to a career in personal development. This report therefore recommends that the Civics course at Junior Level be revised and a course at Senior Level be introduced.

## **Appendix 1: Recommendation 1283 (1996), on history and the learning of history in Europe.**

People have a right to access their history – whether they then embrace or reject it. Politically history can help or hinder Europe’s future depending on the role it is given. Students must be given the opportunity to examine critically both what they see and hear around them in the various media available, and through schools sources. This will help them understand how complex issues can be and help them appreciate diversity and recognise the distortions that stereotypes can offer. By continually using a variety of sources they develop a critical mind that can assist in overcoming the temptations some politicians (particularly in central and Eastern Europe) may have to manipulate the “single, static” visions of history. It is this objectivity that should be aspired to by all involved – whether in the classroom, the written or visual media, the lecture hall or wherever - to avoid religious and political bias.

There must be more to history than politics – the role of women and minorities must be recognised and there is a need for controversial, sensitive and tragic events to be balanced with more positive and inclusive topics that extend beyond National boundaries and span cultural, philosophical, economic and political movements. By opening up to other views of the same events by schools in other countries this facilitates exchanges that are important between students. Approaches to learning must continue to expand in the technologies and forms of educational experience used, with a more equal treatment of a varied approach and a recognition of the role of out-of-school facilities and influences. Teacher training support is central to this goal and the Council for Cultural Co-operation can assist both in the teacher training but also for helping history teachers to form interactive networks which will enable them to maximise the cross over of innovative methods. The same co-operation potential exists between historians and teachers (it is important for historians to have some concept of the realities of the classroom and how to reach the target audience).

This Recommendation strongly supported the Georg Eckert Institute and its work on International Textbook Research – I would agree having seen some of its work in action – and it looked to the Ministries of Education in member states having to ensure that the Institute’s work is continually updated by those countries.

It supported the development of national history teacher associations and the involvement of teachers in Euroclio. It also called for a code of

practice and European Charter that would protect teachers from political manipulation. A similar protection for historians was identified.

A very important recommendation was that calling on **governments to provide adequate and ongoing finance for history research, particularly on multilateral and bilateral commissions on contemporary history.** This working across borders would assist more tolerant attitudes as historical accounts would gain a breadth of experience.

## Appendix 2: Curriculum Changes

The new Leaving Certificate History Syllabus gives the choice of which 4 subjects will be studied from a selection of 12 topics in modern Irish, European and American history, to the teacher. One must be a documents based study which involves comprehension and the skills of working with evidence. This is a natural follow on from the format of Questions 2 and 5 on the Junior Certificate exam paper. The other 3 subjects will be assessed by essay in the terminal exam. Two choices must be Irish.

There will be more emphasis on the social, economic, cultural and religious areas than was the case in the old syllabus. Apart from text books and other source material, use of the internet will become increasingly important.

Another major change is a Research Study which will give students a year to prepare a report to be submitted around Easter time before the Leaving Certificate exam in June. This Research Study can be about any aspect of history, in any period. The teacher will help and oversee this work but the choice of subject matter is that of the student. As this replaces the “special essay” which was examined in the old Leaving Certificate paper, less time is required for the exam, which has been reduced from a marathon of 3 hours 20 minutes to 2 hours 50 minutes. Ordinary level students follow an identical course, with a different emphasis in the way questions are asked on exam papers.

The study of history at Leaving Certificate fulfils many of the general aims and principles of the Leaving Certificate programmes.

- It emphasises the importance of individual thought.
- It fosters a spirit of inquiry and critical thinking.
- It helps to prepare students both for further education and for adult and working life.
- It helps to prepare students for their role as active and participative citizens.

An interest in, and knowledge of History are relevant to any career related to current affairs – journalism, local and national radio and television. History is valuable as a background to studies in law, town planning, architecture, politics, economics, sociology, music, art, museum and library work. History is a good training for administration, management and the world of business in general. History contributes to a good all round education. (Based on the Wesley College Website)

### Appendix 3: Survey

Q. 1) Have you taught modern Irish history from 1960 on?

Yes\_\_ No\_\_

If yes, do you feel well supported with the resources needed to teach modern Irish history?

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Do Students react more positively to modern Irish history than to any other sections of history? Yes \_\_\_ No\_\_\_

Please explain:

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If your answer to Q.1 was No, Could you outline the main reasons why you have avoided teaching modern Irish history from the 1960's on?

(E.g. Fear of creating divisions in the classroom, Lack of knowledge of the area, Lack of resources....)

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Q.2) Some would say that there is an apathy to modern Irish history?

- A) Is this true?
- B) How can any apathy be addressed?
- C) Should efforts be made to overcome apathy?

Q.3) Do you believe in teaching history as purely an exam subject? (I.e. Students are given "facts" to learn and regurgitate on the exam day.) Yes \_\_\_ No\_\_\_

Please explain:

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**Q.4)** Should history have a social and societal role in ensuring that the next generation gains skills to analyse events from many perspectives? If so, is the focus for teacher and student less exact/clinical?

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**Q.5)** If the process of teaching history is evolutionary does the current assessment process reflect the aims of the curriculum?

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**If you answered no to Q.5** then have you any suggestions as to how this could be adapted?

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**Q.6)** In some countries politics and civics are treated within the history classroom. In other countries they are either separate or politics is entirely avoided.

What role do you think civics/politics have in the school curriculum?

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*Thank you for your time.*

*Please feel free to add any information that you feel is appropriate?*

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## **Appendix 4: The Experience in the North**

The North of Ireland has been held up internationally as a model for how history should be taught in an area of conflict. This happened despite a lack of any systematic research as to what is actually taught in Northern Ireland. The lack of information is now being addressed, mainly by the history teaching fraternity – one major player in this is Dr. Alan Mc Cully of the Unesco Centre at the University of Ulster at Coleraine. Their studies focus on classroom realities and, through knowing what is going on in a classroom they aim to improve or replicate an educational practice (Barton). Sharing “best practice” works in every walk of life.

Alan Mc Cully believes that there is still a gap between the stated intentions of the Northern Ireland History Curriculum and a significant number of teachers teaching it. This can reflect a mismatch between what the official aspiration is and what teachers think is possible, or the reality that it takes time to move from “certainty and fact” to a multi-perspective interpretative teaching approach. It also relates to the political climate at any given point in time – seen in the row (August 2008) between the two parties in government over what the geographical territory was called. The argument was ironically over the use of the terms “Northern Ireland” and the “North of Ireland”, in the government’s “Shaping Our Future” document!

To learn about an issue it must be taught. Until the early 1990s young people could leave school never having studied any Irish History. A largely common History Curriculum was introduced in 1989/90 to address the community divisions in Northern Ireland through history teaching. It introduced a prescribed, enquiry based curriculum, which aimed at having the students taught a broadly common programme, engaging them with different perspectives.

A Working Group in 1990, made up of eight senior teachers at primary and secondary level that embraced both Catholic and Protestants teachers; a teacher trainer; three lay persons and two assessors (from the history inspectorate), was chaired by David Harkness (professor of Irish History, Queen’s University Belfast). The work fed into the new programme of study and attainment targets in September 1991; the Northern Ireland Curriculum Council followed this with a Consultation Report which was presented to the Minister for Education in January 1991. The aim was to ensure a broad coverage in time and space, local, national and international for the students from age 6 to 14 (compulsory) or 16 (if they opt to continue their history education). Textbooks were not prescribed

but efforts were made to ensure that a range of teaching materials were available – including textbooks.

Harkness believed that government should be involved at the “broad guideline” stage but the actual choice of curriculum content should be left to professionals in the field, while the teaching material should be selected by the school or teacher. However he also felt that governments had to ensure that the range of elements to choose from would be as wide as possible and that these (including minority histories) should be supported by professionally researched, broadly based, perspectives.

At this time too, the History teaching focus was expanded by six cross curricular themes - including Education for Mutual Understanding and Cultural Heritage that all teachers were obliged statutorily to include in their lesson plans. Idealistically, students would, through this, begin to understand and appreciate their own way of life and that of other cultural traditions around them. They would learn to respond constructively to conflict by teaching them how to handle and react to various personal and social situations. It linked into other efforts that were being made by some to address community divisions. A specific example was the establishment of integrated schools, which, despite being supported by the 1989 Education Reform Act continues to be supported by only a minority of parents - well over 90% of students, still attend schools that are seen as being on one or other side of the main cultural groupings.

Looking back to the 1980s, there had been attempts (within the churches, media or lay) to foster cross community contact between the young of both traditions in the form of extra-curricular activities, as it did not happen in schools. It was begun by private citizens who became “the Cultural Traditions Group”. Because getting a variety of textbooks or viewpoints published in a small geographical area is not commercially very appealing, they established a publications committee and public money (c150, 000 annually) was channeled through the Community Relations Council and has continued with financial supports from National and European sources. This opened a door for support in developing textbooks and supporting both authors and schools. One other theme employed by the NICC at that time was the “Thinking European” notion (maybe a notion ahead of its time) but it wasn’t supported by materials.

Another important fund to nurture diversity was the Northern Irish version of the UK Historical Association’s Young Historian Scheme (funded by the Department of Education for 3 years but managed

independently with a coordinator in place who could organize events within the North plus exchanges with Britain). The BBC and ITV school history programmes too offered “alternative perspectives” at a time when they were most needed. These were all efforts to overcome the lack of History Education in the schools and ensured that the students had some support to see another side. They stood up to:

*“... the surrender of the field to the abusers of history” (Harkness, p.67)*

In 1994 (the year of the ceasefire) there were moves to try and make the "recent history of Northern Ireland" a compulsory module in GCSE History but there was a compromise instead (a facet of life in the North) that you could choose "Northern Ireland Since 1965" or "Northern Ireland In World War Two". In reality there was an avoidance of teaching a common history. Research does suggest though that no matter how hard it is to face, there needs, in post conflict situations, to be some way:

*"to respect the differences in the narratives of the groups involved, not by abandoning the notion of the objective truth but by recognizing that history was experienced by different groups differently, so the salience of events is different for different groups" (Margaret Smith).*

Part of the problem was resources. In his address to the Council of Europe in 1996 Professor Harkness noted that the Community Relations Council saw a gap in the information available for Key Stage 4, “Northern Ireland and its neighbours since 1920”. The Northern Ireland Curriculum Council commissioned a book that was to be published by Cambridge University Press which was to be used throughout the United Kingdom.

If the official aim in history teaching was to provide a balanced understanding of a variety of cultural and political backgrounds to our students, then there was a key problem to be addressed:

*“In Northern Ireland history plays an important role in the formation of individual and community identity and this identification often is credited with perpetuating conflict” (Mc Cully/Barton).*

If teachers were right not to bring in the tension of the Troubles (post 1960) into the classroom in the past, there was a growing sense (when the ceasefire of '94 became permanent c'96) that teachers now needed to be more proactive in raising the sensitive (and contested) issues of both traditions to ensure that all pupils understood how key events in both Irish

and British history were perceived by each community (rather than to improve community relations as a goal alone).

Conway states that:

*“no topic is intrinsically sensitive but may become so as a result of the teacher’s and/or student’s reaction to it”.*

From the teachers and pupils perspectives, there was no consensus as to the appropriateness of the aim of engaging children in a new form of learning. Some saw the teacher as neutral chair directing evidence gathering as the right way forward others saw that to try and take the teacher and their control from the centre of the class as wrong. This was a tension that remained to be worked out. Many teachers taught history as a subject to enjoy not *“promote positive values and social reconciliation”* (as the Department may have wanted). And while, unlike other conflict zones, school textbooks were seen to be balanced and sensitive in their use of language, the difficulty remained that they didn’t ask the challenging questions. Students were really left to do the “enquiry” part themselves, which was really a comprehension exercise, especially for the lower ability students.

In 1996 and 2001 both, it was felt that the role of the teacher in being *“the primary vehicle for the transmission of critical information”* remained a steadfast objective (Conway). Students from a variety of backgrounds echoed this wish for history lessons in classrooms to give them a better understanding of issues around them. All the evidence suggests that students seek support from the classroom, not to change their point of view but to enable them to work out “their understanding” for themselves. And so the next debate was whether the teacher should be the “neutral chair” or whether they declared their allegiance to the class (more a feature of teachers in England). In either case the teachers tended to focus on documents rather than lead discussions when handling emotional issues. Those who took on controversial issues tended to focus on teaching things in a non-threatening (also non-challenging) way – focusing on earlier time periods; not having a point of view themselves but letting documents “speak for themselves”. There would not, for example, be a question on how adequate the British response was to the Irish Famine of the 1840s, even though the period under discussion was so long ago.

For “good students” they could tackle events post 1922 but realistically teachers didn’t want to “rock the boat”. They have not tackled in any coherent fashion the links between past and present. Teachers can feel

that (a) they cannot influence the student's ideas, so why try (b) they may create unmanageable situations in the class (c) they don't see challenging misconceptions as their role. The latter is the most serious of all. If teachers do not see a central role for themselves in terms of a social responsibility to challenge myths and the narrow mindedness that "street history" offers students, there is no other location for the young to gain this intervention. Therefore as issues go unchallenged, the "street" wins, not society.

This leads us to ask, who is teaching history (a research programme in itself) and what personal baggage may they bring to the classroom? How well supported are they? Research shows that if you were in an area of conflict especially with lower ability students there is no chance that teachers will move from "safe" territory. And yet those students are in most need of the facts to contradict "traditional" notions that they bring with them from their backgrounds (and other research suggests the students are only too anxious to have the teachers give them a broader perspective on the situations that surround them).

When teachers avoid dealing with it, many children are then only exposed to the "street history" of murals or what they have "picked up" from what is said at home or on the street. In a seminar in 1997 representatives of the Basque and Cypriot regions saw similarities in the way street slogans fed their conflicts. Students need the support of the school environment to put contexts on their personal experiences. They need help to develop a concept of historical time that, for a child is quite different to the concept of clock time.

It is strange that, if students are deemed to learn a lot from their community, extended family, print and electronic media, there would be any adverse response by teachers to reach back into these same sources in a more structured manner in the classroom. Using what children see around them as the starting points for history lessons presents an open and interactive manner of teaching that is very different from providing facts for their students to regurgitate. This makes history lessons, less academic, less dull, but more relevant. Teachers learn to facilitate an investigation of a topic that is real to the student, through the interpretation and analysis of the varied evidence compiled – written texts, artifacts, photographs, drawings, songs, folklore, oral testaments, moving pictures... These types of lessons have a lasting value for students of all ages, compared to the sitting and reciting facts approach.

In a study by Mc Cully/Barton, 11 year olds were tracked over three years. At the start 70% of them exhibited a broad range of understanding as to what constituted history (family history, local heritage, the world wars, social justice, human rights) this had hardened so that, by 14 their identification of events were dominated by labels - Protestant/Unionist or Catholic/Nationalist. The intensity of the student's responses related to what type of school; the location of the school and the gender of the student:

Boys	Secondary Schools	Areas of Conflict	Strong Unionist Or Nationalist history+cultural identification
Girls	Grammar/Integrated	Non Conflict	Identified with N Ireland in Non-Political way. The "Troubles" were more a feature of life.
	Catholic Schools		Identified with recent events mostly
	Protestant Schools		identified with 17-20 <sup>th</sup> Century events

When students were asked what events they saw as significant in history it was seen that "the extent of death and hardship involved (regardless of the community affected)" was a key factor and this was linked to a *"need for remembrance"*. Girls focused on themes of *"remembrance, cooperation and inequality"* while boys were more aware of *"community conflict or the political and demographic origins of the state"* (Barton).

This leads to the obvious question as to the role of women in the future as peace makers; whether as the mothers of the next generation's children or as national figures involved in the peace process. An evaluation of the role of the Women's Coalition or what could replace it would be a useful study in this context.

Again, linking research findings to action, if teachers consciously took topics to study that would embrace, for example, the themes of remembrance, given that students have considered that significant, it may keep them engaged. Taking these issues on and then looking at the variety of ways that they can be viewed as important would expand the analytical thought process for the students. It would also help in that many events had cross community deaths and yielded cross community co-operation.

It is seen (Margaret Smith) that 80% of teachers interviewed agreed that history teaching has a responsibility to help improve community relations but 66% said that their teaching could not alter the student's pre-acquired knowledge. However, Margaret Conway found that, while a student's background will influence what they take to a lesson, the majority of students perceived school history classes to be the most influential source of learning about the history of their country. They are not overtly sectarian in their historical perspectives and count significant events in history as applying to both communities. There may well be a need for more feedback to be encouraged from students to teachers to give them the confidence to tackle sensitive topics.

It is interesting that in a study that looked at students in the USA that they saw history's purpose to be to provide a sense of national identity. In Northern Ireland students saw history as being a mechanism for them to learn about people who are different to them and they had "*a more well-developed understanding of the role of evidence in developing historical accounts*".

In 2001 the Inspectorate paper on "Improving History in Post-Primary Schools in Northern Ireland" saw the strength of the subject as "*developing the pupils' interpretative, analytical and evaluative skills*". Many students in the better schools understood that "*historical explanation is often provisional and frequently contested*". It was seen in that report that teachers were adapting to new technology also - using ICT to help teaching and learning. The paper pointed up a need for differentiation in lesson planning for the lower abilities. It stressed follow up in respect of marking and checking so that what the teachers have taught is what the students understood. There was a sense that history teachers in Northern Ireland had been objective at a time when civil unrest was at its height for decades.

In keeping with what was said earlier in this Report, the Inspectorate saw a major deficiency in the balance between:

*"...depth and detail and developing in their pupils a strong and accurate sense of historical time, change and continuity and how the past has influenced the present".*

Particularly for the lower ability students, if history is a series of events (1066, Henry VIII, Mary of Scots, the Armada, development of Unionism and Nationalism in Ireland) taught as separate entities (stories), focused largely on the United Kingdom rather than the wider world; if history is taught maybe even to assist their literacy skills, they may never get a sense of how the past has led to the present and how it may shape the future. Surely, if they are the likely early school leavers then they are also those who actually need the support most as they may well be our vulnerable citizens of the future.

Government has a role to listen and engage with teachers and students particularly. In my experience, when actually asked, teachers can be very realistic in what they present as their challenges and needs. UNESCO in the University of Coleraine, ask students and teachers the questions and find that if one had spoken to the other a number of misapprehensions would already be overcome. If teachers are to change they need curriculum support; continued professional development and resources. If history teaching is to become more direct and meaningful there needs to be more of a sense of "all for one / one for all" – the September 2007 curriculum can do it if supported by professional development.

The revised curriculum of September 2007 fits onto one page. It brought some new topics in to freshen up and bring relevance back to what had become a dull subject for both students and teachers. With the level of migration into the North, new issues around racism and sectarianism need addressed. There is lots of scope for teachers. The foundations though are to acquire evidence and not extol facts. The manner in which this can be done relates to the simple measures used in the recent research projects whereby students from as early as primary school were given pictures from the past and asked to put them in chronological order and/or asked what pictures had they an affinity with. This, in effect, is accepting that they are not "blank pages" but already "aware" (from age 6 upwards). However in accepting they are not blank pages we should also not assume that they are exposed to "taught history" until the teacher engages with them.

With the Curriculum getting less prescriptive, teachers can make more practical links back into the world the student lives in to illustrate points and to make history living and relevant for them. It is also more challenging than opening a book at page one and reading to the end. The

definition presented above of what types of schools had what type of “identity” would open up the debate on what type of history lessons needed to be devised in each type of school with the gender issue also being pertinent. This would involve designing programmes for different schools – it would involve thought. If history lessons are deemed by all sides to be an important mechanism:

*“not only to learn how to discuss the past in a divided society, but to learn the skills of research, debate and critical thinking that are important for a liberal democracy”*

The challenge therefore must be deemed too important not to take.

*“By keeping controversy at arm’s length, teachers may be inadvertently surrendering to influences outside the school – influences which they are uniquely qualified to challenge, and to which students expect them to confront” (Barton).*

That is why in the North, citizens within the church and outside it moved in the 1980s to try and have competitions or any form of after school activity that would begin to assist the process of understanding the “other” side but teachers, as is seen in the work of UNESCO should be central to the process.

Should a forum not have been set up so that history teachers could debate the role and purpose of their teaching in a society emerging from conflict? The schools are expected more to serve a social purpose but the teachers need to be brought along if it is to succeed. The input of the teacher is central therefore teacher training, in the context of revising how history is taught and having the curriculum, the textbooks and the external examinations updated, is all inter-related. It is time for the researchers and the teachers sit down together to chart a more successful way forward. Indeed Scandinavian commentators in 1997 could not understand how demarcated the University /teaching college staff were from the teachers in schools. They saw a real link between highly experienced teachers sharing their time between college and schools. There is a real need to keep the practitioners and those who teach the next generation of teacher as close to the reality of the classroom as possible. This too links into other academics in the teaching and writing of history.

One key question in the Republic is the link between History and Citizenship. Most teachers do not want to see the status of History diminished but the History/Citizenship collaboration has come into the Revised Curriculum (Sept. 07) in the North as a statutory element.

While the LGC curriculum documents use acceptable language some teachers felt that there were overt and covert goals hidden by Government. Was the goal to have everyone signing up to a particular “set of liberal values” which would lead to “right” and “wrong” ways of thinking of issues (some element of social engineering)? The issue of the “common good” led other teachers to accept the collaboration. The positive attitude to the latest attempt to revise the curriculum is important but the detail of how it impacts on contributing to the process of cross-community reconciliation in the North – only time will tell. Teachers who have undergone a “Local and Global Citizenship training programme” had an ability to apply that methodology to history lessons which lends credence to the argument to do a teacher training module in this.

Questions for the future include:

*“whether developing a shared sense of identity – one that transcends the community divide – should become an explicit goal of the curriculum” (Keith Barton)*

Should we have primary children look to a variety of sources including the written history, so that it is not unfamiliar to them when they get to secondary school; do we need broader understandings of historical themes by including social and material life into the discussion rather than focusing on single time periods, where students are not given a sense of “how long ago” it happened or the context before and after the specific subject; perhaps we should be doing more comparative studies between what Catholic and Protestant students see as historically significant events and whether they are significant for the same reason to both communities or, as is happening in other countries, look to seeing what is not contested and see how we can build on these agreed historically significant events.

We have succeeded when:

*“The history our pupils learn today will shape how they make history tomorrow [they need to be] more understanding, more tolerant of people different to themselves to show them they can make a better history than the one we’ve experienced here for the past thirty years” (Catherine Thompson).*

In this sense, how the subject is taught should be used to ensure that students face up to any prejudice that they have.

*"The past, and issues arising from differing interpretations of the past, are too important to be neglected, and it is essential that history teachers continue to convince their pupils that history matters" (Daniel Mc Call)*

## Appendix 5: Full list of answers to Question 6

Question 6: What role do you think that civics and/or politics have in the school curriculum?

- It should be part of the teaching of history
- It is impossible to teach history without politics
- They are very relevant to the curriculum and part of our society
- You can not teach politics but you can explain political systems
- They play a positive role where the values of democracy are encouraged
- History should be kept separate to civics and politics
- Civics plays a major role
- Generally students do not have an interest in them (Junior Cycle)
- Need a more integrated approach but can't dilute history
- History can not be studied without them
- History and Civics work well as two separate subjects (Senior Cycle)
- They instil a sense of citizenship, rights and responsibilities
- It should be intertwined with the history curriculum
- They are supplementary but it is looked down upon as a subject, a lot depends on who is teaching it
- It makes people aware of the political system we have in the country
- It is very important, one of the 'life-skills'.
- They should be treated in a neutral way looking at all sides of the story
- More time should be allocated to CSPE in the timetable (majority)
- Students need to be politically aware as they will vote for government in the future
- They contribute to the appreciation of history
- It should be more important, CSPE is treated as a second class subject. Teachers are 'landed' with it.
- Civics is not taught properly
- It is too linked into the study of history, there needs to be a dedicated politics course aimed at the Leaving Cert course
- There has to be interaction in order to explain certain concepts and give comparisons/contrasts with today
- Students need to learn about their role in society and these subjects provide this and more time needs to be given to these subjects.
- It should be taught separately because not all students take history and are so devoid of learning about politics

- It can cause tensions in relation to the different political parties
- Plays an important role in helping students engage in the political process at both local, national and international.
- Civics is rather vague and teachers avoid the historical story. Need a module on political systems.
- Need political systems module, politics is a part of life. (majority)
- Should be integrated into all subjects, not just history
- To create active citizen need these subjects. Preparation for citizenship. (majority)
- Could not add any more as the curriculum, particularly the history one is overloaded.
- Both need to cover the role of the European Union
- Need a more traditional approach to Civics where pupils learn about cabinets, government, local government, the United Nations and Human Rights. Civics at the moment covers too much trivia.
- They are vital – they go hand in hand with each other and help’s to understand/explain the other.
- They encourage students to engage in modern politics and world issues. They demand an awareness of our European citizenship and our relations with other countries, political and economic influences in Ireland and our rights and responsibilities.
- Students should know who is running the country and how they are elected. Civics is important but most kids are apathetic to politics and particularly their role. Since CSPE was introduced, I feel the social aspect has taken over from the civic/political aspect as many non-history teachers are not comfortable with it.
- CSPE is compulsory at Junior Certificate and is important but again, many students have little or no interest in politics and believe only in civil rights and not civil responsibilities.
- CSPE is extremely current although it should be paralleled it should not be confused. History can only be assessed with retrospection.
- Civics is very important for Junior Students – CSPE – become “a good active citizen”. Politics could be a good option for Senior Students. Not all history students like “the politics side of the course”
- CSPE – isolated – needs to be more “cross-curricular”. Politics and current affairs need to be discussed in history classes to foster an appreciation for history as a “process”.

## **Appendix 6: Aims of the History Seminar**

Denis O'Boyle, Director, Mayo Education Centre, 2006.

- To raise awareness of the change in emphasis in the history curriculum
- To familiarise teachers with the content, skills and concepts of the history curriculum
- To focus on a variety of methodologies and to assist them in providing for a variety of different needs
- To enable teachers to develop pupils abilities and skills to work as young historians
- To support teachers with practical ideas for implementing the SESE History Curriculum

### **Key Messages**

The seminar stressed the overarching global messages of the history curriculum.

- The spiral nature of the curriculum
- A balance between process (how) and content (what).
- The child working as an historian (skills and concepts)
- Exploration of personal, local, national and international history
- Integration across the curriculum from infants to sixth emphasising a thematic approach to 2<sup>nd</sup> class.

### **Outline of Seminar**

The seminar was grounded on the methodologies of teaching history with each session outlining a variety of different methodologies and approaches which teachers could employ in their classrooms.

Session 1: 9.00am – 10.45

- Use of artefacts and documentary evidence
- Teachers were offered an opportunity to reflect on the question – What is History? and Whose History is it?

Session 2: 11.00 – 12.45

Based on local history and outlined how to initiate a history trail. The methodologies referred to were

- use of photographs
- paintings
- documentary evidence
- oral evidence
- useful websites
- use of IT are referred to in this session.

Session 3: 1.30- 3.00p.m

- Explained and demonstrated approaches and methodologies to using story and drama in the classroom.
- Classroom and whole school planning for the implementation process.

## **Appendix 7: The Role of Humour in Areas of Recent Conflict**

Often people are sensitive about their beliefs but may not be as “precious” when it comes to other people and their beliefs. On the Island of Ireland there have been attempts at irreverent humour which have challenged the balance of laughing at “the others” and laughing at ourselves. This manifests itself in such television programmes as “Fr. Ted”, a comedy series that was based around three notional Catholic priests and their life on their island parish. In effect stereotypes were embraced in the three characters and, when it emerged initially the National broadcaster, of “Catholic Ireland”, RTE did not purchase it. It became a major hit through the British “Channel 4” and later RTE bought back the rights to all the “Fr Ted” series.

It was true to say at the time that poking fun at the Catholic Church was something that was very much frowned upon and the concept that this could be comedy was not embraced by some. However, for “others”, there was a certain admiration for the fact that the Irish could laugh along with something as core to them as their religion. I recall a long standing Protestant friend being very much taken aback when I commented on, or alluded to, a particular “Fr Ted” episode. Their reaction was: “Are Catholics actually allowed to watch that and do they find it as funny as we do?”

For years in the North of Ireland, Jimmy Young was a unique artist, ahead of his time. He created a number of characters, one of the more famous being “Orange Lil” – a staunch loyalist, usually depicted in a “Union Jack” dress. His monologues and songs were impertinent and, for their time, quite politically incorrect. There has been in recent times a series of “Our Jimmy” tribute concerts that revive the strongly “tongue in cheek” risky approach to political humour. The audiences do cross the political and geographical divide.

The “Hole in the Wall Gang” has been similarly doing more contemporary comedy routines and series that are perhaps very stereotyped, but none the less they deal with issues in an upfront manner. Their shows have an appeal to many who would never describe themselves as political or historians but their “sketches” and story lines draw young and old in. One such series was “Give My Head Peace”. This tracks the lives of a hypothetical Republican and Loyalist family (Da – who is featured as a close friend of the Republican hierarchy and activist; Ma – his wife; Cal – the Republican and often misguided son and Dympna the dizzy daughter who is married to Billy – a RUC/PSNI

officer who lives with his uncle, Uncle Andy – who is an arch Loyalist who has many tough loyalist friends who enter and exist various episodes).

The episodes closely mirrored many events within the Peace Process, including when there was a move to have more Catholics brought into the newly established PSNI. There was a light hearted attempt to show a number of reactions to this decision in that Dympna joined the Police and within a week she was practically in charge of the entire force as she fitted the criteria of Catholic and Female and this was very much in keeping with the positive discrimination being fostered. It explored Billy's response as the policeman who had been in the force and failed to progress and his reaction to the new policy. As ever the episodes involved a lot of elements of farce but the fundamental issue was explored or at least aired from a number of angles.

Similarly, a former journalist, now writer, Colin Bateman, explores in his very humorous novels issues around the peace process and the Ireland of then and now. His books are entertaining light reads in themselves, but also have messages for those who have an interest in the Irish political situation. One such example would be: "Driving Big Davie" (even the title is a quirk on Driving Miss Daisy). Big Davie is a former RUC officer who got out of the Police force when it became the PSNI. He informs his friend Dan Sharkey that he has been jilted at the altar and, as the honeymoon in America has already been paid for, he asks Dan to accompany him on his honeymoon. In reality Davie has discovered that the terrorist that had had Dan's son murdered (in a previous book) is now out on early release and he places Dan in a position to exact his revenge. The book again is a novel anyone could enjoy with its wicked sense of humour but, it also a commentary on the impact that the early release programme had on some families.

Des Bishop an American-Irish comedian has done some unique work with various groups, with the goal of having local people put on a stand up comedy show of their own after a number of workshops that he carries out with them. His series "Joy in the Hood" on RTE television had episodes based in the Bogside in Derry (Catholic) and Mount Vernon in Belfast (Protestant). The idea was to have a blend of different people work together to put on their show and in the using of comedy – break down barriers. The focus for the documentary / reality shows was storytelling using material from their own, working class, lives. This provided plenty to work with and was a slice of reality that many in the audience could relate to.

One of the Mount Vernon comedians Alan Quail looked to that black side with his humour going thus:

*“Did you hear the reports about the bomb making factory? They didn’t offer me a job!”*

He stated that they had given Des Bishop a sense of what a Loyalist area with a bad name was really like:

*“we’re everyday people, just like in Catholic areas. We’re all in the same boat...If we want to move forward at all in this culture, that’s the way we’ve got to go...making people laugh”.*

Des Bishop’s view of his work in the North was that Sectarian comedy transcended all class boundaries and it would only end when there is no more need to joke about it. An important point made too was that for some in these communities it was the first time that they were made to feel worthwhile and that someone took time to praise them and develop a “can do” sense of self worth. If comedy can breach that barrier it surely needs to, pardon the pun, be centre stage.

“The Folks on The Hill” is a political satire, animation series based on events in Stormont (located on a Hill). The ten minute episodes tend to be very current in their theme and quite irreverent in their dealing with the politicians of all political shades. Serious issues again surface in the veil of humour. While recognising that it is entertainment and not a documentary, there is a role for this type of short and snappy reflection to draw younger people into the world of politics, in my opinion. The even shorter political comment occurs at the end of some of the serious political television debates when the character “Da” from the Hole in the Wall Gang appears as a taxi driver to take the television host home. As ever, the taxi driver has a view on what is wrong with the world and how it can be fixed and, as the credits role he outlines it all to the now off duty television presenter.

However, it is not only in books, live shows and television that such humour about serious and personal issues arise. There have been a number of incidents that have yielded text messages whose coverage would mirror the types of numbers that would have watched or read any other form of media. Examples of these include the text that circulated before the England v Ireland rugby match in Croke Park which ran:

*“Ireland could be without O’Driscoll and Horgan for England visit in two weeks – two players that most teams would struggle to replace. That said England will be without the machine guns and armoured cars from their last visit to Croke Park”.*

There had been a very heated debate in relation to whether Croke Park should be opened up to sports other than Gaelic football at all, and to have England visit it and have their National Anthem played in the stadium which had endured a massacre there in 1920 by the British it was important that an element of humour crept into the issue. What was also important was the fact that Ireland beat England in the match and the next text message ran:

*“The Secretary of State for N. Ireland, Peter Hain, on Monday will lay a wreath for the fifteen people massacred in Croke Park last Saturday”.*

Things have moved on when there can be light-hearted retorts to what was definitely a very sensitive issue for many Irish people.

In relation to the changes in the Policing structures there were jibes at the new dispensation also. The debate centred on getting the percentage of Catholics higher than its very low base in the new PSNI (it still was only 24% by April 2008 although the goal is 50% by 2010). The resistance of Sinn Fein to the new policing structure led to the humour being centred on how people perceived their potential new law enforcers:

*“Crossmaglen was cordoned off today when a suspicious object was found attached to a car. Two Sinn Fein PSNI officers later discovered it was a tax disc”.*

When the more traditional “No” parties took over political power from the more pro-peace parties and the paramilitaries had also declared peace, there was the response in the form of humour:

*“New bungy jumping facility in Belfast now – IRA/INLA/UVF/UFF members all go free – no strings attached! Sponsored by the SDLP/UUP”.*

This has been followed by an explanation as to why Dr. Paisley known as “Dr. No” said “Yes”: “Did you hear Paisley has taken to the drink? He’s running around Stormont shouting *“Where’s Me Guinness, where’s Me Guinness”* (a play on Mc Guinness the Deputy Leader). For others this also outlines the closeness of the bond that has been seen to exist between the unlikely pairing of Dr Paisley and Martin Mc Guinness who have been described as: “The Chuckle Brothers” – such are the signs of great humour between them.

One other by-product of using mediums that move more towards stories, caricatures and humour, is that it will engage the weaker student that is turned off by facts and statistics. There is a better opportunity for those students to embrace the concept of diversity when couched in the approaches mentioned above. Once their imaginations are caught the deeper messages can be presented in the “padding” of other sources. However, for some, their inclination to connect with pure issues without that lighter avenue being used ensures and has ensured in the past that they have remained closed to the word “history” and, as has been seen, it is the weaker students that often need to be exposed to understanding and tolerance most.

Having explored the issue of humour with other nationalities I believe that these Irish examples are not necessarily typical of what happens elsewhere. Perhaps it is the basic personalities of the peoples or perhaps it is an issue of timing and rawness of issues which deter people. However, on the Island of Ireland it has taken time for some people to see the funny side of any of these attempts. Some will never see them as funny. The important aspect that I see is that if we can become confident in defining who “we” are, it is a step on the road to looking out with confidence to begin to understand who “they” are, and what they have been through also. When we get to the point where we can laugh not only at the “other” but at ourselves we will have progressed. In saying all of this I do not take away from the awful individual events and the hurt that they have caused. It is in seeing such incidents from both Da and Uncle Andy’s eyes that we gain a multiple perspective and a respect for that “other” side. There may be lessons in this for others to look to, but humour is very personal and countries will have to evaluate this for themselves.

Across all divides in the North one thing that all agree on is that humour, and black humour in particular, kept them going through the toughest of times. The outer wall of one of the pubs in the city centre of Belfast blends wit and wisdom in its phrase:

*“A nation that keeps one eye on the past is wise; a nation that keeps both eyes on the past is blind”* (The Garrick, Montgomery St, Belfast)

It is interesting that there is such a consensus on that fact in Ireland and yet so few in other countries see humour as even being possible in other conflict areas.

“Recent Research into Teaching History in Northern Ireland: Informing Curriculum Change”; University of Ulster Coleraine, UNESCO Centre; February 2007.

“Making Peace with the Past: Options for truth recovery regarding the conflict in and about Northern Ireland”; Produced and Published by Healing through Remembering; October 2006.

Cross curriculum work is possible and also desirable in schools. One brief example is the use of the Music Class to look at the instruments, music and dance which were linked to modern Irish communities. Seeing music and dancing as features with a past helps ground students in why composers wrote the music they did in the time they did. It also helps to show cultural differences and where they evolved from. This may assist develop an understanding that can support the role of the history teacher.