

# Belfast Citizenship Education Programme

## Evaluation



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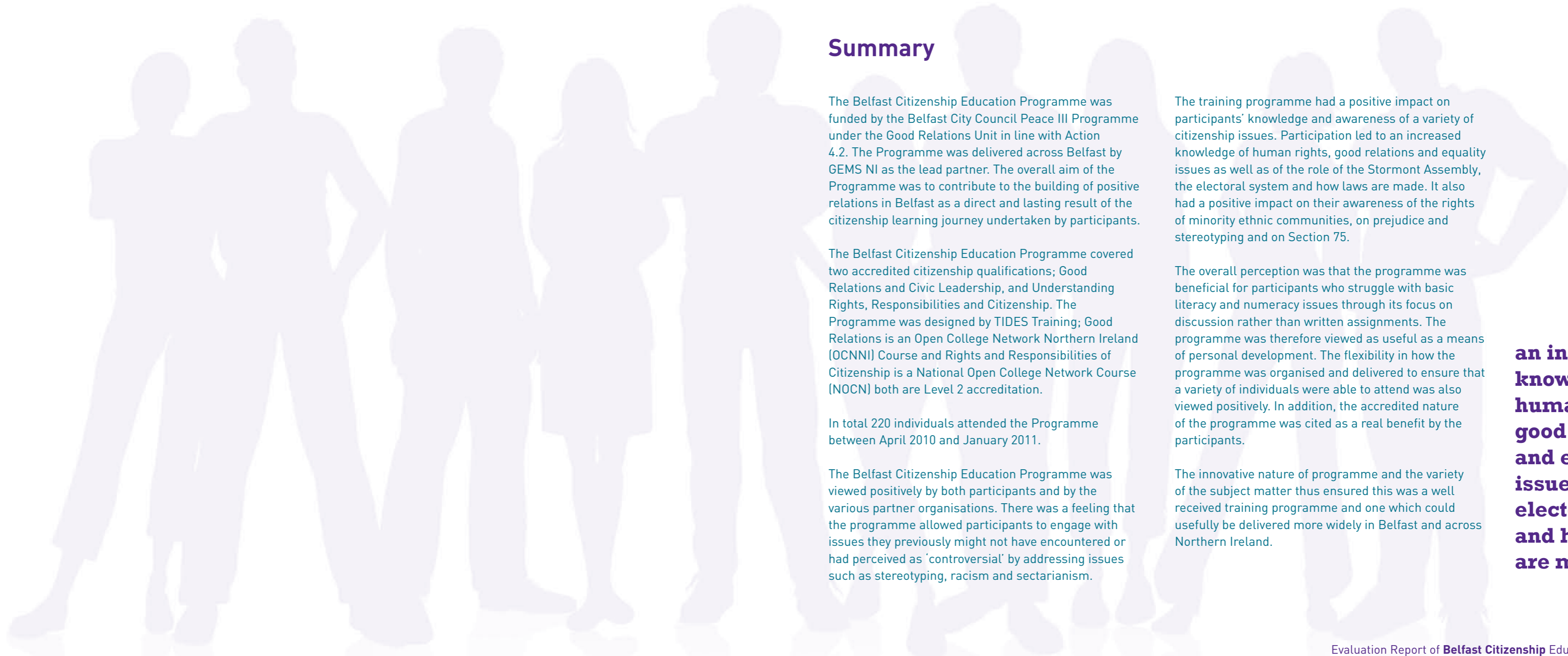


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## Summary

The Belfast Citizenship Education Programme was funded by the Belfast City Council Peace III Programme under the Good Relations Unit in line with Action 4.2. The Programme was delivered across Belfast by GEMS NI as the lead partner. The overall aim of the Programme was to contribute to the building of positive relations in Belfast as a direct and lasting result of the citizenship learning journey undertaken by participants.

The Belfast Citizenship Education Programme covered two accredited citizenship qualifications; Good Relations and Civic Leadership, and Understanding Rights, Responsibilities and Citizenship. The Programme was designed by TIDES Training; Good Relations is an Open College Network Northern Ireland (OCNNI) Course and Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship is a National Open College Network Course (NOCN) both are Level 2 accreditation.

In total 220 individuals attended the Programme between April 2010 and January 2011.

The Belfast Citizenship Education Programme was viewed positively by both participants and by the various partner organisations. There was a feeling that the programme allowed participants to engage with issues they previously might not have encountered or had perceived as 'controversial' by addressing issues such as stereotyping, racism and sectarianism.

The training programme had a positive impact on participants' knowledge and awareness of a variety of citizenship issues. Participation led to an increased knowledge of human rights, good relations and equality issues as well as of the role of the Stormont Assembly, the electoral system and how laws are made. It also had a positive impact on their awareness of the rights of minority ethnic communities, on prejudice and stereotyping and on Section 75.

The overall perception was that the programme was beneficial for participants who struggle with basic literacy and numeracy issues through its focus on discussion rather than written assignments. The programme was therefore viewed as useful as a means of personal development. The flexibility in how the programme was organised and delivered to ensure that a variety of individuals were able to attend was also viewed positively. In addition, the accredited nature of the programme was cited as a real benefit by the participants.

The innovative nature of programme and the variety of the subject matter thus ensured this was a well received training programme and one which could usefully be delivered more widely in Belfast and across Northern Ireland.

**an increased knowledge of human rights, good relations and equality issues ... the electoral system and how laws are made**

## “The overall aim of the programme was to contribute to the building of positive relations in Belfast”.

### Introduction

The Belfast Citizenship Education Programme was developed, designed and delivered by a partnership led by GEMS NI. This programme was funded by the Belfast City Council Peace III Programme under the Good Relations Unit in line with Action 4.2.

The overall aim of the programme was to contribute to the building of positive relations in Belfast as a direct and lasting result of the citizenship learning journey undertaken by participants. The aim was to recruit 245 plus people to undertake two accredited citizenship qualifications (Good Relations and Civic Leadership, and Understanding Rights, Responsibilities and Citizenship) which covered the following issues / subjects:

- Politics and Democratic Choice;
- Civic Responsibility;
- Human Rights;
- City Governance; and
- The Impact of Sectarianism and Racism.

The first stage of the training, the Good Relations and Civic Leadership element was designed to give participants the skills to:

- Understand the influence of identity;
- Understand the importance of cultural diversity; and
- Understand the current legislation on equality.

The second stage of the programme focused on the understanding of Rights & Responsibilities of Citizenship and was designed to help the learner be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of human rights; identifying basic Human Rights;
- Demonstrate an understanding of the laws in society;
- Demonstrate understanding of the democratic and electoral process;
- Demonstrating understanding of rights and responsibilities; identifying his/her Rights.

The Programme was designed by TIDES Training; Good Relations is an Open College Network Northern Ireland (OCNNI) Course and Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship is a National Open College Network Course (NOCN) both are Level 2 accreditation.

<sup>1</sup> The various partner organisations had previously been involved in delivering the Learner Access and Engagement Project commissioned by Belfast Metropolitan College (BMC) which aimed to encourage access to Essential Skills programmes provided by BMC. Members of the aforementioned partnership also worked together previously in relation to the recruitment and mentoring for the Belfast City Council HARTE Programme.

The approach of the project was to work with existing local good relations initiatives and to support the development of citizenship amongst a diverse array of people in all areas of Belfast. <sup>1</sup> The lead partner, GEMS NI, worked with the following partners:

- Ashton Community Trust;
- Impact Training;
- Oasis Caring in Action;
- Upper Springfield Development Company Limited; and
- TIDES Training.

Part of the programme was also the allocation of a personal mentor to each of the participants. The participants' link with all aspects of the programme and also worked with participants to support their participation in the programme. This included assisting clients to access additional learning assistance and other supports as necessary.

In total 220 individuals attended the programme, of those 154 were female and 66 were male. In relation to community background, among those who answered the question, 74 said they were from a Protestant background and 68 said they were from a Catholic background. In relation to ethnic group, 164 said they were White, eight said they were Black Africans, five said they were Black other and three said they were Black. Two of the participants were Indian and one

West Indian. The various groups also varied in terms of age, as the oldest participant was born in 1938 and the youngest in 1991. In terms of employment, of the 220 attendees, 86 stated they were in employment whereas 124 stated they were either unemployed or not in employment, i.e. retired or on a training programme.

### 1. Evaluation Methodology

The aim of the evaluation was to establish the 'distance travelled' by participants in their attitudes and perceptions as a result of attending the programme. The idea was also to, where possible, establish whether or not there was a 'positional shift' which took place as a result of attending the programme and which supported participants to challenge their own thinking and promote their personal capacity for change. The evaluation was shaped by the **Aid for Peace Approach**, an approach designed to examine peace building interventions, which builds on **Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment** and focuses on assessing the needs for peace building in a given country or area and then tailoring the intervention's objectives and activities to these needs by identifying their peace building relevance and developing appropriate indicators. The Approach can be broken down into four key stages:

- Peace building needs analysis;
- Peace building relevance assessment;
- Conflict risk assessment; and
- Peace and conflict effects assessment;

“The various groups also varied in terms of age, as the oldest participant was born in 1938 and the youngest in 1991”.

## “A survey of all participants prior to and upon completion of the programme to assess their awareness of, and attitudes towards, the key issues”.

The Aid for Peace approach builds in and combines other evaluation methods and tools such as input-output-result-impact chains, relevance scales and Conflict Sensitivity Analysis or Theories of Change, and risk assessment methods and checklists. In terms of evaluation, it is suggested that a range of tools can be employed such as interviews, surveys, case studies and participatory planning and workshops are central to the design phase when the causes of the conflict are assessed, needs of the area are outlined and indicators for monitoring and evaluation are developed.

To meet the aims of the evaluation, the Institute for Conflict Research (ICR) utilised a methodology which incorporated essentially three specific elements, both quantitative and qualitative:

- Focus group discussions were held with 45 participants, either in the middle of or after they had completed the programme. This approach aimed to provide participants with an opportunity to reflect and give in-depth perspectives on their views, general attitudes to citizenship and life in Belfast, and also provided participants with the chance to review and comment upon the quality and style of the training. The evaluators also undertook interviews with four members of the project delivery team and one trainer to assess their perspectives on the project, its delivery, perceived impact upon participants and potential issues faced when delivering the training. Interviews and focus

<sup>2</sup>The names of the interviewees for the case-studies have been altered.

groups with participants, lasted between half-an hour to an hour and took place at the venue at which the programme was taking place. The focus groups primarily took place during the programme, often before a session was to start or in between sessions. In one group, the session took place a few months after the programme had finished. In the case of the three case-studies, these interviews took place after the participants had finished the programme.<sup>2</sup>

- A survey of all participants prior to and upon completion of the programme was undertaken via a questionnaire to assess their awareness of, and attitudes towards, the key issues that were addressed in the training programme. The completed survey forms were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) programme and cross-tabulations were utilised to assess whether there were significant differences between the pre and post training questionnaire findings which would provide baseline information as to the overall impact of the training programme on an individual's level of knowledge and perceptions.

A number of participants found the process repetitive and could not see the point of filling out the same questionnaire three times. Others referred to the questionnaires taking up valuable time from the training session.

- ICR staff also attended advisory group meetings not only to make contact with key users of the planning group, but also to allow ICR staff to provide the group with an opportunity to assess the structure, content and delivery of the training sessions with the planning group. This aimed to increase their capacity to develop leadership, advocacy and lobbying skills.

## 2. Findings.

Below are the findings from the evaluation. The first section looks at the Pilot phase of the programme, followed by a section which focuses on the recruitment process and the awareness among participants of the programme. This is followed by a section that is primarily concerned with the impact of the programme and the relevance of the programme for participants. This is followed by the section which looks at the facilitation of the programme and the accreditation process. The last section looks at the co-operation and partnership of the programme.

### 2.1 Pilot.

Prior to 'going live' the programme team designed a 'pilot phase' of the training programme in which ten participants took part. This 'pilot phase' involved representatives from the various project partner organisations. The pilot phase allowed the management team to alter some sections of the programme. The overall feeling among the pilot

participants was a positive one with comments, such as:

*‘It made me think.’*

*‘Challenging and not threatening.’*

*‘The trainers were great.’*

After the pilot phase a few adjustments were felt to be necessary to the training and these minor changes were mainly focused on the legal issues/discussions section so as to make them more accessible for participants. One of the trainers also stressed that this was important as it was a new programme and that some 'tweaking' was necessary. The pilot phase allowed for improvements to be made in both programme content and delivery.

### 2.2 Target Group and Recruitment.

The recruitment process could best be described as having utilised the following broad criteria and focused specifically on the following 'key' target groups, as reflected in the tender proposal:

*... mainly excluded or marginalised from economic, social and civil networks as a result of problems related to sectarianism, racism and the conflict. The focus was set on a priority group for the programme of people who may have different experiences of exclusion, marginalisation, sectarianism, racism and the conflict based on their diverse political, cultural, religious and ethnic identity but who all have the common experience of long-term unemployment/*

**“After the pilot phase a few adjustments were felt to be necessary to the training”.**

## “The programme mentors had attended the programme in its pilot format”.

*economic inactivity/worklessness that contribute to isolation, marginalisation and ethnocentrism and promote a fear of “difference” and reluctance to share space.*

The focus of the project therefore was to engage with a group described by GEMS NI as the ‘hardest to reach, hardest to help’, a target group described in the programme as those individuals:

***‘...working to overcome the personal, social, emotional, intellectual and physical barriers that prevent them from engaging in learning and personal development opportunities.’***

The role of the partner organisations in accessing and engaging with the local communities was therefore crucial. The lead partner, GEMS NI, provided the partner organisations with information about the programme and training and the content of the programme, it was then the responsibility of each partner organisation including GEMS NI to distribute and apply this information at a local level. When asked about their knowledge of the programme it became apparent that it was not always necessarily clear to representatives of partner organisations, the exact nature of the programme and its content, and in some cases participants also referred to a rather vague understanding of the specifics of the project:

***‘Something about citizenship’***

***‘Some training’***

***‘The title of the programme appeared interesting’***

Participants in the various sessions had mainly received information about the programme from within their local communities, often by ‘word of mouth’ or in some cases through the distribution of leaflets or fliers provided by the various partner organisations. The programme mentors had attended the programme in its pilot format, and one mentor who had attended the programme felt that this had made it easier to promote and ‘sell it’ by referring to having done it himself. When speaking to participants they were not always sure who ‘their mentor’ was but knew with whom to speak to and also felt that there was a representative with who they could speak and raise issues with.

Another representative of a different partner organisation referred to the delivery of the training becoming easier once the programme had been running beyond its initial phase and when feedback was available from people who had ‘graduated’ from the programme. As highlighted above there was also a feeling among trainers that participants tended not to be exactly sure what they had signed up for and of what the programme entailed. This was also echoed in comments made by the various participants:

***‘I was not sure what I signed up for.’***

***‘Hard to describe the programme.’***

However, whilst participants initially might have been slightly unsure of what the programme entailed, very few dropped out of the programme,

Through interviews and focus groups participants referred to a variety of reasons for attending the programme. For some participation on the programme came as a result of being involved in schemes/programmes run by the various partner organisations. In the case of one partner organisation, the programme had been included as part of an ongoing education drive.

### Case-study 1.

Louise was born and bred in Belfast, she previously worked in the catering industry as well as office work. After a period of being unemployed, she found employment as an administrator/reception worker and had been in the post for 4 years. She had come across the programme in her line of work but had initially been quite reserved and hesitant about attending the programme as she thought it would involve what she described as ‘being too focused on exams’ as she feared it was going to be ‘too academic’.

She had however felt reassured throughout the programme and had found that rather than a lot of written work, it had focused more on role play and learning about attitudes that way.

***“Role playing was a really good way of learning, I was made to feel more relaxed. It was also a bit of a laugh.”***

Louise also felt that through the programme she had a newfound knowledge in relation to legislation and issues such as Human Rights and Section 75:

***“These were things I never knew.”***

She also felt that now she was able to better ‘associate’ legislation and rights in Northern Ireland and also what was happening politically. She also referred to the programme having enabled her to better understand the experiences of people from outside Northern Ireland when meeting them. She had also benefitted from the fact that participants in her session had been mixed in terms of community background and countries of origin, this had provided a good and sound ground for discussions within the group.

Another often recurring reason given by both participants and partner organisations was a feeling that the programme, while dealing with challenging issues, involved little written course work and focused more on participation in discussions. There was a general consensus among interviewees that the programme was therefore a good starting point for people who had not necessarily attended any previous programmes and might struggle with confidence issues and also with basic literacy and numeracy issues. One of the representatives from a partner organisation also referred to participants having appreciated the programme as perhaps the first opportunity they have had to receive training and interact in a group setting – so the programme was also perceived to be useful in a personal development sense.

**“There was a general consensus among interviewees that the programme was therefore a good starting point for people”.**

**“The role of the partner organisations cannot be underestimated as they also identified suitable venues for the training sessions”.**

Other participants as well as representatives from various partner organisations referred to the programme being a useful platform or ‘springboard’ for participants from which to pursue other courses, such as community work or youth work. The programme had for these participants provided a useful insight into diversity related issues.

What however remained important was the role played by the various partner organisations in actively engaging within their client base to promote the programme. These various individuals also tended to be the main points of contact for the participants and fulfilled their role as mentors within the programme. The role of the partner organisations cannot be underestimated as they also identified suitable venues for the training sessions, venues readily accessible to participants. This also resulted in quite diverse groups, reflecting diversity in areas such as community background, gender, age as well as ethnicity and disability.

**Case-study 2.**

Karen arrived in Northern Ireland in 2000 to attend a post-graduate programme. She completed the programme and started looking for work in the higher and further education sector without any success. After a period landing short term jobs she found herself unemployed and also back in Belfast after eight years in another city in Northern Ireland. She heard about the programme after being in contact with GEMS NI

looking for jobs and ‘having contacted endless number of employment agencies’. Staff at GEMS felt that she could benefit from attending the programme as a way of meeting people and also beginning to work on skills and qualifications. She had found the programme interesting and had found other individuals from outside Northern Ireland, as she said:

*“Made me feel like I was not the only foreigner.”*

One of the stronger sides of the programme she felt was the opportunity to hear people’s stories. She also felt that she now had a better understanding of from where people came and also a better understanding of their experiences. The group had mainly consisted of individuals from outside of Northern Ireland and as seen above this was perceived as strength. She however felt that it would have been of interest to have more ‘local’ people in her group and to her more about the two main communities in Northern Ireland. What had also made the programme worthwhile was that she felt that she had a better grasp of the legal and political system in Northern Ireland, something she did not possess before the programme started. She had also, to her surprise, realised that as a foreigner she did not have the right to vote. One thing she thought had made the programme work well was the facilitation of the various sections of the programme. She was therefore full of praise of the facilitators whom she thought were ‘very good and very approachable as well as knowledgeable’.

**3. The Impact of the Programme.**

One way in which the relevance and impact of the programme was measured was the use of surveys and in total 144 individuals completed the first questionnaire. Only 75 participants completed the questionnaire.

Participants were asked in the survey how much they felt they knew in relation to a range of issues,

ranging from ‘Human Rights issues’ to the ‘Role of the European Union’ and ‘Section 75 Legislation’. When comparing the results from the ‘pre programme’ group, and their knowledge of the various issues compared to the ‘post-programme group’, it was clear that through the programme participants had increased their knowledge of a range of issues. It was more common among participants in the ‘post programme group to refer to having ‘most knowledge’ of the issues listed compared to participants in the ‘pre programme group’.

**Table 1: Knowledge levels.** <sup>3</sup>

Issue	Most knowledge		Quite a lot of knowledge		Least knowledge	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
Human Rights issues	14	22	21	28	14	12
How laws are made	6	20	25	24	23	6
The electoral system	13	24	16	33	22	12
Politician responsibilities	13	17	21	23	25	13
Role of Belfast City Council	15	15	23	35	16	9
Role of Stormont/Assembly	12	22	23	32	23	9
Role of British Government	12	22	14	30	19	14
Role of European Union	13	23	13	31	23	6
Good Relations issues	18	44	24	22	12	
Equality issues	18	32	21	28	12	13
Culture in the workplace	16	32	25	26	17	6
Section 75 legislation	13	26	13	28	44	9
Rights of ethnic minorities	15	23	16	30	29	11
Prejudice/Stereotyping	19	31	22	27	20	9

<sup>3</sup> The number in the tables refer to percentage of individuals who answered the question.

**“Participants were asked in the survey how much they felt they knew in relation to a range of issues”.**

**“ Only 28% of respondents in a 2006 survey were aware of the legislation”.**

When asked what they felt the term citizenship meant to them, references were often made to ‘being part of a community’ or ‘belonging to a country’. References were also often made to ‘identity’.

When participants were asked in focus groups about gaining knowledge through the programme, the overall impression was an affirmative one. The following comments well illustrate this:

*‘I now have a better understanding of politics.’*  
*‘I feel I know how media works.’*  
*‘I picked up a better understanding of politics, something I was not previously interested in.’*

Some of the participants in the focus groups referred to having had ‘no idea’ about issues such as Human Rights legislation, or Section 75 and what it involved prior to the programme. Low levels of knowledge in relation to, for example Section 75 is not perhaps surprising. A survey by the Equality Commission for

-quality Commission Northern Ireland (2006a) Awareness of Equality Issues amongst the General Public in Northern Ireland. Belfast: ECNI.

Northern Ireland (ECNI) highlighted a distinct lack of public awareness around Section 75.<sup>4</sup> Only 28% of respondents in a 2006 survey were aware of the legislation, and even an awareness of the existence of the ECNI and its role would appear to be reasonably low. Even of those respondents who were aware of Section 75, 50% were unable to name any of the activities which public bodies are required to carry out under their statutory requirements.

Even though it was possible to establish higher levels of knowledge among participants in the post programme group, it was of interest to notice that when asked to rate the importance of a range of issues, that among other things, participants in the post-programme group were more likely to refer to ‘no opinion’ compared to participants in the ‘pre-programme group’. Also, even though fewer in the ‘post-programme group’ referred to issues as ‘very important’, it still remained the most ‘popular choice’ among participants.

**Table 2: Levels of importance**

Action	Very important		No opinion		Not important	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
Being a legal resident	68	61	11	12	11	15
Having a National Insurance	66	61	10	13	11	17
Having the right to vote	62	53	10	12	15	19
Participating in elections	53	36	13	23	17	20
Standing in elections	26	17	18	29	33	26
Being able to speak English	59	58	12	14	15	15
Paying taxes	49	39	23	16	9	14
Obedying the laws	66	63	7	4	12	16
Prepared to sit on a jury	32	28	23	24	19	16
Participating in community groups	44	37	20	22	9	15
Participating in political groups	23	12	26	35	25	27
Being a volunteer	38	41	27	25	9	12
Lobbying/Campaigning local government	28	21	25	27	22	25

In the pre-programme group, just over half of the sample (59%), stated that they were registered to vote and 59% said they did so regularly. Similarly, in the post-programme group just over half (56%) were registered and did so regularly. Among those who did not vote regularly, a large number referred to not being interested in politics. In some cases, participants also referred to not having the right to vote.

When asked if they were involved in volunteering, just

over half (54%) of the sample said they were involved in voluntary work. Of those who were involved in voluntary work, references were often made to churches and activities within various communities. In the post programme group, just under half (46%) of respondents said they were involved in volunteering. When asked to rate the importance of volunteering, 43% in the pre-programme group felt that it was much more important compared to 35% in the post-programme group.

**“In the pre-programme group, just over half of the sample (59%), stated that they were registered to vote”.**

**“Participants in the various focus groups referred to getting a better understanding of issues”.**

Even though the survey results might indicate that participants did not feel strongly about some of the issues listed covered in the programme, participants in the various focus groups referred to getting a better understanding of issues, such as volunteering. Even though participants in focus-groups and interviews stressed that they themselves were challenged on their stereotypes and attitudes to a variety of issues, often illustrated with comments such as:

*‘It [the programme] provided me with a better understanding of diversity and respect for diversity.’*

*‘It [the programme] helped me to challenge stereotypes.’*

*‘Through the programme I challenged myself on stereotypes and minorities.’*

*‘I learnt more about different cultures.’*

*‘[The programme] opened my eyes.’*

*‘[The programme] challenged stereotypes – did not realise how much.’*

*‘I felt enlightened.’*

In one focus group, one participant referred to the situation<sup>5</sup> for Roma people in South Belfast and where people in general had a limited understanding of the situation; participants felt that the programme had provided them with a better understanding of issues relating to such situations. This in turn had left them feeling better informed and in a position where they could challenge other individuals about stereotypes.

**Case-study 3.**

Ray is 32 and born and bred in Belfast. After secondary education at an integrated school he attended Belfast Metropolitan College and graduated with an engineering degree ‘when the recession hit’. He started to attend GEMS NI to improve his interview skills and was also told about the programme. After initially having some doubts about the programme, after the first day he started to see the relevance.

*“I think I have now a better understanding how others, such as migrants might experience things, I can see their point of view better.”*

Ray also found that through the programme he felt better prepared to handle situations he might come across in the workplace, involving, for example disability. He was also of the opinion that the programme had widened his views and understanding of a range of issues such as cultural issues as it had allowed for meetings with individuals from other countries and nationalities. He had found the programme ‘challenging’ in relation to issues such as community relations, as it had involved both ‘give and take’ as he had to share his understanding of culture and also listen to others.

Ray also felt that the facilitators had acted neutrally during the sessions and that they could see both sides of an argument or discussion. Ray also felt that he now had a better understanding of issues such as Human Rights and also Section 75, something of which he had ‘only heard about’ before starting the programme.

**Table 3: Issues of Importance.**

When participants in the survey were asked about how important they felt certain issues were, participants in the post-programme group tended - compared to the pre programme group - to refer to issues being ‘not very important’. With respect to how important participants felt certain issues were, individuals in both

groups ‘agreed’ on the issues perceived to be ‘very important’ with the only exception being participant in the ‘post programme group’ referring to ‘reducing the number of migrants’ as ‘very important’. Participants in the ‘post programme group’ tended also more frequently to refer to actions being ‘not important’.

Action	Very important		No opinion		Not important	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
Encouraging cultural diversity	54	50	17	6	5	12
Increasing shared public space	47	43	15	10	4	12
Respecting other cultures	67	58	10	8	4	10
Respecting other religions	68	61	11	5	5	15
Increasing cultural integration	51	46	20	16	5	8
Building integrated communities	51	46	17	13	6	9
Creating safer communities	73	58	10	5	6	16
Supporting integrated education	61	46	20	11	5	12
Reducing unemployment	70	57	9	10	5	18
Reducing the number of migrants	24	29	32	20	22	24
Improving training opportunities	65	51	8	9	5	13
Better cross-border links	49	41	19	20	9	13
Better links with Britain	34	33	25	27	12	12
Better links with Europe	44	41	23	20	5	15

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Guardian Thursday 18 June 2009, ‘Belfast Romanians in hiding as attacks continue’, BBC on-line, Monday 15 June, ‘Racist gang attack family’s home’.

**“I felt better prepared to handle situations I might come across in the workplace” (Ray)**

**“It also became clear that the delivery of the programme had made participants feel comfortable”.**

**4. Facilitation and Delivery by TIDES Training.**

One issue which was frequently mentioned by participants was the facilitation of the programme. Participants tended to use words such as ‘relaxed’, ‘enjoyable’ and ‘well structured’ to describe the way in which the programme was delivered. Several of the participants stressed what they described to be the benefits of the programme, often referring to what they saw as ‘informal learning’ as the programme was not driven by exams or too many written exercises. These comments were often made by individuals who recently had returned to education or who attended an educational programme for the first time.

It also became clear that the delivery of the programme had made participants feel comfortable, perhaps best illustrated by a comment made by two participants:

*‘People were encouraged to be honest and to take part in discussions.’*  
*Everyone was made feel welcome to contribute to the discussion and no-one was left to feel ‘stupid’.*

This latter comment was felt to be particularly important by a number of participants who had not been in any form of formal or informal training setting in many years. In addition, other participants further stressed the positive input made by the facilitators in involving participants in the discussions, in some cases dividing the group into smaller groups and not allowing one individual to dominate the discussion.

It is perhaps in this context also worth reiterating that issues/subjects covered in the programme tended to be what can best be described by participants as ‘controversial’ as it looked at issues such as stereotypes, racism and sectarianism. The overall feeling was however that the trainers/facilitators were very good at dealing with such issues while at the same time also involving and engaging with the participants. As a result none of the participants spoken to had at any time during the programme felt uncomfortable dealing with these subjects. References were also made about the skills of the facilitators/trainers to be able to deliver training on these issues while at the same time allowing for discussions, discussions referred to by one participants which could easily have escalated ‘beyond control’.

As highlighted above, the programme covered issues such as community and good relations. When respondents were asked in the questionnaire to prioritise a range of issues, the main issue for both groups were: ‘Better relations between Protestants and Catholics’. Whereas among participants in the pre-programme group, the second most important issue was ‘Better relations between migrant workers and locals’ in the post-programme group this was ‘replaced’ with ‘Challenging racism’. The third most important issue for the pre-programme group was ‘Less sectarianism’ whereas in the post-programme group it was ‘Better relations between migrant workers and locals’.

**Table 4: Comparing Priorities.**

Issue	Before	After
Better relations between Protestants and Catholics	77	69
Better relations between migrant workers and locals	60	51
Less sectarianism	58	44
Challenging racism	56	52
Increase in safety	55	41
Less tension at interface areas	54	49
More shared spaces	52	45
More integrated schools	47	45
Dealing with disputes over parades	42	39

The programme was originally designed to be a 4-day programme. The approach to delivery was flexible and designed to reflect participant need. For example two days a week over a longer period of time. The flexibility provided by the programme was welcomed by participants as it allowed for the accommodation of childcare and work, all of which were factors which facilitated the retention levels of participants. For some participants and trainers there was however a feeling that this degree of flexibility meant the programme/delivery lost some of its momentum as sessions were split up.

For some of the partner organisations the scheduling of a number of the training courses during June, July and August had meant that recruitment had not necessarily been as successful as anticipated. They therefore would welcome sessions later on in the year or before the summer months.

**5. Accreditation.**

There was a feeling among participants that the accreditation was important, as one participant said:

*‘It is useful to have something to show for what you have done.’*

For many of the participants this was also a factor taken into consideration when signing up for the programme. The accreditation was, as documented above, viewed as crucial by the participants, particularly as this was, in many cases, the first of their ‘diplomas’. For the partner groups the fact that the programme was OCN accredited also meant it was ‘easier to sell’ the programme.

There was an acknowledgement among participants, mentors and tutors that the programme itself provided

**“The flexibility provided by the programme was welcomed by participants as it allowed for the accommodation of childcare and work”.**

## “Participants overall praised the programme and suggested that it should be used in schools and in workplaces”.

the participants with ‘soft skills’ and not necessarily ‘practical skills’. In some cases participants would put their participation on the programme onto their CV’s/ portfolios or make use of the content of the programme in job-interviews. In another case one participant also used the programme to support in work progression/ promotion. In this case the participant referred to the programme in her line of work and in particular the diversity dimension which helped to increase awareness where she worked about such issues.

Participants also referred to talking about the programme in discussions with friends as they felt it had increased their awareness on a range of issues. What also came through in talks with participants was that for many of them this was their first experience of ‘training’ outside of school or college and as such the programme had helped to build up their confidence. For partner programmes the programme had been useful as it highlighted for potential employers that individuals were willing to learn and to take their career further, especially as the programme would highlight increased awareness on issues such as diversity.

Participants overall praised the programme and suggested that it should be used in schools and in workplaces. As two participants stated:

***‘Northern Ireland is changing...it is not like it was 20 years ago.’***

***‘Everyone should learn about these things.’***

There was also a feeling among participants and partners that the programme could benefit from having

the content of the programme described in ‘plain English what it is about’. Participants also stressed the fact that any information about the programme should also entail information on how attending the programme would benefit them beyond merely getting a certificate.

### 6. Partnership and Co-operation.

GEMS NI worked closely with the other partners in the steering group and there was an overall feeling among partners that the project as such tied into other ongoing pieces of work and as such was not operating in isolation which it was hoped would increase the long-term impact of the programme. All of the partners spoken to stressed the usefulness of the partnership and although, GEMS NI was the lead partner, other partners felt that they had had an input in the running of the programme. The regular team meetings were highlighted as a good way to share experiences and to discuss issues relating to the programme. There was a feeling that GEMS NI had as a lead partner kept all other partners well informed about the project and had co-ordinated it well. Partners also felt that GEMS NI had an ‘extensive knowledge’ of running similar programmes and had the necessary skills to do so in an organised manner.

Trainers and representatives of partner organisations felt that the lead partner had provided good guidance and co-coordinated the activities together with trainers. There was also a feeling that GEMS NI had been ‘crucial’ for the project as the lead partner and having ‘pushed’ the project and partners along.

### 7. Conclusions.

In talks with participants on the programme as well as representatives from the various partner organisations the overall impression was a positive one and individuals referred to having benefitted from the programme. This is also demonstrated by the statistics from the questionnaires, as respondents in the post-programme groups compared to the ones in the pre-programme groups, for example, were more likely to refer to ‘having most knowledge’ regarding all of the issues listed.

The programme was seen by the partner organisations and individuals as a way to engage with issues they previously might not have encountered. Even though participants on occasion were not sure about the programme content and what it did involve, the fact that the various partner organisations were in a position to inform certainly facilitated this process. The role of the various mentors was in this context beneficial.

There was a feeling that the programme had been well facilitated by the trainers which had provided a safe and secure environment while at the same dealing with controversial issues.

The close relationship between GEMS NI as the lead partner and the other organisations meant that the programme was successful in maintaining retention levels.

### 8. Recommendations.

The following are recommendations which may inform the development of the programme in future years:

1. The programme should retain its focus on the issues covered in the current programme as that participants felt it had challenged their thinking and raised their awareness.
2. There are sections of the programme, such as the one on Section 75, which could potentially be integrated into, for example induction training, diversity training and other areas with employed people but also as part of improving the employability for the harder to reach long term unemployed and economically inactive people.
3. The Programme could benefit from advertising the programme by using ‘sound bites’ or ‘testimonies’ from previous participants and trainers to inform potential participants about the content of the programme.
4. As a way of making the programme more interesting participants felt that the programme could benefit from ‘guest speakers’ so as to better illustrate sections of the programme. This could be, for example, a migrant or someone from a different cultural tradition.
5. The flexibility of the programme in relation to splitting it into sections should be kept but done in conjunction with trainers. This is important so as to retain participants while also keep a certain ‘momentum’.
6. On the basis of feedback from all stakeholders including participants, the evaluation questionnaires (whilst effective for gathering and analysing data), were viewed as over-complicated and accordingly, would benefit from revision to ensure that respondents are not overwhelmed.





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