

Biggest digital school link up set for 26 May

150 schools in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland will be taking part in a unique digital link up to celebrate the successful completion of their work in the Dissolving Boundaries programme on 26 May.

For the first time ever, pupils in primary, special and secondary schools will join together to celebrate 'Crossing the Frontier', by linking up for video-conferences with their partner school across the border, sharing work in their 'virtual classroom' and inviting parents and others in the community for a school assembly to mark the occasion.

The teachers and pupils have been working together in cross-border pairs throughout the school year using digital technology so that young people can study different aspects of the curriculum and get to know each other.

The Dissolving Boundaries programme which coordinates this work is based in the School of Education at the University of Ulster in Coleraine and in the Department of Education at NUI Maynooth, near Dublin. Staff in both universities have planned the day which will include a live video-conference link between the 2 universities when some of the students and teachers from the programme will present their work to an invited audience of civil servants, academics and advisors. Among the presentations will be work from schools that have chosen 'enterprise' as their focus, supported by the Joint Business Council, representing the CBI and IBEC, employers' organisations on both sides of the border.

26 May coincides with the release of a report from the influential National Foundation for Education research (NFER) which carried out research for the Department of Education in England on projects from around the UK that were likely to increase social cohesion. They chose Dissolving Boundaries as an outstanding example of partnership in action.

All the participating schools will be posting messages into a special forum on 26 May with participants from around the world, including pupils and teachers from Arab and Jewish schools in Israel who have been using the same approach to working together as Dissolving Boundaries.

Professor Roger Austin from the University of Ulster and Angela Rickard from NUI Maynooth who direct the programme praised the work of the Dissolving Boundaries team who have worked tirelessly for the last 10 years to support teachers and pupils, some 36000 since the programme started in 1999.

Roger Austin said, 'We know for sure now that working together online sustains the contacts made face to face and helps to build trust and respect between young people from different backgrounds and cultures. This is not only important for their lives as future citizens but will help them take their place in the global knowledge-based economy'.

Ian McMorris, chairman of the Joint Business Council Education Committee said: 'This event showcases the collaborative work on enterprise by students and teachers north and south. The longer term benefit associated with this initiative is the positioning of enterprise in the broader

schools' curriculum. The mainstreaming of enterprise education at primary and secondary level, the need for the development of programme resources and teacher training as well as accreditation of such programmes within the curriculum will be critical in building the entrepreneurial capacity of the all-island economy.'