

**STRATEGIC PLAN**  
**APR 2024 – MAR 2027**

***‘Peace Builds at the Speed of Trust’***

## **Extending the Term of the Strategic Plan:**

CRIS consulted on and developed this strategy in 2021, during the COVID 19 pandemic. The original term of the strategy was to span three full years 2022 – 2025. During this time, as like most organisations CRIS met severe disruption to our normal operations. However, over the course of two years CRIS successfully innovated and adapted many of its programmes to be delivered digitally. For some programme areas this was feasible such as some Good Relations pupil programming and areas-based collaboration work with schools. However, many areas of work were not possible to continue delivery on and as such several work streams were put on hold.

In recent research study it is cited that, *'A majority of trustees say their charities halted some or all services or activities during the pandemic. A quarter of the smallest charities (with incomes of less than £10k) halted all services or activities, whilst around one in six of all charities started new activity to respond to the crisis. Over a third moved some of their services or activities online, with a fifth adapting how they worked in other ways'* ([Charity trustee research 2021: web version - GOV.UK](#))

During the initial term of its strategy, CRIS is fortunate to have found ways to continue to work within its mission, *'to inspire and equip whole school communities as powerful catalysts for peace and reconciliation'*. However, there is no doubt that the momentum and impact of our work in communities was compromised during the pandemic.

The Board of CRIS and management team have reviewed the current strategy and are content that its revised vision, mission, values and aims continue to be relevant and in sync with CRIS's current schemes of work, development priorities and the wider policy context within which it operates.

CRIS has taken external consultative advice on the extension of its strategy to cover the period April 2025 – March 2027. The Board is satisfied that the rationale to roll the strategy on for a further two years is sound. This will enable CRIS to achieve the reach and impact goals initially envisioned. The CRIS management team will develop an operations plan in collaboration with the wider programme staff and its partners to ensure that projected outcomes are realised during the extension period.

The CRIS Board has formally approved the extension of this strategy on Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> November 2024. The Board and CEO have also agreed to begin the preparatory work to consult on and develop a new strategy throughout 2026. This will ensure a smooth transition to a new strategy cycle in 2027.

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## Mission, Vision and Values

### *Peace Builds at the Speed of Trust*

#### **MISSION**

To inspire and equip whole school communities as powerful catalysts for peace and reconciliation.

#### **VISION**

An inclusive and dynamic society, built on respect and trust, where all children and young people can reach their true potential.

#### **VALUES**

We are guided by the following values:

##### ***PEACE***

*We believe peace is always possible.*

We are committed to active peacemaking as a daily challenge in creating relationships of trust and understanding - a peace that celebrates diversity and positively equips people to address conflicts.

We work towards peace that values the everyday role we can all play in restoring relationships and building an inclusive, just society.

##### ***TRUST***

*We believe trust is the glue that binds relationships, enabling people to feel safe and live and work together.*

Building trust is at the heart of our approach.

We invest in, and are committed to, the quality, authenticity, and integrity of our ability to nurture good working relationships.

##### ***HOPE***

*We cherish hope as a motivational force for social change and peace.*

School communities hold enormous potential as places of transformation for young people, their families and wider society.

By harnessing hopes and collective action, we can build peace and reconciliation together.

## **RESPECT**

*We believe that every life is a unique gift to the world. We share a common humanity in which each person is of inherent worth.*

Society is enriched by the diversity of its people. Each of our lives is affected by, and affects, the lives of others.

We treat everyone with dignity and respect. We strive to build an intercultural shared society which understands and values our interdependence.

## **COLLABORATION**

*We believe that collaboration is crucial in building reconciliation. Together we can create a society where everyone can thrive.*

Collaboration provides a space for shared ideas, understanding, and collective action.

It creates common purpose, cohesion and a sense of belonging. Collaboration enriches the holistic educational experience and improves outcomes for all. It better prepares our young people for living in a diverse world.

We strive to include all stakeholders to be active contributors. We listen to and learn from our partners to innovate for peace.

## Strategy Overview

Community Relations in Schools (CRIS) was established in Northern Ireland in 1984 out of a context of a violent political conflict. Founders believed there was a unique role for education to play in supporting communities to tackle historic prejudices, promote sustainable long-term peaceful conflict resolution and to build social trust and reconciliation. Despite our formal peace accord in 1998, many aspects of life and living remain divided, most notably that of our separate education system. The work of CRIS remains as relevant as ever as we seek to build relationships of trust between communities, to support the development of a positive and durable peace. We are continually motivated by a foundational assertion, *'Peace Builds at the Speed of Trust'* which is rooted in our organisational values and lived out in all we do.

This strapline supports all our strategic initiatives. Everyone associated with CRIS is energised by the notion that activities anchored in trusting relationships, have the potential to realise a peaceful and reconciled society in Northern Ireland. Rooted within our relationships with local schools, we extend an invitation to community members to join with us to fulfil our vision – *'An inclusive and dynamic society, based on respect and trust, where all children and young people can reach their true potential.'*

The aims priorities, and initiatives which guided the creation of this strategy came through times of listening, learning, and deep reflection on our peacebuilding initiatives. Over several decades we have captured our peacebuilding practice within our developmental model aptly named GRACE. GRACE (*Good Relations and Collaborative Education*) guides our work which is now rooted in seven localities deeply impacted by the legacy of the conflict within Northern Ireland.

Since our last strategy, we note several striking shifts within our macro level environment: BREXIT and questions regarding the constitutional status of Northern Ireland, ongoing instability within Stormont, and recently the seismic challenges regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. All these factors present a backdrop by which our organisation must navigate to deliver on our promises to the community through our strategy.

Based on our partnerships and relationships, rooted in trust building, we believe it is an imperative to support parents and carers to become active participants in their own peace building endeavour. We capture this notion within the potential that all can participate as an 'everyday peacebuilder.' Tapping knowledge and voices of our grassroots families, schools, and

marginalised communities, we explore new ways to counter the systemic divisions which impact most aspects of lives, homes, and schools.

CRIS, as a trusted intermediary, provides the space, support and the tools to co-design systems and programs which contribute to flourishing communities.

Over the next three-years our strategy will focus on three Aims:

- AIM 1 – Catalysing for Peace and Reconciliation with schools individually, in their ‘twinning’ partnerships and within their localities.
- AIM 2 – Equipping and Inspiring the Education Sector through training, facilitation, public policy development, research, and evaluation.
- AIM 3 – Sustaining and Growing the organisation to achieve our Mission through investment in our people, financial stewardship and fundraising, communication, and governance.

As we approach our 40<sup>th</sup> year, we are ever compelled to sustain and grow the organisation to bolster our contribution to a reconciled Northern Ireland. This strategy renews our sense of urgency to journey with the community to build peace, communicate aspirations of community members, and to share the alternative stories of hope we experience each day.

CRIS is in a unique position at a time where a significant pivot towards a reconciliation mindset is most necessary. Despite the obvious challenges, it is an exciting time for CRIS to embark on these next steps as we nurture relationships, build trust, and join with students, families, community members, academics, and politicians in an everyday peacebuilding approach.

## Aims & Priorities

### Aim 1 - Catalysing Peace and Reconciliation

#### School Partnerships

**Sub-Aim 1.1:** *To expand the work with school partnerships and individual schools to build their confidence and capacity to engage in wider and deeper collaboration.*

Priorities for development:

- Engage with an increased number of individual schools, using a ‘whole school’ approach, to build their confidence and capacity to engage in peacebuilding and collaboration
- Develop, and support, an increasing number of cross-sectoral school partnerships to build their confidence and capacity to engage in peacebuilding and collaboration
- Consolidate and deepen partnership working between schools so they are increasingly interdependent, self-sustaining ‘hubs’ of intergenerational peacebuilding engagement

#### Locality Partnerships

**Sub-Aim 1.2:** *To build and support multi-sector collaborative education partnerships within localities to develop, have impact and become more sustainable.*

Priorities for development:

- Build and develop multi-sector collaboration between multiple school communities within identified geographical locations
- Build relationships with relevant bodies in supporting and formalising the development of multi-sector collaborative partnerships
- Support the sharing of effective practice and learning across localities
- Encourage learning exchanges and visiting between partnerships
- Co-design locality programmes and activities

### Aim 2 - Equipping and Inspiring the Education Sector

#### Training and Facilitation

**Sub-Aim 2.1:** *To support the learning and development of educators on building mutual understanding and effective collaboration.*

Priorities for development:

- Build CRIS’s training curricula, materials and high-quality resources

- Support the implementation of the curriculum through Personal Development & Mutual Understanding (PD&MU), Learning for Life & Work (LLW) and Local & Global Citizenship
- Build CRIS's e-learning expertise and high-quality online resources
- Deliver effective training with student teachers and youth workers
- Deliver effective training with school leaders, teachers and non-teaching staff
- Deliver effective programmes and training with parents/carers
- Increase engagement with governors

### **Supporting Public Policy Development**

**Sub-Aim 2.2:** *To contribute to the development of public policy and practice so it supports reconciliation and the development of collaboration in the school system.*

Priorities for development:

- Develop, implement and review a strategy for influencing public policy and practice
- Develop, implement and review specific public policy campaigns, where possible in partnership with others
- Articulate and disseminate the educational, social and economic benefits of reconciliation-orientated work with schools
- Build relationships with public policy decision-makers and those who can influence public policy locally and regionally

### **Research and Evaluation**

**Sub-Aim 2.3:** *To be recognised for its expert knowledge and evidence-based practice on school-based peacebuilding and collaboration.*

Priorities for development:

- Build CRIS's expertise in evaluating community relations work in an educational context
- Build CRIS's knowledge of effective international practice
- Develop, implement and review a research strategy
- Access appropriate external research expertise
- Promote effective internal reflective practice, supporting learning and innovation
- Build, implement and review an organisation-wide framework for measuring success
- Ensure that the desired outcomes of CRIS's work are effectively articulated and its impact robustly evaluated with lessons disseminated
- Provide guidance to schools and education bodies on the monitoring and evaluating of, and learning from collaborative peace building practice

### **Aim 3: Sustaining and Growing the organisation to achieve our Mission**

#### **Our People**

**Sub-Aim 3.1:** To ensure that CRIS has the talent required to achieve its mission and they are effectively supported, engaged, and given the opportunity to develop.

Priorities for development:

- Ensure that CRIS has the staff it requires to achieves its aims and objectives
- Ensure the working environment remains safe, engaging, and a fulfilling place to work
- Ensure that CRIS fulfils its requirements as a responsible employer
- Strengthen the CRIS ethos as a learning organisation through investment in reflective practice and personal and professional development
- Ensure staff are provided with appropriate support and leadership
- Plan for timely and responsible succession for long-term sustainability
- Build the base of CRIS associates and ensure they are effectively recruited, inducted, supported and engaged

#### **Finance**

**Sub-Aim 3.2:** *To ensure that CRIS generates sufficient income to be successful and sustainable and its financial and physical resources are effectively managed.*

Priorities for development:

- Develop, implement and review an income generation strategy
- Ensure CRIS generates sufficient unrestricted income to achieve its aims and objectives in order to be sustainable
- Maximise appropriate grant sources within CRIS's mission and aims
- Maintain strong relationships with funding bodies and ensure compliance with funders reporting requirements
- Ensure CRIS has effective up-to-date financial planning, management, reporting and audit processes
- Agree, and regularly review, a reserves policy and ensure it is effectively implemented
- Ensure CRIS has appropriate premises, and these are effectively managed
- Ensure CRIS has the other physical resources it requires to be effective

#### **Communications**

**Sub-Aim 3.3:** *To effectively promote CRIS to grow its reputation, profile and influence.*

Priorities for development:

- Develop, implement and review a communications strategy
- Ensure CRIS has a distinctive and authentic brand identity
- Build awareness of CRIS within the education sector and wider society
- Ensure CRIS is effectively promoted to the public through traditional and social media
- Ensure the website is fit-for-purpose, up-to-date and aligned to CRIS Communication strategy

### **Governance**

***Sub-Aim 3.4:*** *To ensure the governance of CRIS complies with the requirements of the law and best practice.*

Priorities for development:

- Ensure the board has the skills and diversity required to govern effectively
- Ensure the board has the appropriate structure and office-bearers
- CRIS has an appropriate legal status and complies with its legal and regulatory responsibilities as a charity
- Ensure CRIS has the appropriate organisational frameworks, policies and procedures which are effectively implemented and regularly reviewed
- Ensure CRIS meets its responsibilities in relation to health & safety
- Develop an appropriate business model for CRIS
- Ensure the board manages risk appropriately
- Ensure CRIS fulfils its safeguarding responsibilities
- Ensure CRIS has an appropriate strategic plan and develops, implements and monitors its annual operational plans, to drive the implementation of the strategic plan
- Ensure CRIS's work is appropriately monitored, evaluated and organisational learning is assessed
- Develop, implement and review an environmental sustainability strategy

## Annex A: Glossary

### Children/ Young People Engaged

- **Definition:** Children/ young people who are participants in CRIS programmes and activities.
- **Measurement:** Primary Beneficiary is the number of distinct children who have received at least 4 educational sessions and/or 4 Buddy Up! contact sessions.
- Secondary beneficiary is the number of distinct children who have been involved in programmes and activities made possible by CRIS' work with schools (i.e., CRIS directly helped access funding etc.)

### Parents/ Carers Engaged

- **Definition:** Parents/Carers refers to any adult participant linked to a pupil who is involved in a CRIS programme and/ or activities.
- **Measurement:** The number of distinct adult participants whether they are involved once or multiple times in any given year.

### Teachers/ Principals Engaged

- **Definition:** A teacher/principal who engage with CRIS programmes and activities through a range of individual or blended methods such as attendance at training, co-delivery of pupil programmes, whole school and partnership development work, sourcing of funding, and/ or other forms of consultation.
- **Measurement:** The number of individual distinct Teachers/ Principals who engage with CRIS.

### Schools Engaged

- **Definition:** Schools who participate in programmes and activities at various stages of the GRACE model 1-5 (either through funding or consultancy work)
- **Measurement:** The number of individual schools who engage with CRIS at any stage of GRACE 1-5.
- **Journey of Engagement:** For an outline of the seven phases and key activities involved in the CRIS Journey of Engagement (regardless of a schools individual 'partnership status') please see pages 15 - 17 for more information.

### School Partnership and 'Partnership Status'

- **Definition:** A school partnership is usually a twinning of two schools (sometimes three) who work with each other, bringing pupils and staff (and sometimes parents) together for shared programmes and activities. CRIS support schools to strengthen their partnership work, and also support schools to find and form new partnerships.
- **Measurement:** The *GRACE Model* is used to identify the stage of partnership working. Indicators for each stage of GRACE help to refine the measurement of school partnership working.

- **Measurement Clarification:** The formation of ‘new’ school partnerships, supported by CRIS will be counted separate from development work to existing school partnerships
- **Partnership status:** Schools often vary in the nature and depth of their ‘partnership status’ when they first engage with CRIS. There are three broad categories of ‘partnership status’ including.
  1. Individual schools who have no partner
  2. Schools who are in a recently formed partnership (could be over the last one to five years)
  3. Schools who have longer standing partnerships, (five years with some as longstanding as 20 years).

### Fully Resourced Programmes

- **Definition:** Educational resources to support pupils and / or teachers to build key knowledge, skills and attitudes to support personal development and mutual understanding. Resources support peace education w/ children; equip teachers through training; and/or support collaboration with school partnerships and within localities.
- **Measurement:** Quality of and uptake for ‘new fully resourced programmes’ educational resources developed.

### GRACE Model (Good Relations and Collaborative Education)

- **Definition:** GRACE is a five stage, relationship focussed model of practice aimed to support whole school communities to work towards increasing reconciliation through collaborative educational partnerships.
- **Measurement:** Five stages of collaboration will be further refined to include indicators linked to each stage to help guide schools in their own development.

### Locality Partnerships

- **Definition:** CRIS support of a group of local schools and other statutory and community stakeholders to use collaboration to advance shared reconciliation goals and to address common interests within their local district council areas. Locality partnerships can range in size from 6 – 20 schools.
- **Measurement:** Number of locality-based partnerships regardless of stage of development (scoping/developing/ formalising/ independence)

### Resources Raised

- **Definition:** Resources refer to all financial and gift-in-kind resources which flow into CRIS on an annual basis. Including, but not limited to, grants, individual donations, corporate donations, service feeds and gift-in-kind
- **Measurement:** The GBP value of all financial and gift-in-kind donations as recorded in NI Charity Commission annual reporting.

### Whole School Approach

- **Definition:** The ‘Whole School Approach’ is embedded within the *GRACE* model and commits to, (where possible), take a systemic approach to reconciliation and peacebuilding by including all members/stakeholders in a school community (pupils, parents/ carers, teachers, teaching assistants, non-teaching staff, senior management, Board of Governors) in activities which encourage sharing, relationship & trust building and mutual understanding.
- **Measurement:** The range of stakeholders and quality of engagement from the above-named groups involved in CRIS’s peace and reconciliation programming from the school community.

#### List of Acronyms

- EA – Education Authority
- ETI - Education Training Inspectorate
- CSSC – Controlled School Support Council
- CCMS – Catholic Council for Maintained Schools
- *Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta* - Irish Medium Council
- NICIE – Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education
- RoI – Republic of Ireland

## ANNEX B

### JOURNEY OF ENGAGEMENT: DEVELOPING A CRIS SCHOOL-PARTNERSHIP

Schools who work with CRIS usually follow a series of seven phases on their journey of engagement. At the outset schools engaged often have varying '*partnership status*' such as individual schools who have no partner; schools who are in a recently formed partnership; or schools who have longer standing partnerships, of which some may span over fifteen years. Regardless of the '*partnership status*' of each school, CRIS most often works with schools individually as well as supporting the development of their school-twinning/ partnership and/or wider locality collaboration.

CRIS works in a bespoke way with each school who we engage, and we seek to provide context relevant advice, support, and resourcing to enable progression through various stages of CRIS' *Good Relations and Collaborative Education* (GRACE) model.

At the heart of all our work with schools is a focus on relationship and trust building. CRIS supports schools to have a meaningful engagement enabling the co-design of processes that maximises the potential for positive outcomes and impacts on reconciliation and education.

The diagram below summaries the seven phases involved in our *journey of engagement* to develop a CRIS-School partnership (i.e. a school that partners with CRIS).

Each of the seven phases detailed below is independent and relies on progress made at the former phase for positive momentum building towards capacity building, partnership and collaboration.



#### KEY ACTIVITIES AT EACH PHASE:

1. **WELCOME & INVITATION:** CRIS meets with School Leadership (SL) to explore possible partnership.
2. **CONTEXT ASSESSMENT & SCOPING:** Together CRIS and SL consider school and wider context and how partnership can support a whole school approach to building Good Relations and Collaborative Education (GRACE).
3. **CREATING A DEVELOPMENT PLAN:** Based on context assessment, CRIS will work with school to create a GRACE development plan and, if feasible, identify internal stakeholders to champion and embed values and practices.
4. **IMPLEMENTATION:** CRIS supports schools to work to implement identified areas of development. CRIS will regularly link with identified champions to assess whole school engagement.
5. **EVALUATION:** CRIS will work with schools and champions to assess progress and next steps, and where relevant, use the GRACE Impact Framework Tacker (GIFT).
6. **GROWTH:** After Evaluation, School and CRIS identify areas for growth aligned to GRACE model Stages 1-5 and activities at levels 2-6 of the Journey of engagement are repeated.

7. **GRACE SCHOOLS OF EXCELLENCE:** Schools who have deep and wide engagement and commitment to GRACE may be asked to become exemplar to showcase best practice. For example, if Buddy Up has been implemented these schools may be awarded a kite mark for Buddy Up! Such schools continue to work with CRIS as allies, in further leadership development and/or for GRACE sustainability and regeneration or any further support as needed.

Also see **GRACE model digital media resource** case studies for examples of GRACE schools of excellence across GRACE Stages 1 – 5 (<https://www.crisni.org/the-grace-model>)

#### **EXIT STRATEGY:**

After substantial investment and progress, and after mutually discussion has been made with stakeholders within an identified locality (such as e.g. Cookstown where CRIS worked from 2009 – 2015), CRIS may reduce support and shift resources towards a new locality. On occasion CRIS may be approached to support further capacity building in schools and other forms of consultation and support in areas where it no longer views as a base for operations.