

Making education an election issue

Ahead of the general election, TUI posed a series of questions on key issues to the main political parties. Responses received are set out below.



CASUALISATION/DIFFERENTIATED PAY SCALES

A very significant proportion of teachers and lecturers suffer as a result of part-time hours/low pay, insecure employment or both. 30% of TUI members at second-level are employed on a temporary and/or part time basis, and this proportion grows to 50% for those under 35. In addition, teachers who entered the profession since February 2012 have been placed on a severely reduced rate of pay, vis a vis their colleagues.

Does your party/group commit to fully addressing the crisis of casualisation in education and to removal of the unfair, exploitative and inequitable measures that see many teachers, employed since February 2012, being paid a significantly lower rate than their colleagues for carrying out the same work?



Jan O'Sullivan TD, Minister for Education and Skills

It is essential that teaching remains a high-status profession in Ireland, and part of making that a reality is making sure that teachers can benefit from secure, rewarding careers, with well-defined paths to promotion.

One essential piece of this work is tackling casualisation amongst the teaching profession. We are proud to have established the expert group, chaired by Peter Ward, which produced recommendations on tackling casualisation in the school sector, and we are fully implementing the recommendations made by the expert group – reducing the amount of time it takes to get job security, and making it easier for those working part-time to increase their hours and to have these additional hours added to their permanent/indefinite duration contracts.

I am committed to replicating this work at third-level, and await the report of the expert group examining casualisation at that level.



Jonathan O'Brien TD, Sinn Féin spokesperson on education

Sinn Féin condemned the 14% cut in pay and the loss of allowances for newly qualified teachers when they were introduced by this government and we believe that it has badly damaged the morale that is essential within a classroom setting, given that new teachers are earning over €11,000 less than their colleagues recruited in 2011. This is compounded by many teachers who are working on part-time contracts. Our view is that we should work towards putting all newly qualified teachers on the same rate of pay as their counterparts so that they are getting equal pay for equal work.



Charlie McConalogue TD, Fianna Fáil spokesperson on education

New entrants to the teaching profession do not receive the same allowances as longer serving teachers, which cannot be justified and is corrosive of morale within schools. In further pay agreements, we believe there should be a focus on equalising pay for new entrants and we are committed to restoring full equality of treatment for teachers.

On casualisation, we welcome the implementation of Ward Report recommendations on redeployment eligibility for Teachers covering for a secondment or career break, which will mean that teachers in temporary positions become eligible for a Contract of Indefinite Duration (CID) after two years of teaching. We will ensure full implementation of the Report's recommendations for further reduction in workforce casualisation.



Paul Murphy TD, on behalf of Anti-Austerity Alliance

It is scandalous that about one-third of secondary teachers are in part-time, insecure contracts, unable to make ends meet while doing a stressful and responsible job. More permanent teaching posts must be created and the scandal of casualisation ended. The AAA believes the diminishing of pay and conditions that was carried out in the public sector since 2008 should be reversed. All teachers employed on contracts with inferior pay and conditions should have their contracts brought in line with other teachers employed prior to the crisis.



THIRD LEVEL CRISIS

Funding for the Institute of Technology sector was cut by 35% (€190m) between 2008 and 2015. Over the same time period, lecturer numbers fell by 9.5% (535) while student numbers rose by a staggering 32% (21,411). This is having a direct, negative impact on the student experience of higher education and the working conditions of academics. Lecturing hours in the sector are far in excess of international norms (18 to 20 hours compared to 8 to 10 hours) and a survey carried out by TUI earlier this year shows that lecturers are experiencing high levels of work related stress as a result of cutbacks and rationalisation measures in the sector

Does your party/group commit to a restoration of funding to Institutes of Technology and an urgent improvement of the student/academic staff ratio in third level institutions from the current high of 20:1 to, as a starting point, the OECD average of 16:1?



Jan O'Sullivan TD, Minister for Education and Skills

The future funding of higher education is an issue that must be dealt with early in the lifetime of the next Government. The report of the future funding group will not be prescriptive, but will identify the funding options that need to be considered to ensure that we protect the high quality of our higher education sector. In advance of that report, the Labour Party will unveil a short-term programme to immediately begin reinvesting in higher education as part of our manifesto.



Jonathan O'Brien TD, Sinn Féin spokesperson on education

Sinn Féin believes that we must work towards addressing the crisis in the third level sector that has resulted in increased casualization and over-burdening of staff. We are committed towards working progressively to reduce student/academic staff ratios.



Charlie McConalogue TD, Fianna Fáil spokesperson on education

Fianna Fáil is committed to significantly increasing the average per capita Recurrent Grant from the exchequer to Universities and to IoTs; which will enable HEIs to reduce the student/academic staff ratios to a level commensurate with a higher quality student/ lecturer engagement.

We will address the chronic under-funding of capital infrastructure in HEIs by committing to new five-year funding cycle for the PRTL Scheme. The purpose of this Scheme will be to provide a fund to develop new projects as well as to refurbish projects for which PRTL provided funding under the various schemes introduced by Fianna Fáil. In broad terms, this will be conducted along the same lines as the PRTL and will be linked to stated strategic objectives and outcomes which reflect the priorities of any given institution as well as State policy.



Paul Murphy TD, on behalf of Anti-Austerity Alliance


The cuts in funding and staffing in IoTs are creating a severe crisis. The AAA believes that the cuts in funding and in staff must be reversed. We support the student/staff ratio to be brought to 16:1.

3?

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES OF FURTHER EDUCATION

While Budget 2016 allowed for some minor improvement, cuts to guidance counselling provision and the moratorium on the filling of posts of responsibility (such as Year Head) will continue to make it unacceptably difficult for schools to make timely interventions to support those students struggling either with aspects of their education or a personal crisis.


Does your party/group agree to lift the moratorium on the filling of posts of responsibility and to restore guidance counselling provision to its pre-2012 levels in the interests of student welfare and pastoral care?



Jan O'Sullivan TD, Minister for Education and Skills

The Labour Party wholeheartedly believes in the need to support school leadership. In Government, we have established a new Centre for School Leadership, with a ring-fenced budget to provide greater mentoring, support and qualifications for school leaders and those aspiring to leadership positions.


In the last Budget, I secured 550 additional teachers on top of those required for demographic growth, to be deployed in post-primary schools. 250 posts will also be used to enhance the role of deputy principals at post-primary level in schools with less than 500 students – the first step in rolling out a more comprehensive middle management structure in all second-level schools. Improving guidance counselling support in post primary schools will be a priority for the remaining additional posts.



Jonathan O'Brien TD, Sinn Féin spokesperson on education

Sinn Féin is committed for working towards lifting the moratorium on posts of responsibility in schools and restoring the previous guidance counselling allocation system.


We recognise that schools already disadvantaged by the consistent education budget cuts were doubly affected by the imposition of the moratorium on appointments to posts of responsibility (PORs) which has had serious consequences, particularly in terms of school management. As a result of these cuts, subjects are being dropped from the list of options available to senior cycle students and combining higher and ordinary level students in the one class has become an increasingly common occurrence.



Charlie McConalogue TD, Fianna Fáil spokesperson on education

The current situation and attitude to leadership and management in schools is unsustainable. Fianna Fáil is committed to giving schools one administration day per week for teaching principals and to rebuilding middle management structures within schools by removing the moratorium on posts of responsibility for assistant principals, ensuring that any additional posts are used to meet broader curriculum objectives of individual schools, including ICT, special needs education, pastoral care, and mentoring/induction/ CPD of teachers.

Fianna Fáil believes the role of guidance counselling is critical, broadening students' future education and career path choices. Guidance Counsellors are the only persons in a school setting professionally qualified to provide guidance counselling to students. One of Fianna Fáil's key education priorities for the next government will be to restore the Ex Quota Guidance Counselling to all Schools.



Paul Murphy TD, on behalf of Anti-Austerity Alliance


The cuts to guidance counsellors has been one of many cuts made in education that has had a major impact on students who need support and assistance. The AAA calls for the cuts to guidance counselling to be immediately reversed and for extra resources to be put towards assisting students in their academic and career choices, as well as in their personal welfare.

4?

RISING STUDENT NUMBERS


Student numbers in second level schools will continue to rise sharply over the next decade (Department of Education and Skills projections predict a 19.4% increase in student numbers at second level between 2015 and 2025).

Does your party/group agree, at a minimum, to maintain current staffing ratios while taking account of the need for significant additional resources and supports necessitated by the huge projected rise in student numbers?




Jan O'Sullivan TD, Minister for Education and Skills

We are committed to continuing to provide the posts necessary to meet demographic growth, and are also proposing a significant reduction in the pupil-teacher ratio in second-level schools, the details of which will be outlined in our manifesto over the coming weeks.




Jonathan O'Brien TD, Sinn Féin spokesperson on education

Many children are taught in unacceptably overcrowded classrooms and Sinn Féin agrees that smaller classes benefit students. We are committed to ensuring that class sizes do not grow with expanding numbers attending schools.



Charlie McConalogue TD, Fianna Fáil spokesperson on education

Yes. Fianna Fáil is fully committed to increasing the number of teachers at second level to meet demographic demands up to 2021, projected to be approximately 2,050 post-primary posts above 2015/2016 numbers.



Paul Murphy TD, on behalf of Anti-Austerity Alliance


Yes, but we go further and believe that there should be a reversal of the cuts made to staffing hours and posts. The current standard second level pupil teacher ratio of 19:1 must be brought down, as it has created unacceptably large class sizes; a more difficult learning and teaching environment; and less subject choice for students.

5?

BUREAUCRATISATION OF TEACHING AND LECTURING


Research and experience shows that teaching in Ireland has become increasingly pressurised for a variety of reasons. Increased and often bureaucratic workload is central to this change. Teachers in England are leaving the profession in large numbers during the early career stage because of workload problems. It is in nobody's interest that this destabilising phenomenon be replicated in this country.

Does your party/group agree to engage meaningfully with TUI and other unions to address our sincere concerns that teachers and lecturers are being increasingly deflected from their key roles of teaching and learning?




Jan O'Sullivan TD, Minister for Education and Skills

There are a range of other issues of concern to TUI members – from the administrative burden on those working in education, to the development of Technological Universities, to the development of the Further Education and Training sector. Just as I did in relation to reform of Junior Cycle, I am committed to a process of ongoing engagement with the TUI, to deliver improvements to education that will benefit all of society, and in particular both those in education, and those delivering that education.




Jonathan O'Brien TD, Sinn Féin spokesperson on education

Sinn Féin are committed to working and engaging meaningfully with trade unions across sectors, and indeed share many of the concerns raised by the TUI. We have been active on the issues of capitation grants, cuts of guidance counselling, and the need to increase resource teaching, as well as supporting teachers throughout their advocacy on the new Junior Cycle. We will continue this work.



Charlie McConalogue TD, Fianna Fáil spokesperson on education

Yes. We are committed to engagement with both teachers and lecturers on issues which are corrosive of morale and on any perceived barriers to more effective teaching and research.



Paul Murphy TD, on behalf of Anti-Austerity Alliance

Successive governments have placed an undue burden on teachers, with bureaucratic demands. We will engage with the TUI and any union or group of workers. We believe that teachers, like workers in any sector, know their job and workplace best. The education system must be democratised with teachers being brought into the heart of the management of schools and the education system. Alongside this, resources must be given to teachers and schools that allow for teachers to be free to put their energies into teaching and supporting their students to learn and develop.



LACK OF APPROPRIATE CAREER STRUCTURES FOR EDUCATIONALISTS IN FURTHER EDUCATION

Owing to the extension of the moratorium on the filling of public service posts to many areas in the further education, adult and community education sectors, there is a dearth of career opportunities for educationalists (eg teachers) in this area. Of particular note is the prevalence of the so-called ‘tutor’ grade, paid hourly, without the standard benefits available to other public servants such as access to paid maternity leave and an incremental pay-scale.

Does your party/group agree to engage fully with TUI to ensure that further education, adult and community education is secured as a properly staffed and properly funded system established and protected for the public good, and further ensure that those employed in this sector are valued in the same manner as other public sector educationalists?



Jan O'Sullivan TD, Minister for Education and Skills

See answer 5 on previous page.



Jonathan O'Brien TD, Sinn Féin spokesperson on education

Sinn Féin believes education should be freely available as a right and publicly funded. We are committed to working with all stakeholders to ensure that this is realised. Indeed in our last budget proposals we recommended increasing the capitation 2% for VTOS, YouthReach, BTEI, PLC and Adult Literacy. We are of the view that teachers and educationalists across the sector should be valued.



Charlie McConologue TD, Fianna Fáil spokesperson on education

Contract employment in both FEIs and HEIs is denying both Educationalists as well as Researchers access to many of the employment conditions and opportunities that are crucial to their long-term success. We are committed to a full review of work practices and conditions both sectors and taking necessary legislative measures to reduce the interminable reliance on contract employment and casualisation in these sectors.



Paul Murphy TD, on behalf of Anti-Austerity Alliance

Yes, we are always happy to engage with the TUI, or any union or group of workers, about the situation they face in their workplace or sector. We oppose the casualisation of work in education across the economy. We believe that all teachers and educationalists should be on decent pay and have decent conditions. We also believe there needs to be a massive expansion of further education, adult and community education in order to allow everyone have access to lifelong learning. As a step towards this, we call for the cuts to spending and staffing made since 2008 in education to be immediately reversed.

At the time of going to press, responses had not been received from Fine Gael, People Before Profit Alliance, Renua or the Social Democrats.