

**Teachers’ Union of Ireland**

**DRAFT Response to DES Consultation on “Advancing School Autonomy in Ireland”**

**(January 2016)**

TUI represents education staff (16,000+) employed by Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and in Community and Comprehensive (C&C) Schools, teachers in further and adult education and lecturers and researchers in the Institutes of Technology. Following a request for submissions on “*Advancing School Autonomy in Ireland”* from the DES, TUI respectfully makes the enclosed points.

Overview

TUI wishes to immediately put on record its opposition to large parts of the document drawn up by the DES. This TUI submission will deal with issues on a point by point basis but cannot overstate the absolute opposition of our members to any proposal to bring in a system similar to ‘academies’ as practised in the United Kingdom (UK).

Funding

Not only does the evidence from the UK show that ‘academies’ don’t work, but they don’t work at a horrendous price to the taxpayer, not to mention the education system. The Irish education system has been the victim of repeated cutbacks in recent years. Some of those cutbacks are set out in Appendix One. Is the DES willing to fund ‘academies’ in a similar way to how they are funded in the UK i.e. c.stg£22million (approximately €29.8m) per academy in once-off funding (Adonis, 2012)? If so, where is the €21.87bn (yes billion) to support 734 second-level schools to convert to ‘academies’ going to come from when the DES isn’t even able to afford the €24m necessary to pay for restoration of the full ex-quota guidance service, or the over €700m required for full implementation of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004. The above funding doesn’t include ongoing costs. Adonis (2012: 203), a government minister who was the driving force behind ‘academies’ in the UK, has stated that the typical academy at second-level “has about 1,000 pupils and an annual budget of about £6 million”. This is funding of a scale that Irish schools can only dream of. A rough estimate for a similarly sized school in Ireland, including staff costs, would be approximately €5m (about stg£3.7m). Adonis also argues that starting salaries for headteachers should be £100,000 (approximately €136,000), again a figure Irish educationalists cannot imagine. Despite this wealth of investment, Adonis (page 217) acknowledges that

*“About 20 percent of England’s teacher trainees drop out within two years and nearly half drop out within five years, compared to less than 3 percent a year in the world’s best education systems.”*

TUI assumes that this is not the sort of results of school autonomy that the DES is aiming for.

If the DES has access to dramatic additional funding over forthcoming years, then Teachers’ Union of Ireland recommends that the DES should, in marking the centenary of the Proclamation of the Irish Republic, cherish all the children of the nation equally by providing for

* a significant increase in investment in public education and frank recognition of the necessity for such an increase in the context of the development of a knowledge economy and knowledge society.
* full implementation of the EPSEN Act 2004
* explicit identification of, and commensurate investment in, further and higher education as essential components of the public education system and the social contract
* rejection of privatisation of public education services
* a statement of government policy and intent entirely to exclude education from the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP)
* significant amelioration of the Employment Control Framework as a first step towards its removal
* increased academic staffing levels for Institutes of Technology in recognition of the urgent need to restore appropriate standards of provision to students and to arrest and reverse the casualisation and demoralisation of academic staff
* targeted improvement in the pupil/teacher ratio at second level and in further education, with an initial focus on tackling and overcoming the disabling effects of educational disadvantage - in the context of which guidance counselling needs to be prioritised. DEIS and School Completion Programmes must, at a very minimum, continue to be funded at their current levels
* further reduction in state support for schools that employ exclusionary practices and that raise very significant annual revenue through the application of fees. Specifically, the TUI asks that such schools be required to repay to the state the full economic cost of each unit of teacher allocation from the fee income they generate, subject only to the retention of such income as is equivalent to the capitation grant that a school of similar size in the state system would receive
* cessation of the misguided practice of favouring the voluntary secondary sector in relation to capitation payments. This practice has resulted from a campaign of misinformation by the managerial body for the voluntary secondary sector regarding the level of subvention to the ETB sector which incorrectly posits that the effective student capitation grant in the ETB sector is disproportionately high
* restoration of school capacity to meet student support, administrative, curricular and compliance needs by way of restoration of the posts of responsibility suppressed as a result of the moratorium introduced in 2009. The significant reduction in middle management capacity in schools over recent years has severely damaged the ability of schools to respond in a timely manner to the pastoral needs of students and their families
* the application of an additional 1% to corporation tax, this addition to be styled an education levy and to constitute a dedicated fund for investment in higher education. In making this demand the TUI notes that corporations – especially transnational corporations – are primary beneficiaries of public funding of higher education and of the highly educated graduate workforce available in this country. The union further notes that corporation tax is payable only in respect of profits made by companies and organisations and that, while the nominal rate of this tax - at 12.5% - is significantly below the international norm, the effective rate is considerably lower.
* promotion and enhancement of all educational disciplines by not focussing solely on Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths

Middle Management

Page five of the DES document references middle management posts being “unevenly distributed” due to retirements. What this actually means is that promoted posts were subjected to a “moratorium” as part of funding cuts in recent years. Vital middle management posts, were simply withdrawn and promotion prospects for teachers put on hold. Remarkably, the moratorium on posts still holds despite the much improved economic climate. As a result, the education of students and the smooth running of schools is jeopardised by the absence of staff to address issues as they arise. This is compounded by withdrawal of allowances for special needs posts and further again by the withdrawal of ex-quota guidance posts, though some alleviation was recently introduced. The recent Travers Two report, which was endorsed by the DES, made an interesting comment that is of relevance here:

*“A decade of rapid social, demographic and educational change followed by salary cuts, deteriorating career structures and casualization have left many teachers alienated and distrustful.”*

Page 9 of the DES document recounts commitments from the Programmes for Government 2011-2016 that schools will have greater autonomy to set their own staffing needs and that principals and boards will have increased freedom to allocate and manage staff and to delegate management responsibilities to teachers. TUI members are telling us repeatedly that there aren’t enough teachers to fulfil “staffing needs” and that the moratorium on recruitment of middle management means that in some schools there isn’t anyone to delegate to. A ‘moratorium’ is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “a temporary ban on activity”. Given the much improved economic climate recently, and the formal lifting of the ‘temporary ban’ on public service recruitment by Minister Howlin (Irish Times, October 14th, 2014), it is hard to see why the ‘moratorium’ is still in place for recruitment of middle management in schools. TUI believes that the DES would serve the interests of students in crisis much better by focusing on re-establishing the middle management structures that existed previously rather than trying to devise new ‘autonomous’ structures that have no staff to manage. Page ten of the DES document also refers to “increased autonomy of schools over staffing”. In the UK, this has resulted in principal teachers being in the rather unenviable situation of having to decide which, and how many, teachers to make redundant in order to keep their devolved budget in line. As reported in the Guardian (November 20th 2015) “budget pressures are pushing more than half of schools in England towards cutting staff, with most preparing for big reductions to balance their books”. Indeed, some principal teachers have themselves been made redundant when their school gained more ‘autonomy’ by converting to be an academy (Guardian, September 21st, 2012). ‘Academies’ then often form multi-academy trusts. The ‘executive headteachers’ in some of these multi-academy trusts are earning salaries of over stg£200,000 (approximately €273,000) i.e. more than the British Prime Minister (Daily Telegraph November 22nd 2012). TUI asks whether this is what the DES is planning under its proposals for greater school autonomy in relation to budgets.

Recent Cutbacks

As mentioned above, a comprehensive list of cuts to schools is set out in Appendix One but to be concise, investment in education in Ireland lagged significantly behind OECD or EU averages (OECD, 2013) despite Ireland having a very young population (Eurostat, 2015). This is manifested in:

* delays in speech and language assessment (Irish Times, August 31st, 2015),
* high costs to parents for schooling (Barnardos, 2015),
* cuts to the Visiting Teacher Service
* delays in accessing social work and education welfare support
* high costs to parents of children accessing third level education (Irish Times, August 13th, 2015),
* cuts to English language support (FLAC, 2014),
* cuts to the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance (FLAC, 2014),
* cuts to guidance and pastoral supports for students (TUI, 2014; NCGE, 2013; ASTI, 2014; TUI, 2012 - www.irishtimes.com/news/survey-finds-schools-will-have-lost-five-middle-management-teaching-posts-1.500227; INTO, 2015 - [www.educationmatters.ie/em\_news/in-school-management](http://www.educationmatters.ie/em_news/in-school-management))
* a lack of funding to implement the EPSEN Act (Irish Examiner, July 10th, 2015)
* underfunding of the Child and Family Agency (Irish Times, September 16th, 2014)
* reduction in the ability of schools to provide curricular programmes such as Leaving Certificate Applied, Leaving Certificate Vocational and Transition Year (ASTI, 2014)

Statistics show that approximately one in ten children live in consistent poverty and one in four live in relative poverty (NESF, 2005; CSO, 2009; Barnardos, 2008; Hayes, 2008). These figures largely pre-date the end of the Celtic Tiger so there is a fear that the consistent poverty rate may in fact be higher now. Childhood poverty is likely to feed into negative life chances later and may also lead to inter-generational difficulties.

Children’s Rights Alliance (2015: 3) noted that

*“We have the highest EU rate of youth suicide amongst girls and the second highest rate amongst boys. Other stark realities are that one third of LGBT young people have seriously thought about ending their lives and 20 per cent have attempted suicide. Shamefully, Ireland ranks second of 194 countries for binge drinking of alcohol amongst those aged 15 and over. We also spotlight the fact that in 2013 only one in three children detained on remand was later detained upon conviction – raising a serious question on whether detention is being used as a measure of last resort.*

*Add to this shocking landscape a backlog of over 7,000 child protection cases and 3,000 children on waiting lists for mental health support and thousands more waiting for other essential health care and special needs services. There are serious delays in sexual offences cases being heard in court and very long waiting lists for sexual abuse counselling. It gets even more unfair when you consider that waiting times vary massively from county to county resulting in a geographical lottery dictating the speed at which a child will be supported. This is very far from utopia. The bottom line is that public services and the courts must be better resourced to provide essential supports and uphold children’s rights.”*

And that

*“There is no national out-of-hours social work service in Ireland. However, there is a national emergency place of safety service, comprising two services operated by Tusla – Child and Family Agency. These services are not directly accessible by members of the public: access is organised through the Gardaí Síochána (police service). Tusla – Child and Family Agency has developed a business case for a national Emergency Out of Hours Social Work Service but a service has yet to be*

*developed, and it is understood it would continue the model of being only accessible through the Gardaí Síochána.” (pg 37)*

TUI argues that fixing the problems set out above is a much better use of €29.87bn than changing schools into ‘academies’.

The issue of cutbacks again is an issue on page nine when the DES document refers to “giving new freedoms to public service bodies”. Perhaps the time involved would be better used giving more staff to public service bodies. Many bodies on which schools rely for expert assistance have suffered dramatic cuts in staffing in recent years. For example, less than half of the recommended 127 specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) teams have been established, 472 children in care did not have a social worker, 673 children in care didn’t have a care plan whilst there were 8,161 child protection cases which have not been allocated a social worker including 2,829 deemed ‘high priority’ (Children’s Rights Alliance, 2015). Furthermore, in a study of 33 countries, Ireland had the seventh highest ratio of students to school psychologists i.e. 5,298:1 as opposed to 927:1 in Denmark for example (Jimerson et al., 2009). The average in the study was 3,709:1. For Ireland to reach a reasonable rate of 2500 students per psychologist, taking into account demographic group, would require the employment of 267 more psychologists by 2021 (Impact, 2015). This is all within the context that during 2014, Gordon Jeyes, the TUSLA Chief Executive publicly stated that the Agency required additional funding of €45 million ‘just to stand still’ (Irish Times December 30th 2014).

Initiativitis

Page four of the DES document states that “all decision-making with regard to school autonomy has to have regard to the context in which schools operate”. This context, as set out above from the Travers Two report, is one of budget cuts and initiativitis. As further noted by Dr. Travers, and acknowledged by the DES,

*“ambitious reform requires the wholehearted engagement of teachers - otherwise its chances of success are limited. The timing is not propitious.”*

Initiativitis is defined by Fullan (2008: 1) as

*“the tendency to launch an endless stream of disconnected innovations that no-one could possibly manage. In Change Without Pain, Abrahamson (2004) calls this the “repetitive change syndrome”: “The symptoms? Initiative overload, change-related chaos and wide-spread employee anxiety, cynicism and burnout” (p.2)”.*

A list of recent initiatives in the second-level sector is set out in Appendix Two and runs to over thirty large changes currently being rolled-out. Fullan (2001) has argued that schools can rarely cope well with more than approximately six changes at one time. Is the DES arguing that an additional dramatic change should be added to the list i.e. “advancing school autonomy”?

Decision-making regarding profits/pay/staffing/textbooks

Page six of the DES document refers to schools having “decision-making authority over their operations, including the hiring and firing of personnel, and the assessment of teachers and pedagogical practices”. TUI members, including principal teachers, are adamantly opposed to any such plan. A similar model was tried in New York in 2008/2009 and also in Sweden in relation to ‘free schools’. The outcome is described very well in Singer (2014: 42) and Adonis (2012: 150). Singer states that:

*“New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg must have been jumping up and down with glee. He had already pledged to improve Gotham City schools by getting rid of the incompetent teachers who were undermining the education of our children. It is a laudable goal, but the problem is that he did not seem to be able to find that many. According to the New York Times, in 2009 the city’s Department of Education fired only three out of fifty-five thousand tenured teachers.*

*Even when you add to the three tenured teachers who were fired the ten teachers who were charged and left voluntarily, the nine who were retrained and reinstated, the one who was deported for immigration violations, and the fifty cases that are still pending, that only brought the total to seventy-three possibly incompetent tenured teachers out of a total of fifty-five thousand, which is about 0.1%.*

*And it’s as if the mayor was not trying. Of the fifty-five thousand tenured teachers in the school system, only 1.8% received an unsatisfactory rating by their principals in 2008. This was after Bloomberg threatened to remove school principals if their schools performed poorly on state assessments and promised them substantial bonuses for improved test scores.”*

Adonis, a very strong supporter of ‘academies’ and ‘free schools’, states that:

*“In Sweden, commercial operators have been a driving force behind independent state schools. But Sweden’s experience has been problematic with a number of recent scandals around profit-taking from state-funded schools. The Swedish education minister recently announced an inquiry into how free schools which fail to meet accepted standards can be prevented from taking out profits.”*

An indication of how badly wrong the Swedish model went is highlighted by the decision of the Swedish government to abolish the profit motive of ‘free schools’ after dreadful results and the collapse of one of the largest providers of ‘free schools’. As noted in a report on the matter “venture capitalists (which own many Swedish free schools) would just pull out if they weren’t able to make a return” (Times Education Supplement, October 24th, 2014). Indeed, the Swedish Education Minister admitted to the Guardian (June 10th, 2015) that not only had grades declined but inequality had risen. This is the same system that the British Minister Michael Gove said in 2010 that he wanted to copy and create more “independent” schools. These ‘free’/’independent schools’ are the same concept as the ‘academies’ which the DES seems to be advocating under the banner of ‘school autonomy’. The TES report also cites the case of ‘charter schools’ in Arizona where “corruption among charter schools was rife and that people were running schools for ‘personal gain’”.

Page twelve of the DES document states that “it is also suggested by some commentators in US and Australian contexts that the flexibility to incentivise better student outcomes will generate greater teacher effort”. TUI strongly rejects any suggestion that teachers are not making maximum effort and draws the attention of the DES to the massive increase in the number of hours worked by teachers in recent years through the Croke Park Agreement, abolition of the payment for substitution/supervision etc. This is also in the context that Irish teachers already teach far more hours than the OECD average (735 as opposed to 643) and have a higher ratio of students to teaching staff than the OECD average (14 as opposed to 13) (OECD, 2015). It should also be pointed out that despite school staff operating absolutely ethically and with the best interests of students at heart, any “incentivisation” of “student outcomes” can result in systemic pressure to ‘game the system’. This is highlighted in work by Figlio and Getzler (2002: 2) who clearly state that

*“schools may react to these incentives by increasing class time spent on subjects and topics that are emphasized in the accountability exams, while decreasing class time on subjects and topics either not in or not emphasized in the exams”.*

Figlio and Getzler (2002: 3) also cite a very troubling example from the Richmond Times Dispatch (December 1st, 1999) where a

*“Virginia school district superintendent said that the state’s accountability exam system “actually encourages higher dropout rates … It is actually to the school’s advantage to drop slow learners and borderline students from the school, because they are usually poor test-takers.””*

The findings of Figlio and Getzler (2002:11) are troubling and include:

*“The incentive to place the students likely to perform worst on the state tests into special*

*education classes may cause schools to place in special education students whom they believe would be better off in other classes.”*

Similar findings relating to the danger of incentivised school testing have emerged in many areas. For example, Education Week (June 1st, 2015) reports that

*“in some places we’re seeing a backlash against this high-stakes testing from frustrated educators and from more and more parents who are choosing to opt out and not have their children take the tests”.*

It is worth noting that there are plenty of opportunities to ‘game the system’ in the USA. Times Education Supplement (January 8th, 2016: 5) notes that “the average US student takes 112 mandatory standardised tests between pre-kindergarten and the end of high school” – a figure which is considered by the OECD to be not “heavy” when compared to the number of tests carried out in the Netherlands, Belgium and Asian countries. It is also worth noting that in Colorado alone, 100,000 students refused to take part in the tests. Furthermore, in one small town in Washington State, 550 sets of parents refused to allow their children to take the tests. ‘Gaming the system’ in the USA has even led to the jailing of eight teachers and administrators in Atlanta – a scandal which was found to involve almost two hundred staff (Times Education Supplement, January 8th, 2016). Educational gains made arising from these standardised tests have been found to be “effectively zero”.

Page twelve of the DES document also refers to “devolving management responsibility to schools means schools need more supports and resources”. TUI agrees and has outlined elsewhere in this paper the dramatic cuts to school resources that have happened in recent years, not least of which being the significant cut to middle management posts. It must be further noted that significant and adverse changes have been made to qualification allowances. Hence it is hard to see who responsibility will be devolved to and whether anyone be paid for the devolved responsibility.

Page thirteen of the DES document also refers to the ability of ‘academies’ or ‘free schools’ having the ability to set terms and conditions of staff. The outcome of this system in the UK has been recent advice from the Department for Education and from headteachers’ unions, that schools should be careful not to “discriminate against particular groups of teachers as national salary scales disappear and performance-related pay is introduced” (Times Education Supplement, January 8th, 2016: 16-17). This follows on from evidence that older teachers, and black and ethnic minority teachers were being treated differently to the rest of the profession. TUI cannot overstate its determination that this is absolutely inappropriate in the Irish context. The Irish government has long seen the benefits, such as consistency of approach across all workplaces, of engaging with ‘social partners’ such as trade unions. TUI will not accept any move away from common salary scales etc. The DES document itself identifies concerns in the UK and Australia that ‘autonomous schools’ are incentivised to hire unqualified teachers as they are ‘cheaper’. Presumably the DES has no intention of developing such a model. If DES did develop such a model then it would meet a very strong reaction from TUI.

Page thirty-three of the DES document described how Irish schools currently have autonomy over the choice of textbooks. Indeed Cooney Carey (1993: 4-5), a report for the DES, stated that “in theory, teachers decide what texts to use. In practice they are subject to a variety of parental, school and marketing pressures which are all designed to influence them in different directions.” Furthermore, an Irish Times report (July 13th 2015) stated that “parents in the Republic have to pay for school books when they are free in other parts of [Europe](http://www.irishtimes.com/search/search-7.1213540?tag_location=Europe&article=true).”

Page thirty-eight of the DES document refers to the possibility of introducing “a more flexible employment contract” for principal teachers. Apart from the fact that this would be a change in previously agreed job contracts which of course would be unacceptable, it would also leave the system open to loss of institutional knowledge. The second-level system has already lost large numbers of experienced school leaders in recent years (DES, 2013). Perhaps it would be more beneficial if the DES halted the seemingly ever increasing administrative demands on principal teachers and restored the post of responsibility system to its previous stature. A clear example of the growing administrative burden on principal teachers, not to mention the huge burden carried by them in dealing with societal change as it impacts their school, is the fact that the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA, 2010) reported that the number of circulars published by the then Department of Education and Science increased from one per month at the beginning of the new millennium to one per week in 2006. A cursory look at the DES website indicates that almost two circulars were issued per week by the DES in 2015, though it’s fair to say that not all relate to second-level.

Page forty-three of the DES document again addresses the issue of “autonomy over budgets and salary levels of teachers”. This submission has already addressed this issue in clear terms outlining TUI’s absolute opposition to same. The DES put forward a suggestion that teachers and principals “may be rewarded with a pay bonus or salary top-up”. TUI would like to draw the attention of the DES to the irony of it suggesting “salary top-ups” when the Government has not restored dramatic pay cuts experienced by public servants over recent years, not to mention the added hours of work which accompanied these pay cuts. The same section of the DES document also states that “autonomy over staffing also means that schools have the freedom to fire inefficient or under-performing teachers”. TUI finds this to be an extraordinary and unacceptable overturning of existing procedures agreed between the trade unions and the DES, and the statement also seems to cast a shadow over work carried out by its own Inspectorate.

In a remarkable rebuke to its own suggestions over devolved budgets, page 44 of the DES document states that “there is no clear relationship between budgetary autonomy and school performance”. This echoes research referred to earlier in this submission that shows that ‘school autonomy’ of the type suggested by the DES has not worked in other countries, despite massive investment of time and money. Page 48 of the DES document also delivers a remarkable rebuke to the proposals from the DES itself when it discusses the issue of payment of salaries to caretakers and secretaries by schools. The actions of ‘autonomous’ schools in this respect has been so fraught with difficulty that the DES is currently considering a Labour Court recommendation on introducing standardised minimum hourly rates of €13 per hour. “The deal, if accepted, is expected to cost €5 million next year, rising to more than €22 million in 2019” as “almost 8,000 secretaries and caretakers in …are set to receive pay increases of up to 10 per cent over the next four years” (Irish Times November 9th 2015).

Page forty-nine of the DES document explicitly suggests that schools “could explore borrowing” to fund the capital needs of the school. This is a remarkable abdication of responsibility by the DES. Following years of debate about the provision of prefabs to schools, the DES now seems to be suggesting that the school should fund its own buildings. Aside even from the audacity of such a concept, TUI asks how the DES suggests schools repay the money. This submission has previously outlined the issues which have arisen in the UK where ‘autonomous schools’ have been obliged to borrow money to fund budget gaps. The concept of schools having to borrow money to provide basic facilities for schools makes a mockery of the concept of ‘free education’ and raises serious concerns about the commitment of the DES to equality for disadvantaged areas. This causes considerable surprise and alarm to TUI as the DES has traditionally been quite progressive in trying to ‘level the playing field’ for disadvantaged schools through initiatives such as DEIS.

Privatisation

Some aspects of the above have also been tried in Chile. The result has been that the government of Chile is now having to move towards banning publicly funded schools from “charging fees, making a profit and using selective admissions systems” (Times Education Supplement, January 1st, 2015).

Field (2015) also addresses the issue of devolved payment structures and especially ‘outperformance pay’. Field (pg 7) presents compelling evidence that such schemes do not work either in the public or private sector and that issues of “salary, job and workplace characteristics and relationships” matter much more to staff motivation. This needs to be contrasted with the recent experience of Irish teachers who have suffered multiple pay cuts, longer working hours, reduced pension entitlements and a workplace where half of all second-level teachers under the age of thirty-five do not even have a full-time job.

The issue of ‘academies’/’free schools’/’charter schools’ is tightly tied with issues of privatisation as opposed to education as a public good. Bottery (2009:22) discusses the privatisation of education and writes of how the education market could reflect private business practice. He specifically cites the ‘unit’ i.e. school, having the right to:

* “Determine the price it should charge”
* “Make a profit from its dealings”
* “Determine the kind of product it sold to customers (curriculum, teaching methods)”
* “Determine the right kind of clientele it aimed to attract (including its ability to refuse or select particular applicants on its own terms)”

In the context of the “right kind of clientele” it is interesting to note that ‘charter schools’ in the USA “are often criticised for serving smaller proportions of students with disabilities than regular school districts, and a new analysis of national data finds that’s still the case” (Education Week, November 11th, 2015). Furthermore, a report in the New York Times (October 29th, 2015) that a ‘charter school’ network in New York may operate a ‘got to go’ list of students including in its kindergarten schools. According to the report the ‘charter chain’

*“has long been dogged by accusations”* that its achievements *“are due, in part, to a practice of weeding out weak or difficult students. The network has always denied it. But documents obtained by the New York Times and interviews”* with current and former staff in five of the schools within the chain *“suggest that some administrators in the network have singled out children they would like to see leave”.*

This type of language with a child as a “customer”/profit centre/economic widget, sadly is used in the DES document on page 8. As shown above, the privatisation of education hasn’t worked. Ratings and league tables are not a full measure of any education system but they tend to acquire a certain credibility especially in privatised systems but even then privatised systems perform poorly. For example, in the PISA ratings for Maths (OECD, 2014), Ireland is rated significantly higher than the UK, USA, Sweden and Chile and only slightly behind Australia. All five of those countries have, as set out here, a history of privatisation/autonomy in education. In reading, Ireland comes before all five countries. In Science, Ireland also comes before all five countries. It is difficult for TUI to understand why the DES is seeking to replicate countries that perform significantly poorer than Ireland does in PISA. The above doesn’t even include the fact that Ireland has a higher rate of school completion than all of the other five countries and a higher rate of third level education than all five, despite Ireland investing less per student than three of the other five countries (OECD, 2015).

Perhaps the most important measure of the success of the education system is that parents have expressed satisfaction with the way teachers do their jobs (Teaching Council, 2010; OECD, 2013; DES, 2013) and that students, especially girls, reported liking school (OECD, 2009).

If further evidence was required of how a private/autonomy agenda was misguided, it can easily be found in reports from the countries which have tried such an agenda. The Sydney Morning Herald (September 7th 2015) has reported on how “teachers accuse global education giant of profiting out of conflict of interest”. The report cites a member of parliament accusing Pearson, “the world’s largest education business” of a “conflict of interest” in marking standardised tests from schools and generating “revenue out of the same exams”. The report goes on to give examples of where Pearson has lost contracts in Los Angeles, New York, Florida and Texas. A report from the Guardian (July 16th, 2012) cites the example of Pearson running the only for-profit exam board in the UK whilst also carrying “out a probe this year (2012) into whether the English exam system is promoting high standards”. Pearson, together with a number of other ‘educational entrepreneurs’ is also mentioned by CNBC (Companies cash in on Common Core despite controversy, March 11th, 2015) as benefiting significantly from contracts with US states for provision of materials related to the Common Core curriculum.

The issue of ‘venture capital’ in schools took an interesting twist in a report in the Times Education Supplement on October 16th, 2015. The report gave examples of ‘independent schools’ that were being ‘bought’ by Chinese investors. The report quoted a company “which acts as a go-between for people wishing to buy and sell schools” as saying that “enquiries from the Far East had been growing significantly”.

Twice a year in England an “Academies Show” is held to give ‘academies’ an opportunity to meet each other and to see products on sale that may be of interest. One of the advertisements at a recent event was “fixed price” advice to schools wishing to convert to ‘academies’. For a price of stg£12,500 (approximately €17,000) plus VAT, the company will give ‘help and guidance’ on navigating the conversion process. TUI argues that the money would be much better spent on students.

Autonomous or ‘multi-academy’?

It is also interesting to note that while the DES seems to be looking favourably on devolving more power to schools in a similar way to what was done with ‘academies’ in the UK, those same ‘academies’ are being encouraged to come together in multi-academy trusts which appear to be similar to the Education and Training Boards already operating in Ireland. However, unlike ETBs in Ireland, some of the multi-academy trusts have been the source of considerable concern regarding outcomes. For example, the situation at the largest academy sponsor in the UK, which runs 68 schools throughout the UK, “has become so serious that representatives from the Department of Education now sit in on the trust’s board meetings” (Times Education Supplement, December 4th, 2015).

Page thirteen of the DES document refers to the appointment of regional school commissioners (RSCs) in the UK. The paragraph does not cite the extensive use also of multi-academy trusts. In the context of the DES presenting a paper on ‘school autonomy’, it is hard to school how school autonomy is useful in the Irish context when we already have Education and Training Boards for example which function very well. If ‘school autonomy’ is such a good idea, TUI would ask why the UK model of ‘school autonomy’ has found it necessary, after experimenting with ‘school autonomy’, to bring in a structure of both RSCs and multi-academy trusts to replace the previous model of local authority control which existed prior to ‘school autonomy’.

A need to borrow?

‘Academies’ in the UK are independent also in terms of their ability to run their own budget. This ‘autonomy’ has had some impact in terms of schools actually having to borrow money in order to function. This money must then be repaid somehow (with interest presumably). The Times Education Supplement (December 4th, 2015) has reported how “state school debt is on course to more than double in just two years” and how a survey of three quarters of local authorities in the UK has found that “the total amount they gave schools permission to borrow rose from stg£35.8m to stg£51.7m” in one year.

Outcomes of ‘charter schools’ and ‘academies’

As stated above, the DES document appears to be considering the introduction of a model of school autonomy similar to ‘academies’ in the UK. The research into ‘academies’ has found them to be ineffective at best, despite the massive investment of additional funding in them. In the USA, a model similar to ‘academies’ is in operation under the title of ‘charter schools’. Singer (2014) points out that

*“In many American cities, the charter school movement is basically an alliance between national foundations antithetical to public education, local politicians who are building political machines, and business speculators. High quality education is at best an afterthought.” Pg 115*

*“Less than 20% of charter schools offered a better education than comparable local schools and about half offered an equivalent education. However, in more than a third of charter schools, 37%, educational achievement was significantly worse than in public schools.” Pg 119*

*“A New York Times article reported that students in high-tech schools did not perform better on standardised assessments than students in regular schools.” Pg 177*

Curriculum and returns to Ireland

Page nine of the DES document refers to “building a knowledge society” and “reviewing junior and senior cycle provision”. TUI respectfully seeks clarification as to what is meant by both. The education system is a vital supply side factor in any economy and further investment in education is essential. However, education must be about building a society/community and not just an economy. Educating children is complex and the psychological well-being of our students is often overlooked. Developing self-confidence involves various aspects of their lives. Involving children in extra-curricular activities is also overlooked in the design of our education system. Whilst a focus on Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths is understandable from a purely economic viewpoint it is not sufficient for the building of a community that has been much diminished by and era of cutbacks to public service.

The aims of the education system, as suggested above, must also take account of our concept of community in the widest sense. Investment in early childhood care and education (ECCE) has repeatedly been shown by research to make sense in a societal and economic sense. Despite this, Ireland spends 0.2% of GDP on ECCE compared to an OECD average of 0.4%. NESF (2005) calculated the net benefit per euro invested to be €4.60 to €7.10, whilst the High/Scope Perry Pre-School Study found a return of $12.90 per dollar invested (Connolly, 2009). Smyth and McCoy (2009) found that the benefits of ECCE are particularly evident for disadvantaged and minority groups.

The issue of community and returns from education is also important in the context of long-term returns from education. For example, the Net Present Value to the individual (discounted at 5%) of a female obtaining ISCED 3/4 education was $35,058 in 2005 whilst he OECD average was $28,223. The Net Present Value to the individual (discounted at 5%) of a male obtaining ISCED 5/6 education was $104,410 in 2005 and the OECD average was $82,007 (OECD, 2009). International cost benefit analyses on keeping people in school suggest stg£200m per year in Britain, €578m in the Netherlands or $209,100 per student in the United States (Barnardos, 2009). OECD (2010: 11) states that

*“A large body of literature suggests that education is strongly associated with a variety of social outcomes, such as better health, stronger civic and social engagement, and reduced crime. A smaller number of studies further suggests that education has a positive effect on most of these social outcomes. More importantly, from a policy perspective, education has been shown to be a relatively cost-effective means of improving health and reducing crime. This report suggests that school-based interventions can be a cost-effective way to tackle obesity. Hence, education policy can be a viable health policy.”*

The issue of crime reduction is also relevant in the context of the justice system. As cited in Labour Youth (2010: 18)

*“Bacik (1998) found that if you’re from a deprived area in Dublin you are twenty five times more likely to end up in front of a district judge than if you are from a wealthy area in Dublin (Bacik et al., 1998); the links between poverty, crime and educational disadvantage are abundantly clear.”*

The report (pg 18) goes on to state that

*“94% of the prison population in Mountjoy prison were either unskilled or semi‐skilled manual workers, i.e. blue collar, and only 39% grew up in a home with a history of continuous, regular employment…50% of imates in Moutnjoy in 1996 had left school before the age of 15, 80% by the age of 16…20% of them could not even read or write”.*

Furthermore, many “young people aged under 18 who pass through young offender institutions have difficulties with speech, language and communication” (Bercow Report, 2008 as cited in Labour Youth 2010: 5).

Accountability

Page ten of the DES refers to accountability and the need for five year development plans, self-evaluation and annual reports. Many of these proposals are already in operation so it is unclear whether the DES document is seeking a change in the current system or is simply restating the original Government plans in 2011. Schools are already implementing self-evaluation, external inspection, improvement planning etc. so it is hard to see what benefit could be gained by adding further to the administrative burden, and detracting further from the core work of schools i.e. teaching and learning.

Page eleven of the DES document refers to “some USA ad Australian states” having “considerable freedoms in relation to school staffing”. TUI asks whether these are the same states cited by the US Department of Education as having a teacher shortage crisis (Washington Post, August 24th 2015) or the crisis in some areas of Australia as cited in the Australian (Jan 4th 2014). It is interesting that the DES document, which uses the UK frequently as an example, does not cite the UK as an example in this context. TUI asks whether that is related to recent and extensive media coverage of a teacher shortage crisis in the UK (Irish Times October 27th, 2015, Times Education Supplement, November 13th, 2015 / October 16th, 2015 / October 9th, 2015). The crisis in the UK is now so serious that schools are advertising vacancies in 2015 for roles that won’t begin until September 2016 as principal teachers are afraid that they won’t be able to find teachers once 201 begins (Times Education Supplement, January 8th, 2016).

Page twenty-three of the DES document discusses mechanisms of accountability. There are already a range of processes in place through the Inspectorate to ensure the quality of the education system. Furthermore, schools are held accountable on a daily basis by line managers, boards of management, Education and Training Boards, the Department of Education and Skills, the local community, the media, parents, peers and students. It is hard to see what other accountability mechanisms would be available. Furthermore, greater ‘school autonomy’ must inevitably mean that schools would be less accountable to society and Government, not more accountable. ‘Academies’ and ‘free schools’ are not accountable for teaching the national curriculum for example.

Page thirty-nine of the DES document refers to the accountability of schools to parents. Of course schools are accountable to the parents of the children the school is teaching. As outlined above, many of the support agencies on which schools depend in a crisis are themselves suffering significantly from underfunding. For example, schools seeking to contact duty social workers, education welfare officers, CAMHS or speech and language therapists in order to provide support to students experiencing difficulties are often frustrated at the time it can take to access support. This is generally attributable to the pressure on the agencies to provide services that far exceed the resources available to them. Furthermore, it must also be said that parents have an element of accountability to the school. The vast majority of parents are very positive contributors to the school community. In fact, many spend their free time, much as the staff does, taking part in school fundraising which wouldn’t be necessary if the education system was adequately funded in the first place. However, it must be said that a very small number of parents can be ‘hard to contact’ in situations where their child is consistently causing difficulties for other students in the school. Furthermore, some parents withdraw their children from school during term-time for reasons such as taking family holidays. Whilst it is understandable that parents may wish to avail of cheaper holiday prices during term time, it creates a real difficulty for schools both in terms of educational progression and in terms of the school’s responsibility to report unexplained or unsatisfactory child absences to the Education Welfare Section of TUSLA. The issue has become so grave in England, for example, that 63,837 fines were issued to parents in one year (Daily Telegraph, August 8th, 2014). Hence, accountability is not a one-way street.

The issue of accountability also features on page forty-one of the DES document. It states that “schools could be required to report publicly on a number of issues annually” such as compliance with “a number of key regulations”. It could also include

*“for example, total staffing resources available to the school…and financial income from the state. Consideration could also be given to making available certain information on the learning achievements of students”.*

This submission has already clearly set out the opposition of TUI to any move towards league tables and also sets out the problem of ‘gaming the system’ which has followed on from the introduction of such systems. Evidence has been shown of how educational provision to special needs students is often disadvantaged in such circumstances. Considerable information is already available through school newsletters, websites, open days and through the publication of school inspection reports. TUI does not see any benefit deriving from schools having to publish their staffing numbers for example. Such numbers are already published by the DES so there is no point in duplicating the data. Schools receive capitation funding from the state but that is already a publicly available number. Perhaps the DES would be more productively engaged by withdrawing state funding from fee paying schools which have access to considerable financial resources that state schools cannot access. An Irish Times report in 2012 (Jan 3rd) stated that 56 schools (out of approximately 730 second-level schools and 3200 primary schools in the country) received income of €227m annually, which included “over €121 million in gross fee income and €89 million in payment for teacher salaries”.

Finnish model

Page fifteen of the DES document gives examples of how the Finnish education system works. It specifically cites the example of schools having “the right to provide educational services according to their own administrative arrangements and vision”. TUI notes with interest that the section does not cite the fact that ‘autonomy’ in Finland seems very different to the existing system in Ireland. TUI would be interested in knowing the view of the DES and other stakeholders in the event that the DES sought to bring in the Finnish system which includes, as stated by the Guardian (July 1st, 2013):

*“Imagine a country where children do nothing but play until they start compulsory schooling at age seven. Then, without exception, they attend comprehensives until the age of 16. Charging school fees is illegal, and so is sorting pupils into ability groups by streaming or setting. There are no inspectors, no exams until the age of 18, no school league tables, no private tuition industry, no school uniforms. Children address teachers by their first names. Even 15-year-olds do no more than 30 minutes' homework a night.”*

Teaching Posts

Page nineteen of the DES document states that Irish “schools do not have discretion in relation to the number of teaching posts”. TUI has long argued for an improvement in the student/teacher ratio particularly given that the Irish rate is higher than the OECD average (OECD, 2015). However, any move to devolved/autonomous determination of a number of posts would make a national ratio meaningless and enable some schools, which had access to other sources of funding, to appoint more staff than a school with the same number of students but which did not have access to outside sources of funding.

Special Educational Needs

Page twenty of the DES document also cites the issue of schools setting “their own staffing needs” particularly in this case referring to the piloting of a revised Resource Allocation Model for students with special educational needs. Sadly page twenty omits to mention that the DES had to provide extra resources to the 47 pilot schools in order to implement the model as proposed. TUI strongly welcomes the additional resources but regrets that the DES is unable to provide the resources necessary for full implementation of the EPSEN Act – resources which the DES estimated at a meeting in 2015 with TUI, to amount to approximately €700m at 2008 prices. Funding in the DES has been so limited in recent years that some curricular changes which were agreed with stakeholders had to be put on hold as funding wasn’t available to implement the agreed changes. In this context it is hard to see how schools would ever have the resources to set “their own staffing needs” for the 25% of students who have special needs (Banks and McCoy, 2011) even if the school wanted to do so.

Boards of Management

In a similar context to the issue of equality of funding if budgets were to be devolved, issues of equality are also raised on page twenty-one of the DES document. The document suggests that “consideration could be given to increasing parental representation on boards of management”. All representatives on boards of management serve an important function but it is one which is dependent on goodwill and on the expertise of the people available. Some schools have no difficulty filling the roles of parental representatives on the boards of management and are frequently able to choose between large numbers of highly experienced and educated candidates. Other schools however have difficulty even filling the posts at all. It would be highly regrettable if ‘school autonomy’ were to actually mean the creation of an even wider gulf between schools with access with high levels of social capital and those schools with access to less.

TUI seeks clarification of the statement on page twenty-one of the DES document that “giving parents the power to trigger ballots requiring boards of management to address their concerns is another option that could be explored”. It is very unclear what these ballots would be about.

Budgets

Page twenty-two of the DES document considers “the possibility of granting a single pot of posts to DEIS schools, which would amalgamate the DEIS-specific and SEN-specific posts”. TUI has signalled above its absolute opposition to ‘devolved budgets’. It is the role of the DES to ensure that schools have the resources to carry out their work. Irish schools are already far too dependent on ‘fundraising’ – an activity which also detracts time and focus from the core work of schools. It is unacceptable for the DES to devolve budgetary responsibility to schools thereby almost certainly requiring schools to fundraise permanently to fill funding gaps. This also leads to the grave concerns on equality between schools set out above. Page twenty-two is worrying also in the context that it pinpoints disadvantaged schools and special needs students. Reviews of the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (Archer and Shortt, 2003) and of the School Completion Programme Smyth et al., 2015) have found both programmes to be very useful. It is difficult to see any benefit in amalgamating these schemes together and then also merging in special educational needs posts.

Experiences in the UK/USA/Chile of ‘school autonomy’

Page twenty-six of the DES document suggests that “failing schools can be improved more easily if schools have greater curricular flexibility”. This appears to echo an argument by successive British governments in favour of ‘academies’. It should be noted that the evidence emerging from the UK on ‘academies’ is far from a ‘ringing endorsement’ of the supposed success of ‘academies’ educationally. The Academies Commission (2013: 4) states that

*“the recent report from the National Audit Office (2012) highlights that Ofsted has judged almost half of all sponsored academies as inadequate or satisfactory (the latter is now defined as ‘requiring improvement’). International evidence of the impact of similar systems continues to present a mixed picture.”*

The same report went on to state that

*“the Commission views social segregation in the school system as a problem for equality of opportunity and to system improvement. It heard, for example, of some academies willing to take a ‘low road’ approach to school improvement by manipulating admissions rather than by exercising strong leadership. It is vital, as academies begin to assert their independence more vigorously, that such practices are eradicated.”* (pgs 7-8)

It is also interesting that the Academies Commission report (pg 31) stated that “too many witnesses provided evidence of some academies’ insufficient responsiveness to parents and the local community.” The Commission report also raises questions about the willingness of autonomous schools to be socially inclusive – an issue which TUI highlighted earlier in this submission. Page 65 of the report states that

*“There is evidence that schools that control their own admissions are more likely to be socially selective than community schools (see West and Hind 2007; West et al. 2011; Allen and West, 2009; Allen and West 2011; Barnardo’s, 2010; Allen et al. 2011).”*

Page 67 of the report goes on to state that

*“According to the 2011 Report of the Schools Adjudicator, 17% of objections to admission*

*arrangements relate to academies, despite the fact that they made up only 4% of all schools at that time.”*

Furthermore, page 70 of the report states that

*“various researchers have found that market competition in the education system provides incentives for schools to avoid particular, vulnerable pupils who might be seen as detrimental to the school’s attainment profile (MacBeath, 2006; Barnardo’s, 2010).”*

Pages 88 and 89 and the Academies Commission report state that

*“Energetic and technical debate takes place in American educational research literature about the effectiveness of charters. In what is a very controversial field, the most extensive study, conducted by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO), explored outcomes in charter and public schools across 16 states (CREDO, 2009). The overwhelming conclusion of the CREDO study was that the performance of charters was broadly similar to the performance of conventional public schools.”*

And that

*“Chile has adopted perhaps the most radical diversification, allowing the rapid growth of privately provided public education from 1980. In 2010, over 60% of all pupils attended privately supplied schooling, which operates on a voucher basis; schools may charge additional fees above the voucher provided by the state. A study in 2000 exploring the impact of Chile’s reforms concluded that outcomes in the subsidised private schools – those entering the voucher system after 1980 – were generally similar to those of government-funded municipal schools (Mizala and Romaguera, 2000). Chile’s performance in PISA remains relatively poor: in PISA 2009, only Mexico performed worse in reading and mathematics.”*

Admissions into ‘academies’ have also been an issue recently for the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (2015) which found that ‘academy’ admissions arrangements were often unpublished or difficult to find, and that increasing numbers of ‘academies’ were hiring lawyers to deal with admissions cases. Furthermore, Green et al., (2015: 910) state that

*“The evidence suggests that free schools have contributed, along with other school system reforms, to rising social segregation (Wiborg, 2010; Allen, 2013; West, 2014). In the USA, the charter schools are found to be associated with rising segregation (Garcia, 2008; Jacobs, 2013).”*

Green et al. (2015: 907) found in their own study that “there are substantive differences between the ethnic composition of free schools (in the UK) and other schools”.

Curtis et al., (2008: 5-6) sought

*“to ascertain how successful the programme has been in fulfilling each of these objectives so far. Its conclusions can be summarised as:*

*1. With regard to the first objective, the picture is mixed and the evidence not easy to interpret. The average attainment of pupils in Academies has risen but in certain cases their intakes have changed. There are continuing concerns about achievement levels in a number of Academies. The impact of Academies on the attainment of their family of schools and on the wider community has been even more difficult to gauge. While this part of the objective was perhaps too ambitious, little action seems to have been taken to address the issue. The sharing of Academies‟ facilities was hindered by VAT regulations prior to 2007.*

*2. Academies have increased diversity in education in the sense they are a distinctive type of state school, though arguably less distinctive now than when they were first launched. The scope for difference and innovation has potentially been curtailed by recent reforms, such as a clearer requirement to follow the core subjects of the National Curriculum.*

*3. Academies are “inclusive‟ in the sense that they currently have twice the national average of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM). The picture varies between Academies, but overall the proportion of FSM pupils has fallen since the programme started by 16.3 percentage points. This suggests that Academies are becoming more inclusive in the sense that they are drawing pupils from a wider range of social backgrounds and, in some cases at least, a broader ability range. There has also been concern about the high number of exclusions in some Academies and how these might affect neighbouring schools.”*

Curtis et al. also noted “a decline in the proportion of disadvantaged pupils in Academies and there are still considerable concerns about attainment in some Academies” and that “exclusions have been quite high in some Academies, and in certain cases this has been at greater levels than in their neighbouring schools” (pg 7). The report further notes that ‘academies’ often have one staff representative on the board of governors and possibly no staff representative. The ‘norm’ in the Irish system is for two staff representatives and two parent representatives on boards of management. Furthermore, “in terms of exclusions, it was reported in August 2007 that Academies have exclusion rates three times that of neighbouring schools” (pg 36).

The House of Commons Education Committee, (2015: 3), where both the Labour Party and the Conservative Party are in favour of ‘academies’, found that

*“there is a complex relationship between attainment, autonomy, collaboration and accountability. Current evidence does not allow us to draw conclusions on whether academies in themselves are a positive force for change.”*

Indeed the DES document itself (pg 27) cites the “inconsistent results in terms of improving education standards” that are emerging from ‘charter schools’. The report also notes that each multi-academy trust is run by a single “board of directors” and hence it is quite possible that no representative of parents or staff from an individual school may be on the board of directors. Page 56 of the report states that

*“Research by the Institute of Education in 2014 showed that while free schools are opening in areas of high deprivation, as measured by the numbers of pupils eligible for free school meals, the schools themselves did not reflect this in their intakes, having a lower proportion of free school meals (FSM) pupils than the area average.”*

In a worrying echo of the above, National College for Leadership of Schools and Children’s Services (2012: 21) found that

*“More recently there has been a move towards a corporate model of governance in academies. The*

*establishment of academies and trusts has moved the governance of schools away from a stakeholder model, where individuals, such as parents, have a key role to play on the governing body.”*

Professional development

Page thirty-eight of the DES document also makes reference to the possibility of the Teaching Council considering “making mandatory minimum level of ongoing professional development”. TUI has already made its position clear on this matter to the Teaching Council. Many teachers already engage in continuous professional development despite that fact that it is often on their own time and at their own expense. Any move to make this system mandatory would be strongly resisted. In private sector organisations, staff training is provided in company time and paid for by the company. Indeed staff are often given a monetary incentive after taking the course. In teaching, staff are no longer entitled to qualification allowances even after taking part in extensive training – the cost of which the employer contributed nothing to in the first place.

Reviewing work

Page forty-two of the DES document makes reference to work being “required to trial and develop systems whereby principals could review the work and development needs of teachers in a structured, regular way”. TUI has addressed this matter with the DES in a different context recently. As the DES is aware, the middle management structures of schools have been largely dismantled and undermined by the moratorium on appointment to posts of responsibility. The impact on the capacity of schools to manage initiatives and to provide pastoral support to students has been devastating. Even if TUI were to disregard the fact that international management consultancy companies such as Accenture, which have made significant sums designing such programmes for private business, are dropping them as they are seen as a waste of time (Irish Times, July 27th, 2015 and August 21st, 2015), the fact still remains that the evaluation of teachers is the role of the Inspectorate. That role has not been devolved to principal teachers and TUI would strongly object to any move to do so. Principal teachers have not been trained to assess the multiple competencies required of subject specialist teachers. TUI sees no situation in which it would agree to such a devolution of power from the Inspectorate, and would find any such move absolutely unacceptable.

Conclusion

The above reports clearly set out the lack of any clear evidence of ‘school autonomy’ improving school standards despite the significant investment in ‘academies’ for example. The DES document itself (pg 31) clearly acknowledges research from New Zealand which “cannot point to any great system-wide gains in student performance or learning, new approaches to learning, or greater equality of educational opportunity that have clearly arisen from school autonomy”. If greater ‘school autonomy’, in the form outlined by the DES, hasn’t led to any improvement in educational standards in the six countries cited above, despite a massive investment of money, then it is far from clear to TUI what the DES hopes to achieve by introducing greater ‘school autonomy’ in Ireland when Ireland currently outperforms the other countries which have introduced costly and unsuccessful ‘school autonomy’. TUI must make clear that it will not accept the DES using the currently successful Irish education system as an experiment in an ideology that hasn’t worked in other countries. Any movement by the DES to introduce devolved budgets, devolved staffing decisions, changes to national pay schemes, changes to previously agreed terms and conditions of employment etc. will be forcefully resisted by TUI, including by industrial action if required.

**Ends**

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**Acronyms**

DEIS Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools

DES Department of Education and Skills

ECCE Early Childhood Care and Education

EPSEN Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs

GDP Gross Domestic Product

RSCs Regional Schools Commissioners

TUI Teachers’ Union of Ireland

UK United Kingdom

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**Appendix One**

Recent cuts to public education system, in particular second level and further education

2009

Pupil teacher ratio worsened from 18:1 to 19:1 (since amended to 18.7)  
Moratorium on filling posts of responsibility   
Ceiling of two on number of language support teachers per school re-imposed  
Withdrawal of teacher posts under previous disadvantage schemes to non-DEIS schools  
Withdrawal/abolition of grants for LCA, LCVP, Transition Year, JCSP, Physics and Chemistry, Home Economics, school book aid, library grants  
Reduction in capitation funding for Travellers and withdrawal of capitation for schools in receipt of non-DEIS disadvantaged funding  
Substitution cover suspended for absences arising from uncertified sick leave and school business absences  
Teacher in-service education support reduced by €5m   
Early retirement scheme scrapped  
Non-pay grant provision for adult and further education reduced by 5%  
Reduction of 500 Back to Education Initiative places and 100 Senior Traveller Training Centre places

2010

Removal of eligibility for student grants for those in receipt of the Back To Education Allowance and the VTOS allowance and for those pursuing a Post Leaving Certificate course  
Places provided in Senior Traveller Training Centres (STTCs) reduced from 984 to 684  
Allowances to participants in VTOS, Youthreach and STTCs reduced  
Provision for teacher in-service education support reduced by over €10m

2011

LCVP PTR worsened from 17:1 to 19:1  
Non-appointment of 150 scheduled extra primary/second level posts

Phased reduction of 500 language support posts over five years  
5% reduction in funding grants to schools/VECs including grants for Adult Literacy, Community Education, School Completion Programme, Youthreach. Similar reductions in respect of STTCs, VTOS and PLC students.  
Introduction of new €200 annual contribution for Post Leaving Certificate students   
€10m reduction in training allowances and supports   
Cap placed on number of psychologists in National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)

2012

Ex-quota guidance counselling provision abolished  
2% reduction in capitation grants in schools   
Cut in Supervision/Substitution administration fee payable to schools  
Reduction in capitation grants across a range of further and adult education courses including PLC, VTOS, Youthreach, BTEI and Adult Literacy.

2013

PTR for PLC courses worsened from 17:1 to 19:1  
Cut to ‘days in lieu’ maternity leave provision for teachers  
Reduction in supports for Further Education & Training (FET) scheme participants  
Allocation to VECs reduced by €13.2m  
2% capitation grants reduction for schools

2014

Reduction in supports to some FET participants  
1% capitation grants reduction for schools  
1% capitation grant reduction in Youthreach, VTOS and PLC colleges  
There has also been a 6% cut in the allocation to the School Completion Programme in each of the years 2012, 2013 and 2014.

**Appendix Two**

Current changes in the system. An indicative but not exhaustive list.

* Pay cuts for all staff
* Different terms and conditions for newer staff
* Growth of precarious employment
* Employment Control Framework
* New Further Education Strategy
* New Higher Education Strategy
* Establishment of Solas
* Introduction of flex hours and Croke Park hours
* New pilot programme in college admissions
* Change in CAO points system
* A moratorium on middle management posts
* Changes in guidance provision
* Reductions in funding for already over-stretched support services such as Education Welfare Services, CAMHS, Visiting Teacher Service, speech and language therapy, social work departments
* Greater emphasis on STEM
* Greater emphasis on literacy and numeracy
* Review of DEIS, JCSP and SCP
* New Youth Strategy with an impact on education
* Piloting of a new Resource Allocation Model for students with special needs
* Establishment of the Centre for School Leadership
* The proposed introduction of the Meitheal system by TUSLA
* Enactment of Part 5 of the Teaching Council Act 2001
* Introduction of new models of induction and probation including the Droichead pilot scheme
* A new framework on teacher CPD – Cosan
* A new digital strategy
* A review of provision in Gaeltacht areas
* A greater emphasis on wellbeing
* New anti-bullying initiatives especially in the area of cyber--bullying
* A revised Junior Cycle
* Revision of some subjects at Senior Cycle
* A new modern languages strategy
* A greater emphasis on enterprise in the curriculum
* A new model for transition points
* Creation of the Inclusion Support Service
* The development of a new statement of strategy on school attendance
* New guidance on the provision of wireless networks in schools
* New national strategy on education for sustainable development
* Longer teacher training
* Introduction of the Admissions Bill 2015