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tui news

Pre Election Special

TEACHERS' UNION OF IRELAND
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Education

For Their Future

Make your vote count for education

Education is the key to our economic recovery and it has therefore never been more crucial that it be made a priority election issue on doorsteps and at the ballot box, regardless of traditional party loyalties.

Ahead of the general election TUI put a list of questions to the five main political parties to facilitate them in outlining their education policies.

The principal issues raised by TUI are those of investment in education and of equality of access to education for all. We ask you to support candidates from parties which have given sincere and positive responses to these questions.

Our question



INVESTMENT IN EDUCATION

While acknowledging current economic restraints, would your party agree to a phased and targeted increase in the education budget to 7% of GDP (or to some alternative measurable means of increasing education expenditure providing a similar resultant increase) during the lifetime of the next Government, this expenditure to be across all sectors of education?

Their answers



The Labour Party believes funding for education needs to be protected in the coming years as it is of vital importance to our economic recovery. We have consistently said the emphasis on spending cuts and tax increases over the coming years should be equally balanced. We believe frontloading austerity measures will only damage the economy further and destroy jobs.



Regrettably, the dire fiscal crisis facing this country as a result of the last Government's catastrophic economic failure has resulted in a situation where the next Government will have to pick up the pieces and reduce the national deficit by a further €9bn by 2014. The Fine Gael Party is fundamentally committed to protecting the education sector during the difficult stretch ahead but unfortunately it will not be possible at this juncture to commit to raising the education budget as proposed during this period.



Yes



The Green Party has always prioritised education, and during our time in government we worked tirelessly to ensure that funding for education was protected to the greatest extent possible. The Green Party recognises that targeted investment in education is the key to our economic recovery and continued social coherence. In negotiating for a new Programme for Government, the Green Party will seek to increase investment in Education and will work towards increasing investment in Education to meet 7% of GDP.



The National Recovery Plan sets out a gross allocation, including funding from the National Training Fund, for the Department of Education and Skills of €9.692 billion in 2011. The gross overall allocations for the years 2012, 2013 and 2014 are set at €9.480 billion, €9.413 billion and €9.343 billion respectively. The Plan therefore seeks to do as much as is possible to protect front line education services over the four year period despite severe economic challenges facing Ireland. While a target spend of 7% of GDP during the term of the next Government might be laudable, it would in Fianna Fáil's opinion be unachievable in the short term given the present economic climate.

Our questions



APPROPRIATE STAFF ALLOCATION WITH PARTICULAR REGARD TO THE MOST DISADVANTAGED

Does your party agree to maintain current staffing ratios as a minimum and commit to no further reduction in overall teacher/lecturer numbers while taking account of the huge rise in pupil/student numbers due to demographic changes?

Does your party agree to reassess the situation in relation to the moratorium on the filling of posts of responsibility in the interests of the pastoral care of the schools?

Does your party agree to restore the former staffing ratios in schools, VECs and Institutes of Technology which were cut in the recent cutbacks, also taking account of the huge rise in student numbers due to demographic changes?

Does your party commit to preserving the additional and discrete posts outlined above to enable and promote participation of the most disadvantaged?

Their answers



In order to protect staffing ratios and supports for the most disadvantaged in our education system, Labour is committed to implementing the Croke Park Agreement. We will work in co-operation with teachers to ensure our education system delivers for the people of Ireland.



As spending levels are reduced across Government Departments to meet our commitments to reduce the national deficit, Fine Gael's priority is to protect the quality of the educational experience received by our children. We will not increase class sizes. To ensure we can deliver on this commitment, we will work with education partners to seek further possible efficiencies in work practices.

Fine Gael fully appreciates the pressure that the moratorium on public recruitment has placed on schools. Fine Gael cannot, within the constraints of the current economic circumstances lift the moratorium on the filling of posts. However, the Party will work with schools to establish any possible means of alleviating the pressure on schools, within budgetary constraints.

Unfortunately, given the catastrophic economic crisis facing the country as a result of the last Government's economic mismanagement, Fine Gael cannot commit to measures such as reversing changes to staffing ratios.

Fine Gael is committed to protecting resources at the frontline to the best extent possible and will work with education partners to find efficiencies in other areas to avoid any further cutbacks to support, particularly those aimed at tackling disadvantage.



Answer is yes to all



The Green Party believes that education is vital to personal, community, societal and economic development. We will seek to increase investment in Education, including educational disadvantage. The Green Party will retain the existing pupil teacher ratio. We will endeavour to retain special needs SNA allocations and seek to ensure the number of NEPS psychologists are retained. The Green Party will work to fast-track the full implementation of the 2004 EPSEN Act and will ensure the complete roll out on a strict timetable of the Education for Person with Special Needs Act.



On class sizes and staff allocation, Fianna Fáil has a record of commitment to resourcing education, reducing class sizes, supporting special education and tackling disadvantage. The National Recovery Plan reconfirms Fianna Fáil's commitment, not only to return public spending to a sustainable level, but also to protect those most in need and facilitate economic recovery. A necessary part of this, included medium term savings to be achieved through a 10% reduction in salary scales for new entrants to the Public Service and a new scheme which would reduce budgetary expenditure on Public Service pensions in the longer-term.

While the Plan does seek a significant reduction in teacher payroll costs over its operational period, Fianna Fáil considers it important that this be carried out in consultation with the education partners. Such a process would ensure that the TUI and its members would have an opportunity to contribute to the process of identifying a range of measures for consideration including more efficient deployment of existing teacher numbers, reduction in teacher numbers and/or other productivity and efficiency measures.

Our questions



PROMOTING AND ENABLING EQUALITY OF ACCESS TO SCHOOLS FOR ALL

Will your party continue the moves initiated by the outgoing Government to remove inequitable selection procedures from schools?

Will your party commit to the principle of equality of access to education, if necessary by introduction of appropriate legislation to this effect?

What is your party's position on the continued €100m annual state subvention to fee-paying schools?

Their answers



In answer to the question “Do you think the State should continue to subsidise a two tier education system at a cost of €100m?” during TV3’s general election debate on February 8th, Eamon Gilmore, leader of the Labour Party responded: “No I don’t. I think that we need to have a fair system of education, the way that we have a fair system of health. I believe that private schools should be encouraged to come back into the public education system but we have to bear in mind that there is a cost connected to that as those schools don’t get a capitation fee and that would have to be paid in the event of them coming back into the public system.”



Fine Gael fully supports diversity and equality of access to education. The Party will work with schools to ensure selection procedures are equitable.

Fine Gael wholly supports the principle of equality of access to education, underpinned by Article 42 of the Constitution and is open to any measures designed to uphold this principle and enhance equality of access where necessary and appropriate.

The Fine Gael Party has no plans at this juncture to change current funding arrangements for fee-paying schools. The Party believes that withdrawing funding to fee-paying schools will result in extra pressure on State schools, arising from students transferring to State schools if fees are hiked up to accommodate for the withdrawal of State support. The net cost of providing extra funding to State schools as a result of students’ exodus will financially far outweigh the State funding received by private schools and will result in more overcrowded classrooms, greater competition for already stretched school resources and the State’s ability to produce high quality graduates.

In addition, parental choice, which has been a cornerstone of our educational system and is backed up Article 42 of the Constitution, recognising the parents’ role as the natural educator of their child and their free decision to use any school, public or private, to educate their child must be respected.



The answer to the first two questions is yes. The answer to third is also yes. Our 2011 General Election Manifesto commits to ending state subsidy of private education.



We were supportive of and proactive in relation to equality of access during the lifetime of the last Government. In relation to fee paying schools, the Green Party believes it is important to have a collective debate, in consultation with teachers unions, politicians, teachers, parents and students in order to achieve consensus in relation to this issue. In keeping with their own ethos and belief, the Green Party respects the equal right of parents to choose schools for their children. We also recognise that within the fee paying schools debate there is a need to facilitate the rights of minority faiths to receive an education within that structure and that in some instances fee paying schools are a necessity rather than a choice.



On equity of access and social inclusion. Fianna Fáil introduced a comprehensive programme to address educational disadvantage in primary and second level schools in 2005. The 'Delivering Equality of Educational Opportunity in Schools' (DEIS) programme seeks to ensure that the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities are prioritised and effectively addressed by bringing together a range of national programmes to address educational disadvantage throughout the schools system.

Our questions



TRAINING AND UPSKILLING

Does your party commit to removal of the artificially imposed limit on student numbers in the hugely successful Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) sector and on other further/adult education programmes?

Does your party support a complete reform and reorganisation of the country's training regime, including that currently under the auspices of FÁS, by facilitating increased participation in HETAC and FETAC accredited courses in the VEC/C&C and Institutes of Technology?

Does your party commit to the removal of the recently imposed registration charge of €200 in respect of students attending PLC courses?

Their answers



Labour recognises the importance of training and upskilling at a time of high unemployment. We have committed to funding 30,000 new education and training places and 30,000 graduate and apprentice internships. We will also reform FÁS, utilise spare capacity in the Institutes of Technology and remove the cap on places in PLC courses to help the unemployed. We will make it easier to return to third level by reforming the Back to Education Allowance and introduce a tax-back scheme to fund full-time study.



Fine Gael has outlined plans for enhancing access to further education opportunities in our 'Working for Our Future' Policy. The party has plans for 17,000 second chance education places, providing an opportunity for people in the retail and construction sector that did not finish school or college to participate in a 'back to education' placement for two years. In addition, our Reinventing Government policy outlines a reformed approach to training the unemployed, moving away from the top down bureaucratic approach, to a training voucher system where unemployed individuals are equipped to engage in courses from a range of educational providers. This will provide all education providers, including those in the PLC sector with an opportunity to provide the unemployed with training options and increase their capacity in education training provision.

Yes. In our policy, Reinventing Government, Fine Gael has outlined how the Party proposes to overhaul the existing FÁS structure, to create a new 'one stop shop' for getting back to work, the Payments and Entitlements Service. It will provide extensive skills assessment, training guidance and job referral services to the unemployed, as well as other welfare and service entitlements. Many job-seekers will continue to be referred to existing FÁS training centres and services, which will operate under a new slimmed down governance structure. Community Employment schemes will be maintained and expanded but will be managed by local authorities. Under the Fine Gael system, a training voucher system will empower the unemployed to define and acquire their own upskilling needs rather than relying on a State bureaucracy to decide what course to provide.

Unfortunately, given the economic crisis facing the country as a result of the last Government's economic mismanagement, Fine Gael cannot commit to measures such as reversing the registration charge of €200 on PLC courses.



Answer to all is yes.



In negotiating for a New Programme for Government, the Green Party will seek to remove the cap on numbers in PLCs. The Green Party believes there is a need for a radical shift in how our educational system operates. This will require new ways of looking at how the system meets the needs of learners at all stages of life. More flexibility is required, as well as a rethinking in areas such as teacher training, curriculum and how schools integrate within the community.



The recently published National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 also contains our detailed recommendations for the development of a modern, flexible and responsive higher education system that is ready to meet the new challenges of the next twenty years in supporting Ireland's economic renewal and growth. The strategy envisages a system that is more accessible to a much greater range of people, is more engaged with the enterprise sector and wider community and has high quality and innovative provision of teaching and research as its hallmark.

The Strategy sets out changes for the sector that are aimed at providing for:

- a more flexible system, with a greater choice of provision and modes of learning for an increasingly diverse cohort of students;
- Improvements in the quality of the student experience, the quality of teaching and learning and the relevance of learning outcomes; and,
- ensuring that higher education connects more effectively with wider social, economic and enterprise needs through its staff, the quality of its graduates, the relevance of its programmes, the quality of its research and its ability to translate that into high value jobs and real benefits for society.

The Strategy also recommends a number of significant structural changes that will need to be considered.

Our questions



TAXING THE TEACHERS AND LECTURERS OF TOMORROW

Does your party commit to withdrawal of these unfair, exploitative and inequitable measures threatened for new teachers?

Does your party commit to a re-examination of the proposals in respect of pensions followed by a process of consultation with union before any change is introduced, particularly given the fact that a restructured pension scheme for new public service employees will bring about no savings for decades?

Their answers



We cannot promise to reverse the salary reduction and revised pension arrangements for new teachers. Full implementation of the Croke Park Agreement will be required before any government can begin to consider restoring pay scales in the public sector.



Unfortunately, given the economic crisis facing the country as a result of the last Government's economic mismanagement, Fine Gael cannot commit to measures such as reversing the salary reduction for new teachers. However, Fine Gael has proposed a more equitable approach to the work placement scheme in schools, whereby teaching graduates involved in the scheme will be paid the basic starting rate for teachers, on the basis of a 20 hour working week and will be given a €3,000 allowance to fund further/higher education. Again, given the economic crisis facing the country as a result of the last Government's economic mismanagement, Fine Gael cannot commit to measures such as maintaining the existing pension scheme for new entrants to the public service. The Party accepts the fact that there must be reform in this regard.



Answer to both questions is yes.



The Green Party broadly supports the targets outlined in the National Recovery Plan 2011-2014 in terms of the pressures currently facing the exchequer. However we believe that frontline Education services should receive a greater proportion of investment compared to what is currently agreed. This will depend on the policies of other parties and our relative negotiating strengths after the next election. As 2014 approaches, the terms and conditions of public service contracts in general, including new entrants, should be carefully considered to allow for the issue of equity between public servants to be addressed. This can of course be reviewed earlier depending on changing economic circumstances.



Significant budgetary adjustments have been implemented since 2009. We understand and acknowledge that these decisions have not been easy for TUI members but we truly believe these decisions are necessary and are the correct ones to get Ireland back to full economic recovery. The bulk of the budgetary adjustments, set out in our Fianna Fáil's Recovery Plan, are on the expenditure side (two-thirds) with one-third coming from revenue raising measures of direct and indirect taxation. This is fully outlined in the Plan. Fianna Fáil has selected these on the basis we did not want to impede economic recovery. As part of these measures, in Budget 2011, the Minister for Finance announced the introduction of a new single pension scheme for all new entrants to the Public Service from 2011.

**Make your vote count for
education on Friday February 25th**

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