

**Teachers’ Union of Ireland**

**Draft Response to Consultation on Department of Children and Youth Affairs Statement of Strategy 2016-2018**

**(August 2016)**

TUI represents teachers (12,000+) employed by Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and in Community and Comprehensive (C&C) Schools. Following a request for submissions on a Statement of Strategy 2016-2018 from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), TUI makes the enclosed points. TUI restricts this submission to education and youth issues and does not propose to comment on other aspects of the work, or internal processes, of the DCYA.

Child and Youth Centred

TUI welcomes the child and youth centred approach demonstrated by the establishment and ongoing work of the DCYA. The mission of the DCYA “is to lead the effort to improve outcomes for children and young people in Ireland” (DCYA, 2012: 2). Such a child/youth centred approach must be supported by adequate resources. Ireland has a very young population. In 2008, we had the second highest proportion of 10-14 year olds in the European Union (CSO, 2009). The high birth rate in Ireland (CSO, 2014) indicates that the population of young people is likely to remain high for the foreseeable future. DES (2014) estimates that the number of students in the primary school system will rise by 30,000 by 2019 and by 67,000 in second level by 2026. In this context, it is not sufficient to suggest that a world-class child/youth centred society can be achieved with inadequate resources of time, money or personnel. The budget currently available is inadequate to meet the level of need so it is vital that the new strategy not be funded “within existing (inadequate) resources”.

OECD (2014) shows that the Irish education system is competing successfully internationally, though it should be borne in mind that raw statistical data cannot adequately measure the breadth of events and experiences that are an everyday part of a holistic education system. The success of the education system, for example in ensuring that 90% of students complete Senior Cycle (DES, 2012), comes in the context of significant cutbacks in the education system especially in pastoral supports such as middle management (e.g. year head) and guidance posts. 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 and being happy there (OECD, 2009; NAPD, 2016).

The previous paragraph made reference to cuts affecting pastoral systems in schools. The work of DCYA is closely associated with creating a child/youth-centred system for the modern age. Bullying is a serious difficulty experienced by many young people (Gleeson, 2014; Barnardos, 2008; Lodge and Lynch, 2004; Downes and Gilligan, 2007). Cyberbullying has become the latest manifestation of bullying but is perhaps even more insidious as the victim can never really ‘switch off’ due to the pervasiveness of technology in the life of a young person. Young people must be protected to the greatest extent possible and hence it is essential that DCYA encourages all Government departments and agencies to support schools and youth groups through provision of expertise and resources to limit the spread of cyberbullying in schools/youth spaces. Furthermore, parents must be supported in taking on their responsibilities in regard to preventing cyberbullying in the time young people spend outside of schools. Young people spend only a small proportion of their childhoods in school settings so the main focus in terms of preventing cyberbullying must logically and necessarily be on out-of-school settings.

No child-centred model can be achieved to any appreciable extent without dealing with the relative poverty in which many children and their families live. Almost 20% of children are at risk of poverty and almost 10% live in consistent poverty (NERI, 2013). How we treat children is a key measure of how we as a society can be measured. It is perverse and unacceptable that in a first world country, TUI members frequently see students come to school cold or hungry due to lack of money at home, or excessively tired due to having to work in or outside of the home in caring duties or paid employment, respectively. Schools do what they can, with the support of initiatives such as School Completion (where available), by providing breakfast clubs and other assistive interventions but the problem shouldn’t exist in the first place. Unfortunately funding to the School Completion Programme has been cut by approximately a quarter since 2008 (Smyth et al., 2015). The social welfare system must ensure that families are given the protections necessary to ensure that parents can both meet the basic needs of their children and protect each child’s time in and capacity to derive full benefit from the public education system. In the meantime, it is essential that funding available to all schools such as the capitation grant, as well as funding aimed especially at DEIS schools, be increased to the level required to support the needs now manifesting. DEIS is working (ERC, 2014) and should continue. It must however also be borne in mind that 56-61% of students from disadvantaged backgrounds attend non-DEIS schools (Barnardos, 2009) so the needs of those schools also must be recognised.

A child-centred society also benefits from to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty. This submission will address the issue of DEIS later but DCYA also has responsibility to provide other services which could break the cycle of poverty and inequality. Such services could include:

* Homework clubs,
* Community youth initiatives to counteract children drifting into substance misuse
* Second change initiatives for parents
* Initiatives that promote involvement in sport
* Youth clubs

Research

The Research Unit can play a vital role in commissioning, analysing and disseminating research. TUI would welcome additional research into the lives of children and youth. For example, the Growing Up in Ireland study is yielding excellent data. Such research, however, must take account of the administrative burden involved and the data protection issues arising. DCYA need to be adequately resourced if this is to be successful. DCYA could also support research by funding the Irish component of the OECD TALIS study. It is regrettable that this important study into the education system is not seen as important by the Irish government.

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

Investment in ECCE should continue. Studies (as outlined in Connolly, 2009; Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2013; NESF, 2005) have clearly shown that investment in ECCE yields returns of the order of 2.5-16 times the sum invested. This has a significant impact on the child, family and, in later years, on the education system and, indeed, society as a whole.

Child Protection

The last twenty years in Ireland have seen a dramatic change in the priority attached to child protection. The National Vetting Bureau plays a key role in this. It is important that sufficient resources be provided to the National Vetting Bureau to ensure that its vital work can be discharged effectively. It is also essential that adequate protection be given to ‘unaccompanied minors’ who are particularly vulnerable in our society.

Economic Recovery

The economic benefit of ECCE was outlined above. The wider education system also yields dramatic economic returns. For example, OECD (2014) shows that public investment in education yields an Internal Rate of Return of up to thirty percent. Furthermore, OECD (2010) shows the economic and societal benefit of investment in education, especially in the areas of better mental health and reduced crime. KPMG Foundation (2006) found that the total costs to the taxpayer of failing to learn to read amounted to stg£44,797-£53,098 per individual. McGilloway et al. (2012) found that early intervention and improvements in child behaviour resulted in reduced use of support services such as social services and speech and language and hence to savings of €4,021-€4,824 per child over a ten-year period. Hence, investment in education is essential. Government spending on education should be raised to 7% of GDP from the current inadequate level of 6.4%. Furthermore, when investment is announced it should be followed quickly by action. For example, in October 2015 welcome investment of €210m in school digital strategy was announced. It is unfortunate that, at time of writing, schools still did not know how to ‘draw’ down’ the funding or even how to apply for it.

Existing Underinvestment

TUI is aware of underinvestment in education, and in a number of agencies which are vital to the creation and maintenance of a child-centred society. It is essential that DCYA exercises all the powers available to it to cajole, encourage and, if necessary, coerce other Government departments into providing the necessary resources to agencies within their remit. For example, the DES Inspectorate is down approximately forty staff on its levels previously (DES, 2014). NEPS (now part of TUSLA) is suffering from a shortage of staff (source: scotens.org/category/4-sen/people-roles/educational-psychologist). Speech and language therapists have reported shortages of staffing and resulting waiting lists (source: Irish Times, September 22nd, 2014). There is also a shortage of social workers (source: Irish Times, September 5th, 2014). It would be helpful to know how long these shortages are expected to last and what was the purpose of maintaining these shortages this long. DCYA might have a useful role in terms of examining how these shortages are affecting children. In the case of NEPS for example, their expertise in relation to Critical Incidences in schools. When called upon NEPS role “is to advise and support the teachers and other adults who work daily with students and who know them well. Best practice indicates that students need to be with people they know and trust. It is, therefore, better if school staff provide support for students as they will be around in the longer term and will be in a better position to monitor their students over the days and weeks following an incident. NEPS does not provide counselling, but rather immediate, short term support, information and advice to staff.” It is impossible for schools to provide support to their students in the midst of an unprecedented era of swingeing cuts. Again, TUI would like to reiterate that schools are not a panacea for society’s ills. While all schools have Critical Incident Plans the lack of guidance counselling in schools has led to an ad hoc pastoral system. The complete restoration of guidance counselling as ex quota is imperative in light of the on-going mental health crisis our children are experiencing.

Furthermore, 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)*

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). In many educational scenarios, it is important for a child to have access to a trained educational psychologist rather than a psychologist from another discipline. The above shortages are 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). ISPCC (2016: 21) stated that:

*Demand for child and adolescent mental health services continues to rise, up 49 per cent from June 2014 to May 2015. Anecdotal evidence from across the child and family support services suggests that in some cases children can wait as long as eighteen months for a referral to a child psychologist. Evidence from the services since the beginning of 2015 shows no signs of reducing demand.*

The under-resourcing of schools generally also limits the ability of schools to adequately meet the needs of children with special educational needs. Under-resourcing in this area is unacceptable in a period where an average of three children per year, aged fourteen or under, commit suicide ([source: www.rte.ie/news/investigations-unit/2015/0309/685748-suicide-the-figures](http://source:%20www.rte.ie/news/investigations-unit/2015/0309/685748-suicide-the-figures)). The introduction of wellbeing into the Junior Cycle programme is very welcome but cannot be seen as a complete solution.

Students in Need

The attrition affecting guidance counselling services in schools, since the withdrawal of the ex-quota allocation, has had a dramatic impact on supports available to students experiencing additional needs. Surveys carried out by TUI, ASTI, Institute of Guidance Counsellors and the National Centre for Guidance in Education have all shown the difficulties which have arisen. Perhaps the single worst impact is the reduction of provision of one-to-one guidance/counselling support e.g. since September 2012 there has been a fall of 53% in one-to-one counselling (IGC, 2016). McCoy et al. (2014) found that one-to-one sessions were essential to students but often not available even before the cut in the ex-quota allocation. The Budget 2016 announcement of some ‘row-back’ in the cut in guidance services was welcomed by TUI but it still constitutes only a first step in the process of reinstatement. In fact, given the current emphasis on mental health, reinstatement may not be sufficient and TUI asserts that increased guidance resources are essential. DCYA should address this issue with other Government departments and agencies, in order to protect students in need or experiencing mental health issues.

Conclusion

The DCYA has an important contribution to make in ensuring that other government departments put children and young people at the centre of our society. TUI asks that the above recommendations and concerns be at the centre of the new DCYA Statement of Strategy. TUI is available to participate in face to face dialogue in order to develop the above points in more detail should you wish to do so.

**Ends**

**David Duffy (Education/Research Officer, TUI),** [***dduffy@tui.ie***](mailto:dduffy@tui.ie)**, 01 4922588**

**Acronyms**

ASTI Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland

C&C Community and Comprehensive

DCYA Department of Children and Youth Affairs

DEIS Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools

DES Department of Education and Skills

ECCE Early Childhood Care and Education

ETB Education and Training Board

NEPS National Educational Psychological Service

OECD Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

TUI Teachers’ Union of Ireland

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