

**Teachers’ Union of Ireland**

**Response to DES Consultation on Three Year Strategy 2019-2021**

**(December 2018)**

TUI represents 18,000 members from thirty-five different grades of employment which includes teachers, tutors, trainers, researchers, lecturers, coordinators, managers and other educational experts. Our members are mainly employed by Education and Training Boards (ETBs), Community and Comprehensive (C&C) Schools, adult education centres, further education which includes Post-Leaving Certificate colleges, institutes of technology and training centres. The TUI also has members in the Garda Training College in Templemore and recruits from private education providers.

In November 2018, the Minister invited submissions from education providers and stakeholders relating to three-year strategy. Enclosed is the TUI’s preliminary submission on that strategy. The TUI wishes to point out that the two-week turnaround time on the call for submissions is very short and more time should have been given for such an important matter.

Ireland has an internationally acknowledged, high-performing education system and respected teaching profession (Teaching Council, 2010; OECD, 2013; DES, 2018a; OECD, 2015a; OECD, 2009; NAPD, 2016; Comhairle na nOg, 2017; Growing Up in Ireland, 2017; IPSOS MRBI Trust in the Professions Survey, 2017; Boyle, 2017; Scanlon & McKenna, 2018; EU Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018; Kantar Millward Brown, 2018; Social Progress Initiative, 2018; EU Commission, 2018; United Nations Development Programme, 2018; Irish Survey of Student Engagement 2018) despite spending relatively little on education (OECD, 2015b; SJI, 2018, NERI, 2018) and historic underinvestment (DES, 2018b). Indeed citizen satisfaction with the education system in Ireland is the highest of any of 22 European countries studied (Boyle, 2018).

Introduction

The call for submissions seeks views under a number of headings. The TUI will place emphasis on the headings which are of more relevance to our membership. While, the TUI represents members working in the post-primary and tertiary sectors, the union will also contribute to discussions on the value of a publicly funded education system at all levels.

Tackling Disadvantage

The DEIS programme has been shown to have positive impacts as confirmed by the DES at a briefing on May 23rd 2016. Supports to DEIS schools must be continued. Some of those supports include a lower pupil-teacher ratio, additional funding, additional access to HSCL support and SCP services. Furthermore, a new mechanism needs to be put in place to support disadvantaged students in which are not designated as DEIS. A review of the manner in which schools are granted DEIS status should also be undertaken. In addition, recent swinging cuts to the School Completion Programme must be reversed as a matter of urgency.

TUI believes that greater efforts should be made relating to social inclusion and accommodating the needs of new communities and refugees. To assist teachers, more time, resources and specialised training initiatives are required.

Promoting Excellence and Innovation in Schools

Irish schools have always demonstrated excellence and innovation as seen by OECD (2014) and Chief Inspector reports (DES, 2013; 2018a). This is supported by high levels of parental trust in, and support for, the Irish education system (OECD, 2013). However, the Irish system has suffered well-meaning ‘initiativitis’ (Fullan, 2008). The TUI believes that many of these initiatives are positive, but must emphasise that it is not possible to successfully embed all of these new initiatives at the same time whilst the sectors are subject to extensive austerity measures.

Promoting Creativity and Entrepreneurial Capacity in Students

Irish schools have a long history of promoting creativity and entrepreneurial capacity in students. Indeed, schools themselves demonstrate significant social entrepreneurial capacity in the methods they must resort to provide basic resources to their students. Access to essential support services also often requires entrepreneurial expertise and ingenuity as those support services are themselves significantly underfunded (Children’s Rights Alliance, 2015). Entrepreneurial spirit is imbued in students through whole-school events and through subject specific ways e.g. the Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle Business programmes as well as TY/LCVP/LCA course material. Oftentimes the importance of enterprise is also highlighted through extra-curricular activities undertaken by teachers for no reward e.g. Young Entrepreneurs. Further development in the area of enterprise education will take place as part of the revised Junior Certificate. The TUI encourages members to engage in European Commission projects such as Erasmus+ which contribute to building entrepreneurial capacity.

Making Better Use of Educational Assets within Communities

The TUI represents members in community schools and community colleges. The TUI believes that these schools take the term ‘community’ very seriously and that the schools engaging meaningfully with the wider community. Examples of this include schools opening at weekends to host small local religious groups to host services, or the community schools/colleges which have PE facilities onsite which are available to the local community in evenings or on weekends. Sadly, during the recent austerity period, funding for these sports facilities were cut and in a number of cases funding only became available for the facilities to open during the school day – despite the protestations of the schools who wanted the facilities to be open much longer. The TUI would be very pleased to hear that the DES is willing to extend funding to schools to enable the payment of utilities, insurance and staffing which are required to allow schools to open longer. It would not be acceptable for the DES to ask schools to take on additional costs without a commitment from the DES to fund the full cost of same.

Special Needs Education

The TUI has repeatedly asked the DES to fund the implementation of the EPSEN Act. As recently as January 2018, the TUI was informed by the DES that the necessary funding was not available and no timeline could be offered as to when the necessary funding might be available. The TUI would welcome a commitment by the DES that such funding will be sourced as a matter of urgency. Data from the NCSE (2014) show that over the 2013-2014 school year, 25,572 boys and 9,429 girls were allocated additional teaching resources for low incidence disabilities in mainstream primary and post-primary schools. Barnardos (2008) estimates that 18% of students fall within the parameters of the EPSEN Act.

A commitment to implementing the EPSEN Act is essential if provision for students with SEN is to be adequately and appropriately addressed. However, full implementation will only be possible when sufficient resources are allocated toprimary and post-primary schools. Over ten years ago, the TUI emphasised that schools were not sufficiently resourced to implement specific elements of the EPSEN Act, in particular designing and delivering Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for SEN students. In November 2018, the TUI reiterated this position in a communication with members and a letter to the DES and also pointed out that our position applied to other documents that could reasonably be interpreted as an IEP by a different name.

In 2018, schools are in receipt of far fewer resources as a consequence of austerity measures since 2008. Most pertinently, the moratorium on posts of responsibility has diminished capacity to establish special needs departments or otherwise plan and co-ordinate related activity in most schools, notwithstanding some minor restoration of posts recently. However, some schools continue to lose posts whilst many other schools are awaiting any restoration. In addition, a worrying level of casualisation has emerged and the expertise of many teachers with particular qualifications and training in special education is lost as schools cannot deploy staff to best effect. Furthermore, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has removed the allowance payable to teachers who hold a Postgraduate Diploma in Special Educational Needs and participate in the planning and delivery of teaching supports to student with SEN. It’s difficult to see how the Government values the work of teachers who have pursued a qualification in SEN when the Government has removed the allowance for that qualification. Likewise, in the current context of much reduced staffing (fewer teachers and middle management posts, removal of ex-quota guidance posts, removal of enhanced allocations for areas such as Travellers and ESOL) many schools will not be in a position to assign adequate staff time to carry out a comprehensive profiling exercise of the student population and, in particular, of the totality of special needs that exist within it.

In the interest of students the TUI supports the full implementation of the EPSEN Act and embraces the core concepts of integration, inclusion, early intervention, individualised planning and monitoring of progress. However, this is somewhat impractical and overly ambitious as current government cost cutting policies in the public service are completely at odds with intention to implement. Efforts towards full implementation are laudable but TUI is emphatic that any additional work required cannot be imposed on teachers who are already overstretched on a daily basis and have suffered multiple pay cuts. Furthermore, full implementation would place considerable additional demands on other public services, in particular, the HSE. A measured and considered approach to managing the deployment of national resources is therefore critical and realistic expectations of what is achievable at school and service level are essential.

Meeting the Skills Needs of the Future

The adult and further education sector has a long and productive history of meeting the needs of adult learners, students recently out of school and of the workplace. Education and training serves an important need in the development of a skilled staff workforce. However, it also serves the personal development needs of many people. It is vital that both strands continue to flourish. The adult and further education sector is diverse because of the diverse needs of learners. Such diversity is a strength that must be protected.

The TUI believes that the benchmark grade for FET provision is that of teacher. This would be a guarantor of quality and prevent destabilisation and devaluation of the FET sector. The TUI seeks categorical assurances that SOLAS will not attempt to diminish the established pay and terms of employment of teachers in the sector. Therefore, the baseline requirement for staff employed to deliver FET programmes should be an appropriate teaching qualification. Emphasis in this sector should continue to be placed firmly on delivering good quality education.

Other critical issues include the deterioration in teacher and capital allocations, the depletion of guidance services and the artificial and counter-productive limitation on participant places on post-Leaving Certificate courses.

Apprenticeship is central to the development of a high quality skilled workforce. The Irish national apprenticeship system has an international reputation for the quality and excellence of apprenticeship education and training. The high standard of competency, skill and knowledge demonstrated by Irish apprenticeship students is evidenced in the awards achieved at the biannual Worldskills competition. Young Irish apprentices have gained results competing against apprenticeships from the largest and most developed countries in the world. These developed countries invest heavily in their apprenticeship system and provide specialised additional training programmes for the apprentices who qualify to take part in their national team. Irish apprentices with the expert support from lecturers from institutes of technology have managed to punch above their weight and brought home gold, silver and bronze medals and have been awarded medallions for excellence in their respected trade areas. This success is underpinned by the work of the National Apprenticeship Competition Committee and the Annual National Skills competitions held in institutes of technology. Lecturers in institutes give their time on a voluntary basis to promote the work of both the National Skills competition and the Worldskills competition.

Furthermore, the Irish apprenticeship system has a brand quality recognised in the real world of work by both small and large employers and multinational companies. Irish apprentices who successfully complete both their theoretical and practical examinations in the institutes of technology and achieve their required work-based learning standards gain a valuable award which can be considered as a passport to gain access to employment markets internationally. It is vital that the brand quality of the Irish apprenticeship system is protected. Any proposed changes to the system need to consider the consequences and evaluate the risks to international brand reputation and the quality and standards of the apprenticeship system. The TUI demands that that the quality provision of the established apprenticeship system is protected. The TUI seeks representation on the national Apprenticeship Council. The TUI believes that a governance policy is required for apprenticeship including the operational structures of the agencies involved and the key stakeholders. The TUI, working with the European Trade Union Council, intends to develop European apprenticeship projects through Erasmus+. The TUI will work in partnership with the institutes of technology, Education and Training Boards, SOLAS and QQI to promote apprenticeship as a worthwhile career option.

Technological Universities

The TUI believes that Institutes of technology should have the opportunity, but not the compulsion, to convert to Technological Universities. Such conversion of status should not be premised on a compulsory merger of existing IoTs. Furthermore, it is absolutely unacceptable to the TUI that conversion to TU status would change existing member’s terms and conditions or the right of members to have these determined at a national level. Furthermore, conversion to TU status cannot be done on a “shoestring” as highlighted by the CEO of the HEA in February 2015.

Funding of Third Level

Existing funding of third level education is wholly inadequate. The DES recognises that a crisis exists in third level in its statement that there has been “a net reduction in core funding per student (22%) given the scale of increase in student numbers (15%)” and that there has been a “reduction of 2,000 staff) (DES, 2016: 83). DES (2016: 85) states that “the current ECF, agreed for the period 2010 to 2014, remains currently in place” and that “the higher education sector has met, and indeed exceeded, all the required reductions in posts”.

The Institute of Technology sector has suffered a range of anti-educational cutbacks during the ‘austerity’ years. Funding was cut by 35% (€190m) between 2008 and 2015. Over the same time period, student numbers rose by a staggering 32% (21,411) while, as a result of operation of the Employment Control Framework (ECF), lecturer numbers fell by 9.5% (535). This has had a serious direct, detrimental effect on the quality of service to students and the working conditions of academics.

While the sharp increase in numbers participating in third level education is most welcome, the complete failure to provide appropriate funding and to maintain appropriate staffing levels is having a direct, negative impact on the student experience of higher education. For example, students now experience larger class sizes, less access to laboratories and libraries and sharp cuts to tutorials and other student supports. The TUI considers the current workload of members lecturing in the IoT sector to be excessive and in need of review. The OECD (2014) stated that the average student to teaching staff ratio for higher education institutions in Europe is 16:1. A low student to teaching staff ratio is a positive indicator of quality, funding and resourcing. In the IoT sector the ratio is currently 23:1. This high level is putting quality at risk. There is an urgent need to recruit lecturing staff into the IoT sector to meet the growing demand for student places in higher education.

The TUI considers the IoTs provide a unique regional mission enabling access to higher education opportunities in rural communities throughout the country. For this regional and rural provision to be sustainable, alternative funding models need to be developed. The current unit cost model disproportionately favours higher education providers in dense urban settings.

The TUI has repeatedly highlighted the opportunity to properly fund third level education by proposing a one percentage point increase in the Corporation Tax rate. This would allow employers, who benefit from our highly educated and young workforce, to make a meaningful contribution to the education of that workforce through this contribution to a ring-fenced fund.

Professional Development

The TUI believes that it essential for all staff in the education system to have access to professional development opportunities. These opportunities should be held within normal working time and should be funded by the relevant employer. The TUI considers the conferences, seminars and training provided to our members should be recognised for the purposes of CPD

Guidance Support

The TUI has previously welcomed the actions of the DES in providing some alleviation to the abolition of ex-quota guidance in schools. TUI asks the DES to take the next step, as the economy continues to grow rapidly (OECD, 2018; ESRI, 2018; Central Bank, 2018; EY, 2018; IMF, 2017; EU Commission 2017; NERI, 2018), to restore full ex-quota guidance at the earliest opportunity. Mental health issues have increased among students and the lack of adequate counselling support could lead to tragic outcomes. The restoration of middle management posts would also contribute to re-creating the pastoral system that supported students previously.

Teacher Recruitment and Retention

In October 2018, members of the Teachers’ Union of Ireland (TUI) voted to accept a proposal on ‘new entrant’ salary scale issues by a margin of 53% to 47% in the context of the union’s ongoing campaign for pay equality. The union has warned that, of itself, this measure does not deliver pay equality. The union has also said that it will have little impact on the deepening crisis of recruitment and retention. There is no such thing as partial pay equality and the continuing injustice of discrimination against new and recent entrants to teaching remains to be comprehensively addressed.

What remains to be achieved?

1. Elimination of the remaining differences in the early points of scale
2. Restoration of the HDip/PME allowance (formerly payable to holders of the Professional Master of Education (PME) qualification
3. Restoration of commencement on point 3 of scale in recognition of six-year (primary degree and PME) training period

There has been a fall of over 50% in the numbers applying for places on the PME postgraduate teacher education courses between 2011 and 2018 (TUI, 2018). This catastrophic drop coincided with withdrawal of the HDip allowance and abolition of incremental recognition for the period of per-service, unpaid training.

Another causal factor in the crisis is that most new entrants to teaching are offered part-time work. Very few earn a full salary from initial appointment. They struggle to get by and many decide to leave teaching.

Conclusion

To sum up, the TUI believes that the priority areas for the DES over the next three years should be:

* Implementation of EPSEN with adequate funding
* Adequate funding of the third level sector
* Support for adult and further education and a recognition of its broad and diverse role
* Focus on a small number of essential initiatives rather than a ‘scattergun’ approach
* Support for the unique role of Institutes of Technology
* Ongoing support for programmes tackling educational disadvantage
* Restoration of pastoral support systems
* Full restoration of pay scales and allowances

Ends

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Acronyms

CPD Continuing Professional Development

CEO Chief Executive Officer

DES Department of Education and Skills

DEIS Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools

EPSEN Educational Provision for Students with Special Educational Needs

ETB Education and Training Board

FET Further Education and Training

HEA Higher Education Authority

HSCL Home School Community Liaison

IoT Institute of Technology

LCA Leaving Certificate Applied

LCVP Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme

SCP School Completion Programme

TU Technological University

TUI Teachers’ Union of Ireland

TY Transition Year

UK United Kingdom

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