Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI) response to the invitation of the

Department of Education to make a submission on the topic of "*Education for Sustainable***

Development (ESD) Strategy".

(June 2021)

Introduction

The TUI would like to thank the Department of Education (DE) for the opportunity to make this submission on the topic of the forthcoming ESD strategy. In making this submission the TUI recognises that since the last ESD strategy the DE is now separate from the new Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS). However, the TUI makes this submission in the knowledge that many of the principles of ESD apply to all sectors of the education system and hence will refer to sectors beyond post-primary in this submission.

The TUI represents teachers, lecturers and staff (19,000+) in Education and Training Boards (ETBs), voluntary secondary schools, Community and Comprehensive (C&C) schools, Youthreach, institutes of technology and technological universities and those working in out of school services.

Background

Ireland has an internationally acknowledged, high-performing education system and a respected teaching profession (Teaching Council, 2010; OECD, 2013; DES, 2018a; OECD, 2015a; NAPD, 2016; Comhairle na nOg, 2017; Growing Up in Ireland, 2017; IPSOS MRBI Trust in the Professions Survey, 2017; Boyle, 2017; Boyle, 2019; Scanlon & McKenna, 2018; EU Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018; Kantar Millward Brown, 2018; EU Commission, 2018; EU Commission, 2019a; EU Commission, 2019b; Social Progress Initiative, 2018; United Nations

Development Programme, 2018, Irish Survey of Student Engagement 2018; HEA, 2019a; Coolahan, 2017; Eivers, 2019; CSO, 2019a; McKeown et al., 2019; CSO, 2020; OECD, 2020a; Eurofound, 2020; McNamara et al., 2020; Clark & Kavanagh, 2021) despite spending relatively little on education (OECD, 2015b; SJI, 2018, NERI, 2018, OECD, 2019a; UNDP, 2019) and experiencing historic underinvestment (DES, 2018b). Indeed citizen satisfaction with the education system in Ireland is the highest of any of 22 European countries studied by Boyle (2018) whilst parent satisfaction with the Irish education system was the second-highest out of fifty-six countries in Clerkin et al. (2020).

It is also worthwhile noting that 2019 data (OECD, 2019b) shows that both citizen satisfaction with the education system, and the economic return to the taxpayer of investment in education, are both extraordinarily high in Ireland compared to international norms. An Ipsos MRBI survey in 2019 found extraordinarily high levels of public trust in teachers, much higher than for journalists, Gardai, civil servants, politicians, business leaders, social media influencers, bankers or even the "ordinary person in the street" (Irish Times January 31st 2019). ESRI (2020) found very high levels of trust of young people in the Irish education system.

Ireland has a very young population (Eurostat, 2015; Government of Ireland 2019b; DCYA, 2020). 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, 2017; Eurostat, 2017; Government of Ireland, 2019b) indicates that the population of young people is likely to remain high for the foreseeable future. The DES (2012, 2017) suggests that the number of students in the primary school system will rise by forty-nine thousand (516,460 to 565,696) from 2011 to 2019 and by almost one hundred thousand in second level between 2011 and 2025 (322,528 to 416,897). The latest projections are that numbers in post-primary will peak at 402,000-410,000 in 2024/25 (Government of Ireland, 2020; DE, 2020a). Furthermore, "full time enrolments in third level institutions have grown substantially over the past 10 years rising from 138,319 in 2007 to 183,642 in 2017, an increase of 32.8 per cent" (DES, 2018c: 4). The latest projections are that numbers in higher education will peak at up to 242,000 in 2031

(DES, 2018d). In this context, it is not sufficient to suggest that a world-class child centred society can be achieved with inadequate resources of time, money or personnel.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The TUI supports the UN 17 Sustainable Development Goals & looks forward to working with fellow stakeholders in developing and implementing the frameworks and agreed actions that will enable members to fully participate in achieving the 169 targets highlighted in the SDGs.

The TUI particularly encourages discussions with relevant bodies to agree approaches that will enable the effective achievement of the targets within SDG 4 (ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all).

The TUI asks that the DE assist the trade union movement in developing agreed common approaches in achieving the targets so that by 2030 the Irish educational system will have:

(4.1) ensured that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes

(4.2) ensured that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education

(4.3) ensured equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university

(4.4) substantially increased the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship

(4.5) eliminated gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations

(4.6) ensured that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy

(4.7) ensured that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture

of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

The TUI also supports the means of implementation to include

(4.A) building and upgrading education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all;

(4.B) substantially expanding globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries;

(4.C) substantially increasing the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States.

ESD Generally

ESD is very important in terms of society and the economy generally, as well as the education system specifically. The TUI welcomes the commitment of the DE to ESD but also draws the attention of the DE to the many other priorities which schools try to meet on a daily basis. It is important that the DE not engage in "initiativitis" (Fullan, 2008) or "repetitive change syndrome" (Abrahamson, 2004). Abrahamson refers to symptoms of overload, chaos, anxiety, cynicism and burn-out. The International Review of Curriculum and Assessment Frameworks (INCA, 2003) found that curricular overload was putting pressure on schools in many countries.

It is important that human rights are encompassed within ESD. For that reason it is important that specific reference be made to the vital role played by trade unions in the context of human rights and the sustainable development of society generally.

The previous National Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development outlined eight priority action areas, identified as key to the achievement of the overall aim of equipping learners with the knowledge, skills and values 'to become informed active citizens who take

action for a more sustainable future' (DES, 2014a: 3). Amongst those priority action areas in the National Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development were:

1 Promoting participation by young people

2. Curriculum

3. Professional development

4. Further Education and Training

5. Higher Education and Research

6. Leadership and coordination (DES, 2014a: 4)

The TUI believes that these areas continue to be vitally important and will frame this submission in that context.

Promoting Participation by Young People

The Irish education system is fortunate to have an extraordinary high level of school completion by international standards (DE, 2020c; OECD, 2019a). This has been achieved despite the fact that School Completion Programmes (SCP) have been stripped back and the lack of standardisation of SCP roles means vital supports to students and schools are being lost. Cuts to the SCP programme amounted to approximately one-quarter of its pre-recession budget (Irish Times, April 22nd 2017). Recent increases in funding (Budget 2021) have reduced the gap somewhat but SCP is still operating on a budget approximately 20% below what it was over a decade ago. This is not "sustainable development".

As well as young people being able to engage in processes, it is vitally important that the education partners be able to do so. In light of this, it is deeply regrettable that the TUI has been denied a role on the Board of Directors of Solas. The TUI again asks that the DE uses its considerable influence to ensure that the TUI is given the seat it rightly deserves given the key role that TUI members play in FET in Ireland.

The TUI notes that legislation currently working its way through the Oireachtas would create the right to a student and parent charter. The TUI is working with other teacher unions to create a teacher charter which would make clear what rights teachers and teacher leaders

have. The TUI would welcome the support of the Department of Education, in amending the current proposed legislation to include that teacher charter.

<u>Curriculum</u>

The TUI would like to acknowledge that since the last ESD strategy thanks to the NCCA and DE, the role of trade unions as part of civic society has been acknowledged in the Politics and Society course in Leaving Certificate. ESD is a very important part of the curriculum, both generally and within specific subjects. For example, it is very important that students learn the facts about global warming, pollution, deforestation etc in subjects such as geography, science, home economics etc. It is also very important that students have an opportunity to learn about, and debate, general issues of ESD such as human rights, civic society, health outcomes, democracy, equality, fairness throughout the curriculum.

At the time of writing (May 2021), the TUI awaits publication of the NCCA Senior Cycle review report. The TUI has worked hard over the last five years since 2016 to ensure that its views are prominent in the Senior Cycle review process. We have been engaged both bilaterally and multilaterally with, and within, the NCCA. The TUI has also met with the Department of Education, State Examinations Commission, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the other education partners to ensure that our voice is heard. The TUI has, at all times during those five years, emphasised the need for positive improvement in Senior Cycle whilst also ensuring that the widely recognised strengths of the current Senior Cycle, such as state certification, are retained. In relation to this report specifically, the TUI has worked intensively since 2018 to ensure that all structural proposals within the NCCA advisory report to the Minister are reflective of core TUI values. Amongst these core values are involvement of teachers and school leaders at all stages, the essential role of the State Examinations Commission in certification, the need for CPD and professional time, the need to end ringfencing of the LCA and LCV programmes and also the need for better recognition of vocational pathways for students in schools and for those in non-mainstream settings. In the area of assessment, the TUI has consistently called for use of second component assessment, where appropriate, in more subjects so as to reduce the reliance on the June examinations. However, those additional assessment components must be carried out by the SEC and must not lead to additional work for school staff. The TUI also ensured that the needs

of students with SEN and/or coming from disadvantaged backgrounds were central to any revision of Senior Cycle and that equity was a core part of the report's proposals. The TUI has also strongly insisted that the Senior Cycle must do more than preparing students for higher education and the labour force. It must prepare students for life in a changed society where global challenges (such as the environment, technology, economy, wellbeing and citizenship) abound. The TUI will engage extensively with the Department of Education to ensure that all necessary resources are provided to ensure that worthwhile improvements to Senior Cycle can be successfully implemented over the course of a number of years, thereby giving school-staff time to prepare.

Professional development

The TUI believes that teachers should always be able to access high quality CPD within school time and at no cost to the teacher. This CPD should be available when required in areas such as child protection, pedagogy, health and safety etc. It should also be available before/during and after the introduction of curricular change. It is absolutely unacceptable that the DE has refused, since 2011, to pay qualification allowances to teachers pursuing further teaching qualifications such as the Special Needs allowance. The payment of such allowances should be restored forthwith if the DE is to have any credibility in saying that it stands for CPD as part of ESD. The DE should also work with the relevant agencies such as the Teaching Council to abolish the second year of the PME. In advance of abolition, PME students should be paid during the second year of their studies. Similar arrangements should be put in place with regard to the final year of concurrent programmes of initial teacher education. Furthermore, SEN coordinators now require the availability of a paid post on a par with *Programme Coordinator* to ensure adequate time and resources to discharge the duties associated with the increased workload. In addition to the above, it is important that additional resources be given to CPD support services such as PDST/JCT/PPLI/Education Support Centres/NCSE Support Services etc., so that extensive CPD can be available, during the school day, to teachers who wish to avail of it. Ongoing, and expanded resources should also be provided to TPNs such as subject associations. Each national curricular programme such as LCA should have a full-time national coordinator.

Further Education and Training

Sustainable development is an area of significant work within the FET sector in Ireland. Recent expansion of the apprenticeship system, especially in areas of new greener technologies, has been welcomed by the TUI. Further expansion would also be welcomed. The IoT/TU sector also plays a key role in promoting ESD and its impact on society and the environment. However, it is with great sadness that the TUI must state that parts of the FET sector are working in buildings that are not only very poor examples of sustainability but barely functional. The Youthreach sector in particular is often housed in buildings which could only be described, in the politest of ways, as sub-standard. Dilapidated would not be an unkind description either. This is not confined to the FET sector either. The next section will deal with this in more detail.

Buildings

The Covid crisis has highlighted the very poor state of many education buildings in Ireland. This is not just confined to the Youthreach sector though it is certainly at a particularly worrying level there. Post-primary schools, colleges of further education, training centres and HEIs are all struggling with buildings that are not fit for purpose, too small, and in some cases are not even safe. The DE itself (DES, 2018b) has acknowledged the "historic underinvestment" in buildings.

In 2018, the TUI (TUI, 2018) recommended the following to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills:

- Significant investment is required for both the building of new schools and the modernisation/expansion of existing schools.
- Curricular needs and changes to curriculum must be taken into account in terms of deciding building projects and the resources attached to same.
- Building cost inflation, and the time required to get approval for buildings, need to be factored into budgets, as does the additional costs of building in remote areas.
- Provision must be made for additional resources for schools in relation to maintenance, fire safety and Health & Safety.

- Each school should have a dedicated Facilities Manager who would ensure each school is compliant with the above and take the day-to-day compliance responsibility away from the Principals.

- There should be updated guidance on buildings management.

- There could perhaps be centralised buildings management by resourcing ETBs to do it for all schools.

- A small number of schools seem to be reluctant to agree extensions if the extension is recommended for the provision of special classes. Recent legislation prevents 'soft exclusion' in admissions criteria but lack of building space doesn't prevent 'soft exclusion'. All schools and sectors should be welcoming of students with SEN, and have the necessary buildings and facilities to enable inclusion.

- Ancillary staffing allocations should be increased.

- Adequate bathroom facilities should be provided.

- The unique needs of new schools temporarily being housed in primary schools, must be taken into account.

- All stakeholders should play a role in ensuring that school amalgamations can be carried out successfully.

- A simplified application system could be introduced for necessary works.

<u>Higher education and research</u>

As outlined above, the IoT/TU sector plays a crucial role in the expanded apprenticeship model. This should be built upon. The sector also often leads the field in the development of ESD. Sadly it is very difficult for lecturers in the IoT/TU sector to conduct research in the area when their teaching load is out of all proportion to that carried by lecturers in other sectors/jurisdictions (Collins et al., 2020; Clarke et al., 2015; HEA, 2017). It is also important to note that the student body in this sector is much more diverse than the student body in the traditional university sector (Erskine and Harmon, 2020; DES, 2019; HEA, 2019b; HEA, 2019c; Thorn 2018; HEA, 2014; Phulphagar & Kane, 2020; AHEAD, 2015). As noted by CSO (2020), real expenditure per student at third level education decreased from €10,806 in 2007 to €7,089 in 2016, a drop of 34.4%. The question must be asked as to whether the current

level of funding is in fact sustainable development in light of the rising student numbers (DES, 2018d; Government of Ireland, 2019a).

Leadership and coordination

The DE, and its fellow Government departments and agencies, have a fundamental role to play in ensuring that schools have the supports they need to carry out their day-to-day duties. Schools rely heavily on support agencies, especially when working with students experiencing crisis. Vulnerable students require the presence of ex quota guidance teachers but also other specialist agencies. Guidance staff in schools, and principal teachers, often find it very difficult to access outside support when needed as the agencies themselves are under significant pressure.

Many of these support services are vital if a student who is suffering bullying is to be adequately supported. However, through no fault of the staff in the agencies, there are often significant waiting lists. Caseloads for agency staff are often unmanageable. For example, in 2015, less than half of the recommended 127 specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) teams had been established, 472 children in care did not have a social worker, 673 children in care did not have a care plan whilst there are 8,161 child protection cases which had not been allocated a social worker including 2,829 deemed 'high priority' (Children's Rights Alliance, 2015). In March 2018, 2,691 children and young adults were waiting for a CAMHS appointment, including 386 who were waiting more than 12 months and 128 who were waiting more than 18 months (Irish Times September 10th, 2018). In January 2019 the situation was only very slightly better with 2,523 children on a HSE CAMHS waiting list (PSI, 2019). The Inspector of Mental Health Services has stated that only 49% of HSE mental health rehabilitation teams have been established (RTE, 10th October 2019). Mental health services overall are short 2,422 whole time equivalents (WTEs) on what government policy said in 2006 was needed (12,354 based on the 2016 census) and some areas, including much of Dublin, have "less than half the staff" deemed to be necessary (Irish Times, December 28th 2019). As noted in a study in Dublin by McCarthy Quinn and Comiskey (2019: 69) only a small number of young people suffering severe emotional stress "are in contact with an agency that can assist, there is known to be a hidden cohort of young people who are not

visible to the health services". Children's Commissioner (2021: 2) stated that "a staggering 1 in 6 children now have a probable mental health condition."

In November 2018, 37,473 children were "in some health queue waiting for an assessment for mental health, disability or speech and language problems" (Irish Independent Nov 28th, 2018). Schools are trying to support a child in accessing speech and language therapy for example (Irish Examiner, September 22nd, 2014). Children's Rights Alliance (2018) highlights the 314 children who have been waiting over one year for a speech and language therapy assessment. Furthermore, according to the Childcare Law Reporting Project, in relation to applications for secure care – where a child is detained in a special unit providing specialised care and education where they have very high needs - there are 26 secure care beds in the State "and only 14 of them are available mainly due to staffing problems" (Irish Times, January 13th 2020). In February 2020, a review by the Mental Health Commission concluded that there was "an almost total absence" of community mental health services across the State (RTE News February 19th 2020).

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) has, on a number of occasions, outlined its concerns about inadequate community adolescent mental health services. Indeed, IHREC (2019: 28) stated clearly that

"*There were 6,811 children awaiting a psychology appointment across all Community Healthcare Organisations at the end of July 2017, of which 2,186 were waiting more than a year. There is no primary care psychology service to refer children to in North Dublin.*"

In January 2019, there were 29 vacant posts of child and adolescent psychiatrists across the country (RTE News, February 1st, 2019). 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 reasonable rate of 2500 students per psychologist, taking into account demographic group, would require the employment of 267 more psychologists by 2021 (Impact, 2015). Understaffing in National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) has also

been a concern in an Oireachtas Committee report (2018). In 2017, there were 2,767 children waiting for a first appointment with CAMHS whilst Ireland has the fourth highest incidence of teenage suicide in the European Union (Children's Rights Alliance, 2018). OCO (2018:4) made clear that it is "concerned with staffing problems in the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services which means that children experiencing escalating levels of stress and anxiety are often unable to access the emergency supports they need." Two years later OCO (2020: 21) found that "waiting lists for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) remain high, with 2,300 children waiting for an appointment at end of December 2019."

As stated in 2020 by Paul Downes of the Education Research Centre (Downes, 2020)

"In France, all pupils have access to the Psychologist of Education for psychological support and career guidance. Emotional counselling is also available in Sweden, where all students have access to a school doctor, school nurse, psychologist and school welfare officer at no cost and in Slovenia."

The DE will be aware that such a level of provision is still a far-away dream for Irish educators.

This is all within the context that during 2014, the then Tusla Chief Executive publicly stated that the Agency required additional funding of €45 million "just to stand still" (Irish Times, December 30th, 2014). Indeed, Tusla (2018) stated that "while additional funding has been agreed for 2018, significant additional funding will be required for 2019 and 2020". Budget 2019 did give Tusla an increase in its budget of €30m to €786m (Irish Examiner October 9th 2018) but gaps remain. As recently as March 2018, Tusla was short almost three hundred social workers (TheJournal.ie March 28th, 2018) and more than 4,000 children who were referred to protection and welfare services were waiting to be allocated a social worker (Irish Independent March 29th, 2018). In 2018 Tusla recruited 150 social workers, but in the same time frame lost 150 social workers through resignation or retirement (Oireachtas, 2019). This was slightly improved in 2020 by way of converting agency staff to Tusla employees.

Concerns about mental health, and the adequacy or otherwise of support services have also been expressed in Reilly (2015), Mental Health Reform (2018), Mental Health Commission

(2018) and RCSI (2013). The Programme for Government 2016-2018 promised 238 psychologists in NEPS by 2018. In October 2018 there were only 172 wholetime equivalents in post (DES, 2018c). The DE will note that Impact (2015) made clear six years ago that 267 "more" psychologists were needed, not 172 in total. A parliamentary answer (30812/20) on October 15th 2020 set out that the total allocation to NEPS staffing by the end of 2021 would be 251 WTEs. As noted earlier, student numbers in 2020 are considerably higher now than in 2015 – by c.16,000 in primary schools and 26,000 in post-primary schools (DE, 2020b).

RTE News (September 23rd, 2018) reported that less than 10% of the number of staff required for CAMHS intellectual disabilities were in place. In October 2018, 36,531 people were waiting for speech and language therapy (SLT) with a further 32,103 waiting for occupational therapy (OT). One-quarter of those waiting for an OT assessment had been waiting more than a year (Sunday Independent, December 16th, 2018). According to the Mental Health Commission (2020: 17), there are only "98 CAMHS beds nationally: 62 in Dublin, 20 in Galway and 16 in Cork." The DES (2020:3) itself has stated that "the number of referrals (to CAMHS) for 2018 was 18,546 compared to 12,800 in 2011". TASC (2020: 2) has stated that
"Medical health supports are also highly understaffed, with the Psychological Society of Ireland in September 2019 reporting a waiting list of 6,300 children for primary-care assessments and a waiting list of 3,345 adults for counselling (McDaid, 2020)."

The depletion of middle management posts in our schools since 2009 has been very corrosive. It has resulted in a reduction of supports to vulnerable students. The axing of large numbers of posts coincided with an increased demand for supports for students.

In 2018 and 2021, the number of posts was partially restored but only to a level of half of that pertaining prior to the cuts. This minimal restoration was described by the DE at the time as partial and a commencement. They are still only partial and a commencement. The loss of pastoral supports such as Assistant Principal positions and continues to be a situation that the DES (2014b) itself described as "unsustainable".

Additional Conducive Conditions for the embedding of a real sense of ESD in the education system

In addition to the above, there are a number of conditions which, with rectifying, would lead to the embedding of a true sense of ESD in the whole education system in Ireland.

Precarious Employment

Notwithstanding the step forward enabled by the Cush and Ward reports, precarious employment continues to be a serious problem especially in the higher education sector. Many academics and researchers continue to have difficulty in achieving full-time employment on recognised, nationally agreed contracts. Even in the State governed post-primary sector problems persist. Recently the TUI was given data by the ETBI which clearly shows that many ETBs have fallen far below the agreed 95% threshold for full-time employment. There is a need to be able to make permanent and fixed term appointments after November 1st each year.

New Entrant Terms and Conditions

Adjustment to pay scales for education staff in the last decade created discriminatory rates of pay based on when a teacher/lecturer/tutor joined the public service, and there were also significant changes in the pension entitlements of the same staff. Changes in recent years, negotiated by the unions, have ameliorated some problems of discriminatory pay rates. However, lifetime earnings for teachers who qualified in the last decade are approximately €50k less than their colleagues who qualified earlier. The pay differential for lecturers is approximately €17k whilst it is approximately €15k over a career for many staff working in further education. These differentials are unconscionable and grossly unfair.

Croke Park Hours and S&S

Croke Park hours and flex hours in their various manifestations in schools and colleges continue to be a running sore in the education system, as do the significant burden of S&S. Education staff have always gone 'above and beyond' in supporting their students. However, box ticking exercises merely damage goodwill. Over recent years the TUI has made a number

of agreements which have resulted in better use of Croke Park and flex hours. However, the fact remains that these hours should be abolished and trust in the professionalism of teachers, tutors and lecturers restored. In the case of S&S, the system is necessary but currently a very high burden on staff to operate and school leadership to implement. The DE has the power to make the system work but also less burdensome.

Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning (ERTL)

In post-primary, third level, and further and adult education settings, TUI members engaged in ERTL from March until summer 2020, and again for much of early 2021. For many members, especially those working in FET or HE, ERTL continued during this academic year, much of last academic year and possibly even into part of the next academic year.

ERTL has been demonstrated to involve enormous, unsustainable educational, technical and workload challenges. Due to a range of issues, some students experience very significant difficulty in continuing to engage in education once it has been removed from the physical setting of the school, college or centre. The importance of the shared classroom environment and of the personal relationships and interactions at the heart of good educational practice cannot be overstated and their loss cannot be replaced. TUI members witnessed the impact of economic pressures on student engagement, not least in the great difficulties faced by some families and households in adapting their homes into suitable learning spaces in spite of their best efforts. The lack of appropriate devices and broadband access, both for educators and students, presented and continue to present severe limitations on what is possible, as do the lack of training and technical support. Learning resources, lesson plans and teaching strategies must be replaced or rewritten creating massive workload issues. All educational interactions become more time-consuming and more likely to need repetition and reinforcement. Feedback and assessment take place in new settings and formats, many needing to be newly created and taking significantly more time and work by educators.

Investment in the Education System Generally

The TUI believes that 'free education' should mean genuinely free education. Barnardos (2018, 2020) has estimated that genuinely free post-primary education would only cost €127m. A useful first step would be restoration of the full capitation/block grant to schools/ETBs. This would only cost €18.5m. This is a tiny sum in the context of the State funding approximately sixty fee-paying schools to the tune of c.€115m (Irish Examiner, December 9th, 2013). Budget 2019 raised capitation per second-level student "by almost €15 to €310.80 for 2019-2020 but was still 10% short of what was paid in 2010" (Irish Examiner 10/10/2018).

Funding to achieve genuinely free post-primary education could be sourced, at no net cost to the Exchequer, through a financial transactions tax and/or the abolition of bogus self-employment which is designed solely to rob workers of employment rights and to place some businesses beyond the tax net.

It is important to note that Ireland only spends 1.2% of GDP on second-level education, compared to 2.0% in the OECD and 1.9% in the EU22 (OECD, 2019a). In 2020 Ireland fell even further behind at 1.1% of GDP and hence had the lowest spend on post-primary education of 36 countries in an OECD study (OECD, 2020b). The ratio of students to teachers in Irish post-primary schools is also above both the OECD and EU averages (OECD, 2018).

It is important to note that in 2019 Ireland only spent 0.9% of GDP on tertiary education, compared to 1.4% in the OECD (OECD, 2019a). The ratio of students to teachers in Irish tertiary education is also very significantly above both the OECD and EU averages (OECD, 2020b). The funding deficit, even aside from anything to do with Covid-19, will get worse in coming years as, similar to above, student numbers are estimated by the DES to rise by almost thirty thousand in tertiary education in the next ten years (DES, 2018d).

Even without an increase in student numbers over the next decade, the HE budget is forty percent (approximately €100 million) off where we were ten years ago (Irish Times, January 23rd, 2020). The Cassells report made clear that €600m was needed by 2021. The TUI would like to acknowledge the positive comments that Minister Harris made at a recent Education

Futures seminar in relation to not wanting yet another committee to discuss the problems outlined in the Cassells report and that progress needed to be made on the issue in 2021.

Investment in the further education and training sector also needs to be addressed. Priorities in the Programme for Government can only be adequately addressed if accompanied by additional funding. Areas such as Youthreach, adult literacy, post-leaving certificate programmes etc have for too long been a 'Cinderella' of the system.

Equality

Equality must be a core principle in the context of ESD. Equality is not demonstrated by how the system treats new entrants in terms of differential pay, differential pension entitlements and differential qualification and probation criteria. Equality must be clearly shown in the following ways:

Expansion of the DEIS programme

The DEIS system works (Archways, 2017) but needs significant additional investment. The TUI notes the work that the DE is doing on a revised identification model. However, what is really needed is more resources being put into DEIS schools. The quantum is more important than the measurement technique. As noted by Children's Rights Alliance (2020), no new schools have been added to the DEIS programme since 2017.

Educational disadvantage was first raised as a concern in Ireland in the 1960's. Greater availability of, and access to, education led to concerns about equality of access, participation and outcome. By the 1980's, it was clear that different social classes benefited to different degrees from education (Smyth and McCoy, 2009). This is not confined to Ireland. In England for example, children from higher professional backgrounds are 8.1 times more likely to get 5 or more, good GCSE passes than students from manual backgrounds (Connolly, 2009). The issue also tends to be gendered i.e. in 2008, 79% of 18 year old women in Ireland were students compared to 68% of their male peers (CSO, 2008). At a conference in Edinburgh (May 2015), Beatriz Pont from the OECD made the important point that you can't have an excellent education system if you don't have equity and further pointed out that "investing in equity pays off". The Irish Education Act of 1998 defined educational disadvantage in terms

of the "impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools." Since then studies indicate that though all social classes have increased their participation and performance since 1979, the gap between professional and working classes of those who complete the Leaving Certificate has not been significantly reduced (Smyth and Hannan, 2000; Smyth, 1999). Furthermore, there is evidence of a widening gap between the social classes in entry to third-level institutions (Smyth and Hannan, 2000)." In this regard we need to factor in that in 2018, the 'at risk of poverty' rate was 14.0% and the 'consistent poverty' rate in Ireland was 5.6%. (CSO, 2019b)

As stated in DCYA (2020), in 2018 almost 190,000 children were living in income poverty (60% median income) and almost 89,000 children were living in deep poverty. The number of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Ireland was a staggering 302,000.

Hutchinson et al. (2019: 11-12) makes the frightening statement that if current trends continue "it would take over 500 years for the disadvantage gap to close by the end of secondary school" and that in England at least "for the most persistently disadvantaged pupils, the gap continues to narrow in primary but is widening in secondary." Clegg et al. (2017) made similar findings. As noted by Francis and Wong (2013: 4) "socio-economic background remains the strongest single predictor of attainment".

What is badly needed is a significant reduction in PTR, starting with DEIS schools.

End of the 'digital divide'
The digital divide has always been a difficulty for rural and urban areas, wealthy and non-wealthy areas, young and less young people. However, the Covid pandemic and the resulting period of ERTL made clear that there is little, if any, equality in terms of access to broadband and access, and ability to use, digital devices in Ireland. Extensive support for schools, staff and students are necessary. Parents also need support. Access to ICT is an educational necessity, but also good environmental sense.

A full commitment to lifelong learning

Engagement in lifelong learning in Ireland is about the EU average (CSO, 2018; Aontas, 2018). It tends to be concentrated amongst third level graduates and those living in large urban areas (National Skills Council data, July 2020). It also tends to be predominantly in the form of informal learning (CSO, 2018), The disruption to careers and educational pathways caused by Covid-related workplace closures are likely to lead to significant skills shortages in many areas of the economy. In a spirit of ESD, it is important for the Government to provide significant funding to support adults who wish to avail of lifelong learning, not just with a view to the labour force but also societal development. The FET and IoT/TU sectors are uniquely qualified to provide such educational and related supports.

Recommendations

The TUI would like to make the following recommendations to the DE:

- It is essential that vital support structures within schools be restored. This includes, but is not limited to, guidance support and middle management posts.
- Significant investment is needed in all levels of the education system to address historic underinvestment and the significant increase in student numbers that will occur in post-primary, FE and HE over the lifetime of this ESD strategy.
- Whilst recent changes in guidance provision and middle management posts are a small step in supporting students in difficulty, a much larger move in terms of full restoration of both is needed.
- Every school should have a HSCL.
- There should be formal government recognition for the teacher charter which the teacher unions are currently working on.
- Cuts in PTR must take place, starting immediately with DEIS schools.
- A commitment to learning learning.
- There should be a Constitutional referendum calling for the provision "of" education by the State rather than the existing provision "for" education.

Ends

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Glossary

CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
C&C	Community and Comprehensive
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs (Now DCEDIYA)
DE	Department of Education
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Skills (Now DE)
DFHERIS	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
ERTL	Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning
ESD	Education for Sustainable Development
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
ETB	Education and Training Board
ETBI	Education and Training Boards Ireland
EU	European Union
FET	Further Education and Training
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
HSCL	Home School Community Liaison
HSE	Health Service Executive

ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IHREC	Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission
IoT	Institute of Technology
JCT	Junior Cycle for Teachers
LCA	Leaving Certificate Applied
LCV	Leaving Certificate Vocational
NAPD	National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
NERI	Nevin Economic Research Institute
OCO	Ombudsman for Children's Office
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OT	Occupational Therapy
PDST	Professional Development Service for Teachers
PME	Professional Masters in Education
PPLI	Post Primary Languages Ireland
PSI	Psychological Society of Ireland
PTR	Pupil Teacher Ratio
RCSI	Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland
RTE	Raidio Teilifis Eireann
SCP	School Completion Programme
SEC	State Examinations Commission

SEN   Special Educational Needs

SJI   Social Justice Ireland

SLT   Speech and Language Therapy

S&S   Supervision and Substitution

TASC   Think-tank for Action on Social Change

TPN   Teacher Professional Network

TU   Technological University

TUI   Teachers' Union of Ireland

UN   United Nations

UNDP   United Nations Development Programme

WTE   Whole Time Equivalent

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