

**Teachers’ Union of Ireland**

**Response to Proposed Teaching Council Strategic Plan 2015-2017 and Draft Regulations 2014**

**(November 2014)**

Introduction

TUI represents teachers (10,000+) employed by Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and in Community and Comprehensive (C&C) Schools. Following a request for submission on the proposed Teaching Council Strategic Plan 2015-2017, TUI respectfully makes the enclosed points.

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. This is in addition to the pay cuts imposed on public servants in recent years. Perhaps the most important measure of the success of the education system is that parents have expressed satisfaction with the way teachers do their jobs (Teaching Council, 2010; OECD, 2013; DES, 2013) and that students, especially girls, reported liking school (OECD, 2009). This is all happening in the context of significant difficulties in the system in terms of availability of resources (DES, 2014; Irish Times, September 22nd, 2014; Irish Times, September 5th, 2014) and the fact that almost 20% of children are at risk of poverty and almost 10% live in consistent poverty (NERI, 2013).

Draft Regulations 2014

TUI would like to express concerns about three paragraphs in the draft regulations.

Firstly, TUI has a concern about section 7.1(h). The possibility of publishing “such other information as the Council deems appropriate from time to time” appears to be unnecessarily open to ‘creep’ over time. Such ‘creep’ is not acceptable. The extent of information intended for publication should be clearer.

Secondly, section 9.1(b) states that admission to the register requires that the applicant “is not medically unfit to teach and/or unable to discharge his or her duties as a registered teacher”. On first read this seems sensible. However, it does raise the question of whether a teacher returning from long-term sick leave would have to apply for re-registration. This would seem to be an unnecessary burden. Hence this section may need some clarification on that point. This is especially important to a teacher who was registered as CIDu under the amnesty. Following sick leave, these teachers shouldn’t have to apply for re-registration. Indeed, under current regulations on registration, they may not be able to apply for re-registration at all. Clarification is required that the amnesty will continue to apply to teachers under the CIDu rule.

Thirdly, TUI strongly supports the thrust of section 14.4 in trying to protect children, the public, staff, public confidence and the upholding of standards. However, some further elucidation of this section may be beneficial in ensuring that standards and protections are maintained without causing a homogenisation of teaching and the teaching profession.

Section 16.2 states that “an applicant may within 21 days of the date of service of a notice under apply to the Registration Committee for a review of the decision in question”. In such a situation, will the applicant be invited to submit further information or document why they disagree with the decision made? As it stands it reads that the Teaching Council simply reviews the decision – but based on what?

Section 19.1 states that “the Council and any of its Committees may use any of the contact details provided by any person to the Council for the purpose of providing any information to that person, as the Council considers necessary, to include information in relation to disciplinary matters”. Could this mean the Teaching Council could provide information to the employer without the knowledge of the teacher?

Strategy 2015-2017

This submission will look first at the issue of CPD, and will then examine each of the strategic goals individually.

The first issue relating to mandatory CPD is the topic of compulsion. TUI supports the development of the profession. Many teachers already participate in CPD. Such CPD often takes place in teachers’ own time and at their expense. There is rarely a financial benefit ensuing. In fact, teachers who pursued graduate studies in special education, leadership etc. no longer qualify for a salary allowance post-graduation. Even those who do qualify for some allowance are often ‘capped’ by their ETB. Schools are rarely in a position to financially subsidise the cost of CPD which teachers attend. Attendance at CPD often takes place at weekends and in evenings. Teachers attend because of a willingness and desire to provide the best service to their students. Despite these barriers, over seventy percent of teachers attend CPD. Hence, the question must be asked why CPD must now become ‘mandatory’ and what supports will be put in place to support teachers in participating in further CPD.

The second issue is what constitutes CPD. CPD should have an agreed structure and should have academic currency. However, it shouldn’t become excessively academised. CPD should have elements of collaboration, enquiry, dialogue, and debate or reflection. Such CPD could be a Masters or Ph.D. programme in a higher education institution. However, it could also be an online professional community, a meeting at which important issues in education are discussed, a conference examining education/teaching concerns, reflective work carried out by an individual teacher or group of teachers, or a myriad of other activities that meets the definition of CPD above. There is a need to balance personal and professional learning and the danger of only accrediting that which is quantifiable. Under the new Strategic Plan, will a quantum of hours be required and what timeframe will be possible for that quantum to be attained and retained? The timeframe must be realistic and reasonable. Teachers should not be ‘out of pocket’ in pursuing CPD. Furthermore, CPD in a 32-county or an ‘out-of-State’ location should also be allowable. This is important especially for Border counties where attending CPD in Derry for example might be easier than attending the ‘nearest’ centre in the Republic.

Strategic Goal 1 – Work with the profession, public and all stakeholders to promote a culture of shared learning in which research and leading practice is encouraged and applied within the classroom setting

The Teaching Council has made efforts to engage with teachers through for example, its website. TUI believes that further engagement would be beneficial. If resources permitted, an e-magazine or webinars would perhaps be beneficial to both parties.

Strategic Goal 2 – Develop and promote leading standards for teacher education and practice and ensure the achievement of those standards through effective registration process

It should be noted that Droichead is a pilot programme and is being evaluated currently by the ESRI. “The implementation of a revised model of induction and probation” must await the evaluation of the pilot.

“The development of a national framework for Continuing Professional Development” requires a lot of discussion between the Teaching Council and the trade unions. This submission, and the subsequent meeting in November, is only the start of that process.

“The confirmation of standards at each stage of teachers’ careers through the ongoing maintenance of a secure, reliable register of teachers” is a statement whose meaning and purpose is a little unclear to TUI.

Strategic Goal 3 – Lead the enhancement of a culture of professional learning, including a national framework for CPD for teaching

As outlined above, TUI has concerns around the need for the word “mandatory” in Teaching Council publications on CPD, and also around the definition of CPD. This may give rise to a discussion in the industrial relations field.

Strategic Goal 4 – Ensure that the development of fitness to teach processes further enhances public confidence in the profession

A lot of discussion is required around ensuring that “Fitness to Teach inquiries and findings are impartial, objective and proportionate”.

TUI welcomes the statement that where appropriate, issues should be resolved at school level. This will enable the Teaching Council to concentrate on serious allegations regarding Fitness to Teach.

TUI welcomes “the development and ongoing communication of clear guidelines to teachers, school leadership and the public that summarise the rights and responsibilities of all participants at each stage of the process”. TUI would also welcome a document outlining the role of the Department of Education and Skills, together with its support agencies such as PDST and FESS, in supporting CPD.

Conclusion

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. At the time of writing, the date of the meeting has been provisionally set as November 17th or 18th.

**Ends**

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