

**Teachers’ Union of Ireland (TUI) response to the call for submissions by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) on the topic of a revised DEIS identification model.**

**(March 2020)**

**Introduction**

The TUI represents teachers, lecturers and staff (19,000+) employed by Education and Training Boards (ETBs), voluntary secondary schools, Community and Comprehensive (C&C) schools, Youthreach, institutes of technology and technological universities.

**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, 2019; Coolahan, 2017; Eivers, 2019; CSO, 2019a; McKeown et al., 2019; CSO, 2020c) 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 (Boyle, 2018). 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).

The strong economy (ESRI, 2018; OECD, 2017; IMF, 2017; EU Commission, 2017; EU Commission, 2019a; NERI, 2018; ESRI, 2019; IBEC, 2019; Government of Ireland, 2019a; CSO, 2020a) means that Government is in a good position to make a meaningful contribution to continue supporting students coming from disadvantaged communities.

Ireland has a very young population (Eurostat, 2015; Government of Ireland 2019b). In 2008, we had the second highest proportion of 10-14 years old 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 and this is further supported by the large natural increase in population numbers as births significantly outnumber deaths (CSO, 2020b). The DES (2012, 2017) suggests that the number of students will rise by almost one hundred thousand in second level from 2011 to 2025 (322,528 to 416,897). 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.

**Support Services Vital to Schools:**

Schools, especially those in disadvantaged areas, rely heavily on support services to ensure that students can have the same opportunities as those from more financially privileged backgrounds. However those support services frequently are, through no fault of their own, unable to provide essential supports to schools and families as their case loads are utterly unmanageable.

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 an 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”.

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).

As stated by the Children’s Commissioner (2019: 2)

“Across a typical class of thirty students:”

* 6 are growing up at risk due to family circumstances, of whom 4 are living in a household where domestic violence, substance misuse and/or severe mental health problems are present.
* 4 children have an identified special educational need.
* 4 children have a mental health issue, but only 1 will be accessing mental health services.”

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission 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 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). Understaffing in National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) is also a concern of the Oireachtas (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.”

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).

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).

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).

In many cases Educational Welfare Officers seem to be leaving Tusla as fast as they can be recruited. Hence vacancies, both permanent and temporary, have not been filled.

The above difficulties in accessing vital support services compounds difficulties in schools caused by the loss of pastoral supports such as Assistant Principal positions, a situation that the DES (2014) itself described as “unsustainable”. Changes in allocation of guidance support is also a serious difficulty in this regard as students in DEIS schools rely more heavily on school guidance support than students from more privileged backgrounds (Harkin, 2015). Ironically it is DEIS schools which have experienced the most severe cut in guidance support (Smyth et al., 2015; Irish Times, May 16th 2016). As noted in OECD (2018: 15), “socio-economic inequalities in student achievement are observed much earlier than age 15, and they continue to evolve throughout later stages of students’ lives.” OECD (2018: 32) also stated that “disadvantaged students tend to express less psychological well-being than advantaged students.”

**DEIS programme**

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)

What are the effects?

The effects of educational disadvantage include:

* Absenteeism and punctuality issues.
* Poor academic performance. The OECD (OECD, 2006) has found that students from the lowest socio-economic backgrounds were 3.5 times more likely (3.6 times in Ireland) to be the lowest Maths performers in the PISA study than those students who come from the highest socio-economic status.
* Behavioural problems.
* Low self esteem.
* Weak speech and vocabulary.
* Poor health and poor concentration.
* Early school drop-out.
* Unemployment. In the OECD (OECD, 2009), completing upper secondary education reduces the unemployment rate among 20-24 year olds by 6.7 percentage points and among 25-29 year olds by 6.1 percentage points. Male school leavers are 3.5 times more likely to be unemployed whilst female early school leavers are 2.5 times more likely to be unemployed (Smyth and McCoy, 2009).
* Lower income throughout the lifespan. For example, someone in Ireland with no formal qualifications will earn from employment 24% less than those with upper second level. Someone with a third level qualification will earn from employment 45% more than the person with upper second level (OECD, 2006).
* Impact on the economy as a whole. In the United States, cost benefit analysis suggests that keeping children in school benefits the economy to the tune of $209,100 per student (Barnardos, 2009).

Smyth and McCoy (2009) found that we can measure educational inequality in terms of:

* Reading scores at primary level
* Literacy scores on entry to second level
* Performance in the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations
* Retention in second level
* Progression to higher education

A symbol of the inequality in our system is that “the State invests 2.5 times more money per capita in the education of those who complete three years of third level education than it does for those who leave school before the completion of post-primary education.” (CORI, 2005)

Martin (2016) made similar findings in relation to educational disadvantage in Northern Ireland. 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, and this is especially the case for the white majority population”

What have we done about it and has it worked?

To date most initiatives aimed at reducing educational disadvantage have been aimed at DEIS schools.

“However, it is not at all evident that all, or even the majority of, disadvantaged students attend DEIS schools. Unfortunately, no evidence is available on the primary sector but a national survey of school leavers indicates that sixty-one per cent of young people from semi/unskilled manual backgrounds and fifty-six per cent of those from non-employed households attend non-DEIS schools.” (Smyth and McCoy, 2009).

A study by Archer and Weir (2004) suggested that responses to education disadvantage should encompass

* Smaller classes particularly in the early grades. For example, lowering class sizes below twenty is associated with modest increases in academic achievement. Small class sizes are particularly effective if targeted at pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds (Archer and Weir, 2004) Being in a small class has a positive effect on academic achievement and participants are more likely to complete high school. Effects are more marked for disadvantaged groups and those who remain in small classes for an extended period. Those in classes with fewer than seventeen students for a period of three years were almost six months ahead of their peers in reading achievement (Smyth and McCoy, 2009). Despite the mixed results of the Rutland Street project, the evaluation still showed that participants were more likely to obtain educational qualifications at second level than members of the control group (Archer and Weir, 2004).
* Pre-school provision emphasizing prevention.
* A high degree of parental involvement. Parents who were involved in the home school community liaison scheme had greater confidence afterwards in their own capacities to help their children (Archer and Weir, 2004).
* Reform of school organization to develop a unity of purpose and build on existing strengths of teachers and pupils. The JCSP has a positive impact on student attendance and retention for those pupils at risk of leaving school early. The programme has encouraged teachers to engage with a range of teaching methodologies and the extra resources provided to schools are being used beneficially (DES, 2006). Similar findings have been made in relation to Leaving Certificate Applied (Banks et al., 2010). The positive impact of JCSP and LCA should be taken into account by the current and ongoing reviews of JCSP and Senior Cycle.

Findings from recent DEIS studies were presented at a conference in Marino Institute of Education on May 1st, 2014. At that conference, Susan Weir pointed to:

* The enduring relationship between poverty and educational outcomes.
* High levels of engagement by staff.
* A focus on planning and target setting.
* Improved pupil outcomes.
* Significantly improved pupil attendance.
* Aspirations and expectations of 9 year olds of going to 3rd level has improved.
* The return on DEIS is more likely in the long-term than the short-term.

At the same conference, Peter Archer and Laura McAvinue discussed the findings of research on what have we learned about DEIS in post-primary. Those findings included:

* Principal teachers in DEIS schools are overwhelmingly positive about the planning aspect of DEIS while acknowledging some of the drawbacks and obstacles e.g. time.
* Principal teachers are very positive about DEIS but concerned about resourcing.
* Principal teachers say that DEIS improved retention, achievement and attendance.
* In Junior Certificate English, there is an average of 1 grade point difference between DEIS schools and non DEIS schools. Results in DEIS schools have improved a little more than non-DEIS schools in previous five years. The difference in grades in Junior Certificate Maths was slightly wider in DEIS schools but there is no greater maths improvement in DEIS vis-à-vis non DEIS.
* Retention, to Junior Certificate, in non-DEIS schools is 97% but about four percentage points lower in non-DEIS schools. It is difficult to interpret how much of a difference DEIS is making here.
* Retention to Leaving Cert is 92% in non-DEIS schools and 79% in DEIS schools.
* Academic performance in Leaving Certificate in DEIS schools is rising significantly faster than in non-DEIS schools.

Research by Archways (2017) also found that the DEIS programme is working. DEIS needs to continue and indeed needs additional resources in order to ‘level the playing field’ for students. Supports must also continue to other initiatives in disadvantaged areas such as the School Completion Programme (SCP). Recession era cuts to the SCP, of up to a quarter of its budget (Irish Times April 22nd 2017), must be reversed. All schools need access to comprehensive pastoral structures including career guidance and middle management. It is also clear that significant resources must be invested in further and adult education as this is an important route into and through education for many students especially in areas of educational disadvantage. As noted by Children’s Rights Alliance (2020), no new schools have been added to the DEIS programme since 2017.

**Proposed Revised DEIS Identification Model**

The TUI believes that the revised proposed revised model as set out by the DES and ERC on March 12th is positive in so far as it is transparent and reduces administrative burdens on schools. The key concern to the TUI is that resources be targeted at the most vulnerable but that the overall quantum of resources must be adequate to meet the scale of the problem. “Existing resources” are not enough. In this context the TUI welcomes the assurance from DES officials at the event that cutting resources “is not where we want to go”. As well as the scale of existing need, it is necessary for the DES to factor in the increase in post-primary enrolments due over the next four years.

In terms of the mathematical model proposed, the TUI believes that it would be helpful to:

* include a calculation of families living in privately rented accommodation but in receipt of State housing supports;
* capture special circumstances in schools not fully encompassed within the proposed model;
* set out clear appeals processes for schools;
* set out a clear timeline for review of the overall mathematical model;
* incorporate, as much as possible, the needs of migrant communities.

In addition to the above, it is very important that the DES put in place transition arrangements for schools that may no longer qualify for DEIS status other the revised model. This would prevent ‘cliff-edge’ scenarios.

**Conclusion:**

Educational disadvantage has been a serious problem for some time in Ireland. Existing initiatives have made some in-roads but much more needs to be done. Many studies have mapped the extent of the problem and offered possible solutions. However, it is unlikely that any radical improvement can be expected until there is an increase in educational investment in areas such as pastoral supports, further education, and school level supports. Investment in home school liaison support is also necessary. Due to the high level of childhood deprivation in Ireland, and rising student numbers it is not possible to achieve success in the above “within existing resources”. The mathematical model being proposed is, subject to some tweaking, broadly speaking more fair and transparent than the previous model and reduces workload on already overburdened schools. Hence the TUI broadly welcomes it subject to the above concerns. The key concern however of the TUI is that the funding available to DEIS be increased. Trying to support increasing numbers of students in the post-primary system by just using ‘existing resources’ which are already inadequate, is simply unacceptable. The overall budget allocation is of more urgent concern to the TUI than the mathematical model used to calculate individual school distributions.

**Ends.**

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**Glossary**

CAMHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service

C&C Community and Comprehensive

CORI Conference of Religious in Ireland

CSO Central Statistics Office

DEIS Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools

DES Department of Education and Skills

ERC Education Research Centre

ESRI Economic and Social Research Institute

ETB Education and Training Board

EU European Union

GCSE General Certificate of Secondary Education

HEA Higher Education Authority

HSE Health Service Executive

IBEC Irish Business and Employers Confederation

IHREC Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

IMF International Monetary Fund

JCSP Junior Certificate School Programme

LCA Leaving Certificate Applied

NAPD National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals

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

PISA Programme for International Student Assessment

PSI Psychological Society of Ireland

RCSI Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland

RTE Radio Telefis Eireann

SCP School Completion Programme

SJI Social Justice Ireland

SLT Speech and Language Therapy

TUI Teachers’ Union of Ireland

UNDP United Nations Development Programme

WTE Whole Time Equivalent

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