

**Teachers’ Union of Ireland (TUI) response to the call for submissions by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) on the review of the teacher refund scheme.**

**(August 2019)**

The TUI represents teachers, lecturers and staff in out of school services (18,000+) employed by Education and Training Boards (ETBs), voluntary secondary schools, Community and Comprehensive (C&C) schools, Youthreach, Technological Universities and the institutes of technology.

**Background**

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; EU Commission, 2019; United Nations Development Programme, 2018; Irish Survey of Student Engagement 2018; Growing Up in Ireland, 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).

Ireland has a very young population (Eurostat, 2015). 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) 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) between 2011 and 2019 and by almost one hundred thousand in second level between 2011 and 2025 (322,528 to 416,897). In this context, it is not sufficient to suggest that a world-class out of school support system can be sustained with inadequate resources of time, money or personnel. Pre-service and in-service education should be available to teachers who wish to avail of it. Such education should not place a burden on teachers, either in terms of time or money.

**Fee Refund Scheme and Associated Issues**

Data previously obtained by the TUI shows the extraordinary decline in support available to individual applicants under the existing scheme.

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| **Year** | **Total applicants** | **Non approvals** | **Total approvals** | **% refund** |
| 2003/04 | 506 | 123 | 383 | 73% |
| 2004/05 | 587 | 106 | 481 | 53% |
| 2005/06 | 483 | 78 | 405 | 64% |
| 2006/07 | 591 | 95 | 496 | 52% |
| 2007/08 | 552 | 133 | 419 | 63% |
| 2008/09 | 549 | 98 | 451 | 63% |
| 2009/10 | 639 | 107 | 532 | 52% |
| 2010/11 | 786 | 242 | 544 | 46% |
| 2011/12 | 563 | 122 | 441 | 54% |
| 2012/13 | 755 | 72 | 683 | 28% |
| 2013/14 | 805 | 41 | 764 | 24% |
| 2013/14 | 1039 | 56 | 983 | 18% |
| 2015/16 | 1227 | 69 | 1158 | 15% |
| 2016/17 |  |  |  |  |

The TUI would like the DES to take the following matters into account in its review of the teacher fee refund scheme:

* The budget available to the scheme has clearly proven, over a number of years, to be woefully inadequate. A substantial budget increase is required if teachers are to be adequately supported in pursuing further academic qualifications.
* The scheme should, unlike now, be available to all teachers who are registered with the Teaching Council and who are working in schools, colleges of further education, the Prison Education Service or other State-funded education provision.
* It is not sufficient to just restore funding to the Fee Refund Scheme. The allowances which previously existed for further qualifications such as for special needs teaching must be restored.
* The TUI notes that the DES participates in a number of OECD studies such as PISA and PIAAC and also other international studies such as TIMSS. It is deeply regrettable that the DES chooses not to participate in the TALIS studies, which in many ways are an important counterpoint to the other studies, in particular PISA. The TUI asks why the DES is willing to participate in part of the picture but not all of it. Data from TALIS in relation to continuing professional development would provide an important background to the Teacher fee Refund Scheme.

**Conclusion**

The TUI welcomes this review of the Teacher Fee Refund Scheme. However, any review of same will not succeed if the outcome does not include measures to substantially increase funding for the scheme, widen its eligibility criteria and also restore qualification allowances to teachers.

**Ends**

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**Glossary**

C&C Community and Comprehensive

DES Department of Education and Skills

ETB Education and Training Board

PIAAC Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies

PISA Programme for International Student Assessment

TIMSS Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

TALIS Teaching and Learning International Study

TUI Teachers’ Union of Ireland

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