



**Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI) response to the invitation of the  
Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research,  
Innovation and Science to make a submission as part of the Committee's examination of  
the topic "*Education and supports provision for displaced Ukrainian students*".**

**(April 2022)**

**Introduction**

The TUI represents teachers and staff (20,000+) 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, 2019; McKeown et al., 2019; CSO, 2020; OECD, 2020a; Eurofound, 2020; McNamara et al., 2020; Clark & Kavanagh, 2021; OECD, 2021a; CSO, 2021; EU Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021; Indecon, 2020; Purdy et al., 2021; CSO, 2022a; DE, 2021b) despite spending relatively little on education (OECD, 2015b; SJI, 2018, NERI, 2018, OECD, 2019a; UNDP, 2019; OECD, 2021a; Kovacic et al., 2021; CSO, 2022a) 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 31<sup>st</sup>, 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, 2019; 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, 2019) indicates that the population of young people is likely to remain high for the foreseeable future. The DE (2021a) has estimated that the student population in post-primary will rise by approximately seven thousand students per year until reaching a peak enrolment of c.408k in 2024/25. In this context, it is not sufficient to suggest that a world-class child-centred society can be achieved with inadequate resources of time or personnel. In terms of overall expenditure on education, Ireland and Greece were the only EU member states in 2015 to spend significantly less than the UN SDG 4 minimum of 4% of GDP on education (UNESCO, 2022).

The growing economy (ESRI, 2021; EU Commission, 2021; OECD, 2021b; IBEC, 2021; Central Bank, 2022; IMF, 2021; CSO, 2022b; ESRI, 2022) means that Government is in a good position to make a meaningful contribution to continue supporting students with additional needs or from under-represented target groups and/or migrant and refugee communities. This is especially important now that many families have suffered significant economic loss during the Covid-era and following the appalling crisis caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

## **Invasion of Ukraine**

The TUI

- condemns the invasion of Ukraine ordered by President Putin and expresses its revulsion at the unspeakable suffering inflicted on the Ukrainian people;
- regards the Russian invasion as an assault on the humane and democratic values cherished and shared by Ireland and the Ukraine;
- deplores the indiscriminate brutality of the Russian forces, noting emerging evidence of possible war crimes;
- declares the solidarity of the Teachers' Union of Ireland with the people of the Ukraine and, in that context, welcomes the decision of the Irish government to provide sanctuary and assistance to those forced to flee their homes and their country;
- extends its solidarity to our colleagues and to students both in Ukraine and in all sectors of Irish education who may be impacted by this war.

The invasion of Ukraine by Russian military forces in February 2022 has led to an extraordinary movement of civilians towards EU member states. In March 2022, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell stated that Russian forces had committed “war crimes” (Euronews, March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2022). The Irish Congress of Trade Unions, including its affiliate unions such as the TUI, have protested outside the Russian embassy in order to “show solidarity with the people of Ukraine”. It is estimated that up to 100,000 Ukrainian refugees may seek sanctuary in Ireland within the next year (RTE News, March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022). Many will be children and young people seeking to continue their education. The TUI earnestly hopes that all available measures will be in place to support them as they try to rebuild their lives. The TUI is keen to play its part in this endeavour.

## **Curriculum Provision**

Every subject and programme has intrinsic value. The post-primary curriculum in Ireland is recognised as being broad-based and this best prepares learners for life and active citizenship, and best anticipates an ever-changing society where complex challenges, global and personal,

abound. This broad range of subjects should be of assistance in supporting Ukrainian students to find subjects which are of interest to them. The TUI would also note though that small schools are often not able to provide the same range of subjects that larger schools may be able to provide. The TUI sincerely hopes that the DE will provide whatever resources are required to enable Ukrainian students, and indeed all students both Irish and non-Irish, to access a broad education. The TUI also notes that the SEC already enables students to take Leaving Certificate examinations in 'non-curricular languages' such as Polish and Latvian. The range of 'non-curricular languages' is currently confined to EU languages. However, given the circumstances, the TUI believes that an exception could be made so that Ukrainian students could take a Leaving Certificate examination in their own language. It is also possible that some Ukrainian students may be able, with the support of Irish schools, to continue to undertake some of their examinations under the Ukrainian system if sufficient resources and Ukrainian teachers are available to continue to provide the course/assessments. This may also require provision of ICT devices and quality broadband to facilitate participation in online education. Places in educational buildings may also need to be provided.

### **Language Provision**

The TUI has long believed that an expansion of EAL provision in schools is required. It is regrettable that EAL provision is largely subsumed into special needs allocation. Currently schools, colleges and centres of education are experiencing difficulties with diagnostic testing of students on entry to programmes due to the language barrier. The current crisis highlights the need for substantial, and separate, provision to be made for EAL support to Ukrainian students. However, we must also consider the EAL needs of students from other countries as well. The PPLI may be able to make an important contribution here.

Language provision is further compounded in its complexity when Gaeltacht and Irish-language schools are considered. It is important that the DE provide support and guidance to Irish-medium schools to support them as they, in turn, support Ukrainian students.

### **Psychological Supports**

Students entering the Irish education system after fleeing Ukraine are likely to have experienced varying levels of trauma both in what they saw and in what they have left behind. Many will have ongoing concerns about family left behind. It is vitally important that all necessary psychological supports be available both in schools and through the health system. The system may not have sufficient resources to deal with the numbers and issues arriving into the system. However, the importance of guidance counsellors and NEPS staff being available to all students cannot be overstated. For that reason, it is essential that ex quota guidance support be increased to meet the current needs in our schools due to demographic increases but the also identified increased need arriving on our shores. The TUI is aware that NEPS staff are under significant pressure through no fault of their own. For that reason, it is important that large numbers of additional staff are provided as soon as possible. Furthermore, counselling/psychological supports would need to be supported by translation and interpretation services.

### **Regional Education and Language Teams for Ukraine (REALT)**

The TUI is aware of the establishment of REALTs in ETBs. The REALTs will assist in identifying and finding school places for Ukrainian students and will support schools to meet their needs. The TUI believes that REALTs should be available to all students, both Irish and non-Irish. This would assist in preventing 'soft exclusion' of students with special needs for example. However, the TUI is concerned that REALTs as they are staffed from the ETB sector, and have familiarity with this sector, that as a result ETB schools may be expected to take more than their fair share initially.

### **Places for students in all sectors of the education system**

Student numbers in post-primary and FE/HE have risen significantly in recent years and are projected to continue to rise rapidly (DE, 2021a, DES 2018d). Student numbers in the tertiary sector are estimated by the DE to rise by almost thirty thousand in the decade up to 2028 (DES, 2018d). The system has encountered historic underinvestment (DES, 2018b). The

necessary resources and funding must be identified. It must be made available to the system before June. This would include planning for the numbers already arrived but also comprehensive contingency planning for the number that might arrive over the summer months. More places are needed throughout the education system for all students, including those fleeing war in Ukraine. An extensive educational building (and rebuilding) scheme is required to provide purpose-built facilities to accommodate more students, including in the Youthreach sector.

### **Teacher Capacity**

It is vitally important that CPD be provided to teachers by the DE and its agencies. Whilst CPD provided by other organisations is welcome, it often comes ‘with strings attached’ in the form of commercial interests either directly or indirectly. Furthermore, pedagogical improvement is facilitated by CPD being provided by qualified teacher educators within school time to enable meaningful engagement amongst participants. CPD should be available to teachers in relation to dealing with traumatised students, thereby assisting sensitivity in the classroom and the avoidance of unknowingly triggering a student's trauma. There is a lack of knowledge on the culture, traditions and diversity of many of our EAL students. This is also an important area that requires targeted CPD.

Schools rely on support agencies, especially when working with students experiencing crisis. However, schools often find it difficult to access support, as the agencies themselves are under pressure and under resourced. Most schools make every effort to create an inclusive environment for all learners, regardless of background or aptitudes. Targeted investment - especially more teachers to reduce class size - would greatly assist this effort. The depletion of middle management posts (since 2009) has resulted in a damaging reduction in supports for students. The DE has itself described the current paucity of middle management posts as “unsustainable” (DES, 2018c). The extra teachers provided to schools during the COVID-19 crisis should be retained and enhanced to enable schools to provide subject and programme choice at the appropriate levels for all students. Those extra teachers and post holders needed can help meet pastoral needs and ensure student well-being.

There is widespread recognition of a teacher supply crisis. Student numbers in both post-primary and further and higher education are expected to rise significantly in the coming years (DES, 2018d; DES, 2012) thereby increasing the need for a supply of qualified and well-paid teachers and lecturers. The TUI has long made clear that the evidence points to discriminatory pay rates being responsible for this supply crisis (see TUI (2018) for example). In the STEM area, the DE itself has recognised a difficulty of 'out of field teachers' (DES, 2016). Teachers have recognised transferable skills and in the current jobs climate everything must be done to recruit and retain teachers.

The TUI notes recent Teaching Council announcements regarding the process of teacher registration to be followed by Ukrainian teachers. The TUI welcomes the ameliorations provided and would welcome such ameliorations being made available to all qualified teachers regardless of nationality. However, it is important that the overall requirements to become a fully registered and qualified teacher remain to be fulfilled within the traditional three-year Teaching Council requirement.

### **Staff-student ratio**

Students may require one-to-one support from their teachers, especially when encountering academic or personal difficulties. For this reason, it is important that pastoral staff, such as year heads, be available and that staffing ratios in classrooms be as low as possible. This can only be done with a meaningful restoration and increase in the number of posts of responsibility in second level schools.

### **Senior Cycle Review**

The TUI welcomes many aspects of the NCCA report on Senior Cycle review. However, the issue of teacher-assessed, SEC-moderated assessments is unacceptable to TUI members. The current crisis regarding Ukraine demonstrates how difficult, and unfair to students, it would

be for a teacher to try to assess a student who had only joined their class towards the end of the exam-cycle and who, in many cases, may have difficulty communicating with their teacher in the first place.

### **Investment in the Education System**

Irish teachers and lecturers continue to provide a first-class education service to learners of all abilities against the backdrop of significant additional challenges. The findings of the OECD Education at a Glance 2021 report make clear that educators have been carrying out their work in a sector that is chronically and disgracefully under-resourced by international standards. With a range of current and future challenges, an adequately funded education system must be seen as central to the country's future, and Government must urgently commit to redressing the damage of years of cutbacks and neglect.

The key statistic in the report shows that of the countries for which figures are provided, none spend a lower proportion of national wealth on education than Ireland (3%). At second level, the situation remains particularly dire, with Ireland's spend (1.1%) the lowest of the 36 countries for which figures are provided, trailing far behind the OECD/EU averages (both 1.9%).

Recent experiences related to the pandemic have made clear just how many schools and classrooms are unfit for the requirements of modern education. It is students from disadvantaged/SEN/migrant/refugee backgrounds who suffer the most from inadequate education budgets, and the ongoing failure to invest sufficiently must be viewed as a continued attack on the most vulnerable in communities around the country.

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 or Ukraine, will



increase in coming years as student numbers increase as estimated by the DE to rise by almost thirty thousand in tertiary education in the next ten years (DES, 2018d). As shown in OECD (2021a), the ratio of students to teaching staff has increased from 20:1 to 23:1 this year, which is vastly higher than the OECD and European averages of 15:1. This is a clear indictment of the ongoing political refusal to address the sector's funding crisis. It is also a serious problem for student outcomes as "larger classes are associated with significantly lower grades" and the impact is especially severe in STEM subjects and for "students from a disadvantaged background" (Kara et al., 2021: 1, 2).

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. Over 15% of Ireland's 18–24-year-olds are neither employed nor in education (NEETs), according to the latest OECD data. This represents a large proportion of young people and our publicly funded further and adult education sector should be appropriately resourced to provide options to this cohort.

If funding in the system was inadequate prior to Covid, then the system cannot cope with another large disruption, such as the Ukrainian situation, without a large increase in investment in the entire education sector.

### **Covid-19**

The current pandemic has clearly shown the extraordinary lengths staff and management in all sectors of the education system will go to support their students. However, it has also shown the level of historic under-investment that the system is trying to cope with. The TUI welcomes the funding which the DE, and DFHERIS, has put into the system. However, more will clearly be needed as the pandemic continues through 2022 and the increase in student numbers unfolds. The issue of technology and the digital divide is just one example. Providing laptops to students is a start but does not resolve the problem of the digital divide and it does nothing to solve the difficulty of poor access to broadband services especially in rural areas.

The TUI welcomes the general thrust of the recently announced Digital Strategy 2021-2027 and the allied funding and believes that it is an important step in further promoting equity in digital education.

In April 2021, the TUI carried out a survey of its third level members. Key findings of the survey of over 1,500 members included:

- 71% do not believe that the enhanced teaching/staffing allocation provided because of COVID-19 has been sufficient to meet requirements;
- 95% said their work is somewhat or significantly more difficult compared to twelve months ago;
- From a list, respondents identified 'More physical space', 'Smaller class groups' and 'more teachers' as what they would most like to see to counter the workplace risk of COVID-19;
- 52% do not believe that most students have the required ICT facilities to participate in remote learning should schools be required to close for a period.

All the above have a particular influence on students coming from higher education access under-represented groups.

Irish society is acutely conscious of the impact of COVID-19 and its attendant losses in life, health, and employment. We must guard against losses in the social and cultural fabric that binds our nation together. In which connection, the work of TUI members, both in education and as trade unionists, is vital. Indeed, the crisis highlights the centrality of public service and collective effort to any well-ordered society. The TUI earnestly hopes that those newly awakened to this reality do not soon forget it. For our part, we pay tribute and thanks to fellow public servants, in healthcare, policing and education most particularly, and indeed to all workers engaged in the provision of essential services. TUI members have risen magnificently to the challenge of maintaining education of the highest standard. Education is

our greatest equalising and unifying endeavour and in the face of enormous difficulties our members have continued to inspire curiosity and imagination, to release potential and to unfold opportunities and possibilities. The TUI will beware of any complacent, or indeed malign, assumption by Managements or Government that the extraordinary efforts made by school staff in response to the emergency form a template for future work. We will ensure that our no-precedent stipulations, and the written assurances from Government, Departments and Managements to the same effect, will be honoured. ERTL was indeed only an emergency measure. This has been acknowledged by the Minister for Education in her addresses to TUI Congress in both April 2021 and April 2022.

### **Family Accommodation**

The TUI calls on the Committee to ensure that Ukrainian families are adequately accommodated so that their children can be fit to actively engage in education. Accommodation needs to be matched with capacity in the education system for families. Being housed in tents and halls (Irish Times, April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2022) is unlikely to be conducive to educational engagement. The TUI has previously highlighted the high number of students, of all nationalities, who in prior years have had inadequate housing. In 2018 for example, Barnardos found that there were over 3,600 children homeless in Ireland (Barnardos, 2018).

### **English Support for Ukrainian Students**

Further to recent engagements the TUI understands that for students who have completed upper secondary equivalent Ukrainian education (Grade 11/12 or Junior Bachelor in the Ukrainian system) the DEASP may advise Third Level entry. However, there may be a requirement for English language support concurrently and we need to discuss where such supports would come from.

### **RPL for Advanced Entry**

For students who have completed years 1 or 2, a system needs to be provided for RPL and in certain specialisms - in many we imagine - some assessment of the modules undertaken to date will be required. While there has been some mapping of qualifications from the Ukraine to the EQF, it doesn't necessarily mean that the same, or similar modules have been

undertaken, which would make direct advanced entry simple. There is also a conversion process proposing metrics for conversion of Ukrainian grades to ECTS credits - however many students are unlikely to have transcripts or evidence of prior learning available due to the current circumstances.

Decisions on RPL, thus, logically become the purview - in some part at least - of individual departments in individual institutions. Under this item, the TUI seeks an update on the THEA-led RPL project, which we are sure are in the process of considering these challenges. Nonetheless, any responsibility that requires to be taken at the level of a department e.g., SL2 perhaps, is an IR issue and we need to ensure decisions are informed, resourced if required, and the decision maker is provided with the relevant authority and protection to allow them to undertake this important work appropriately.

### **English Support for Advanced Entry - Technical Language**

As above, for non-fluent English speakers, EAL support will be required. However, for advanced entry for some course such support will have to include technical language support e.g., it is vitally important in nursing that students would be taught language to distinguish the types of veins etc. This will not be your normal EAL provision and may require input, again, at the level of the receiving department in the TU/IoT sector.

### **Recommendations**

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

- Substantial support should be provided to Ukrainian students but we should also consider the needs of other non-Irish students as well.
- There needs to be a huge increase in SEN supports and in SEN-diagnostic infrastructure, not just for Ukrainian students but for all students in all sectors of the education system. Historic underinvestment is not acceptable and can't continue. We need a generational leap in provision for all.

- Qualified teachers fleeing Ukraine should be supported in joining the Irish teaching workforce, and the same supports should be extended to all teachers who wish to teach in Ireland. This is ethically the 'right thing to do' but is also in Ireland's interest as we suffer a teacher supply crisis. Much of that crisis was caused by rising student numbers, but also by discriminatory pay and conditions inflicted on new entrants in the last decade. The TUI is seeking to have this issue addressed through the sectoral bargaining clauses in Building Momentum.
- There needs to be more staff and smaller staff-student ratios in all sectors of the education system. Classes cannot be swamped in September 2022.
- Exchequer funding of the education system must be dramatically increased upward towards the international average for investment in education as a percentage of GDP.
- Greater recognition of, and visibility of, the FE sector is vital due to the essential role it plays in supporting under-represented groups to access levels 5 and 6 of the NFQ, and also frequently then accessing levels 7 and 8 of the NFQ.
- Additional staffing for all guidance services in schools, FE colleges, HE institutions and in the Adult Guidance Service is needed.
- There must be more NEPS staff 'on the ground' and available to schools as required.
- There should be ready access to interpretation and translation services when and if required.
- More teacher CPD should be available within school time.
- All Covid supports to schools should continue.
- There should be EAL provision for all – those of school-going age and for adults.
- There needs to be an urgent expansion of counselling supports in schools and FE/HE settings especially in the IoT/TU sector which has a disproportionate number of non-traditional students (HEA, 2019, 2019b; Thorn, 2018; Phulphagar & Kane, 2020).
- There needs to be restoration and an increase in middle management posts which existed a decade ago, to account for the larger number of students in post-primary now.
- HSCLOs are required in every school, not just DEIS schools.
- There should be a dedicated and additional Home School Liaison service for Ukrainian families and an equivalent support for Ukrainian learners at third level and/or in

further/adult education. DEIS models may need to be adopted in schools where there is a large number of new students who will need additional supports.

- Consideration should be given to establishing a DEIS-type model to the tertiary education sector.
- Ukrainian should be recognised as a 'non-curricular language' for Leaving Certificate examination purposes.
- Proper housing supports are needed for all students and families.
- More school and college places may need to be funded.
- There should be liaison (at a central rather than school level) where possible with the Ukrainian education authorities to enable students to complete their national programmes of study and acquire appropriate qualifications.
- There needs to be a timely audit of prior learning of each Ukrainian student to ensure that placement and curricular/programme provision are appropriate and as far as possible, represent continuity, as well as RPL for Advanced Entry
- English Support for Advanced Entry - Technical Language is necessary.
- TEFL training should be available to all staff with EAL students in their classes.

**Ends**

## **Glossary**

C&C	Community and Comprehensive
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs (Now DCEDIY)
DE	Department of Education
DEASP	Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (now Department of Social Protection)
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
EAL	English as an Additional Language
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ERTL	Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
ETB	Education and Training Board
EU	European Union
FE	Further Education
FET	Further Education and Training
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Authority

HSCLO	Home School Community Liaison Officer
IBEC	Irish Business and Employers Confederation
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IoT	Institute of Technology
IR	Industrial Relations
NAPD	National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
NERI	Nevin Economic Research Institute
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PPLI	Post Primary Languages Initiative
REALT	Regional Education and Language Teams for Ukraine
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEC	State Examinations Commission
SEN	Special Educational Need
SJI	Social Justice Ireland
SL	Senior Lecturer
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths
TU	Technological University



TUI	Teachers' Union of Ireland
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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