

**Teachers’ Union of Ireland (TUI) Response to the Joint Committee on Education and Skills regarding non-teaching staff in schools**

**(March 2019)**

**Executive Summary**

The TUI welcomes the work of the Oireachtas Committee in examining the need for non-teaching staff supporting schools. This is important both in terms of staff working inside schools such as secretarial and caretaking/cleaning staff and also staffing needed in supporting agencies such as CAMHS/NEPS/Tusla etc.

Recent years have seen drastic cuts in resourcing of support agencies in particular. However, it must also be noted that dreadful cuts have also been imposed directly on schools. Such cuts include guidance services, middle management posts and cuts to allowances for additional qualifications.

The most important issue in relation to staffing is to ensure that schools have access to well-trained, high quality teachers. The current crisis in teacher supply is unhelpful in this regard. The solution to the teacher supply crisis is clear – it is to resolve once and for all the issue of discriminatory pay rates.

The presence of both non-teaching and teaching staff is vital to schools. The great educational theorist Larry Cuban once said that “when society gets an itch schools get scratched”. Schools have responsibilities but so too does society. Schools are neither the cause of all societal problems nor the solution to all of society’s ills. Schools should not be held responsible for issues beyond the remit or resourcing of schools.

**Section 1: Introduction**

# The TUI represents teachers and lecturers (17,000+) employed by Education and Training Boards (ETBs), voluntary secondary schools, Community and Comprehensive (C&C) schools and the institutes of technology.

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; United Nations Development Programme, 2018; Irish Survey of Student Engagement 2018; Growing Up in Ireland, 2018; Clark and Kavanagh, 2019) 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 in Boyle (2018).

In 2019, schools are in receipt of far fewer resources as a consequence of austerity measures since 2008. Most pertinently, the halving of provision of posts of responsibility has diminished capacity to establish special needs departments or otherwise plan and co-ordinate related activity in most schools. In addition, a worrying level of casualisation has emerged and the expertise of many teachers with qualifications and training in special education is lost as schools cannot deploy staff to best effect. Furthermore, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has removed qualification allowances such as the allowance payable to teachers who hold a Postgraduate Diploma in Special Educational Needs (SEN) and participate in the planning and delivery of teaching supports to student with SEN. Cuts to guidance services have also had a significant adverse impact on services to students (Harkin, 2015; IGC, 2016; NCGE, 2013; TUI, 2014). It’s difficult to see how the Government values the work of teachers who have pursued further qualifications when the Government has removed the allowance for that qualification.

**Section 2: Special Needs Assistants**

It is against this difficult background that we address the difficulties encountered by students with SEN and the caring support given to them by approximately fifteen thousand special needs assistants, of whom almost three thousand work in post-primary (source: www.ncse.ie). Special needs assistants play an important role in caring for students with significant care needs. Significant care needs may include eating, toileting and fragile health (NCSE, 2014).

As noted by Griffin and Shevlin (2007: 250), “official DES policy as outlined in Circular 07/02 states that ‘special needs assistants are recruited specifically to assist in the care of pupils with disabilities in an educational context.’ The assistants’ duties are ‘of a non-teaching nature’”. This role has been reaffirmed by Circular 30/14 which “clarifies and restates the purpose of the SNA scheme, which is to provide schools with additional adult support staff who can assist children with special educational needs who also have additional and significant care needs. Such support is provided to facilitate their attendance at school and to minimise disruption to class or teaching time for the pupils concerned, or for their peers, and with a view to developing their independent living skills.” The Circular also “clarifies the role of the Classroom Teacher and Resource/Learning Support Teachers to provide for the education of a child, and the role of an SNA to support those teachers in assisting with care needs”.

A range of courses are available to train SNAs for their caring role. Most of the courses are one-year Level 5 awards. The TUI supports the concept of inclusive education and believes that supports must be available to students who have significant care needs if they are to be integrated successfully in ‘mainstream schools’. There is a role to be played here by SNAs. There is also a vitally important role to be played by qualified and experienced educators such as special needs teachers who are qualified to Level 8/9 standard. The caring role is required but the TUI believes that inadequate resources are provided to qualified educators to enable them to educate for life children with SEN. Such resources include greater provision of guidance counselling, a reduction in the pupil teacher ratio, provision of time to teachers to support parents of special needs children. Furthermore, whilst the DES currently pays the cost of the qualification required for special needs teaching, there is limited incentive for teachers to partake in this rigorous training programme if they cannot receive an allowance additional to basic salary on completion of the programme. programme. Furthermore, not all schools have enough qualified SEN teachers to manage both the complexity and level of need. The possibility of implementing the EPSEN Act 2004 in full is predicated on the provision of adequate investment in special needs education including the adequate rewarding of extensive additional training undertaken by highly qualified teachers. Qualified SEN teachers need time to administer resource applications, liaising with external agencies, transitioning students from primary to post-primary and also post-primary further education or higher education. Presently due to timetable constraints this is not accommodated. The possibility of implementing the EPSEN Act 2004 in full is predicated on the provision of adequate investment in special needs education including the adequate rewarding of extensive additional training undertaken by highly qualified teachers.

**Section 3: Secretarial and caretaking staff**

The TUI believes that secretarial and caretaking staff play a vital role in ensuring that schools can run smoothly but staffing schedules for both roles are far too low. For example, new schools with as many as one thousand students only get an ancillary staffing allocation of one caretaker, one administrative person and one cleaner. This is woefully inadequate even if the school were only to be open for eight hours a day. However, many schools, especially Community Colleges and Community Schools, are open late into the night for community meetings etc. Ongoing maintenance is, of course, a requirement for all buildings but newly built school buildings are at risk of losing their warranties on the building if specific maintenance is not carried out and recorded as such. It is very difficult to do this when there is only one caretaker. An analogy would be if a company spent €15m buying a new aeroplane but didn’t have anyone to service it. Very rapidly it would become apparent that poor value for money was being achieved. A small investment in staffing to maintain ongoing maintenance would pay dividends in the end. Exactly the same problems can arise for all schools which are trying to cope with the normal demands of a building housing up to one hundred staff and one thousand students, but only a tiny number of administrative, cleaning or maintenance staff. Secretarial staff have to deal with a plethora of systems dependant on type of provision school provides – MIT/Eportal , MIT (an online system for PLC enrolment) , P-POD as well as many compliance, audit and banking procedures and due to this many additional administrative functions fall on principal teachers and deputy principal teachers. It is important to also note that administrative staff also often have some role, under the oversight of the principal teacher, for providing administrative support to the work of critical incident teams, child protection awareness. The operation of the creditor portal system, PPOD, enrolment in night classes, audit & compliance requirements etc.

**Section 4: Staffing of Supporting Agencies**

Schools rely heavily on support agencies, especially when working with students with special needs or students experiencing crisis. Crisis situations 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 is to be adequately supported. 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 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.

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) 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).

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). RCSI (2013: 26) clearly stated that “about 1 in 12 young adolescents (8.1%) is likely to be experiencing a current behavioural disorder. 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. This 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”. 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, not been filled either permanent. Furthermore, School Completion programmes have been stripped back and the lack of standardisation of SCP roles means vital supports to students and schools are been lost. Cuts to the SCP programme amount to approximately one-quarter of its pre-recession budget (Irish Times, April 22nd 2017).

**Section 5: The Over-riding Need for More Teachers**

The OECD (2015b) has made clear that an education system is only as good as its teachers. However, our education system is being undermined by a crisis in teacher recruitment and retention. The crisis has been documented in separate research carried out by the TUI’s Principals and Deputy Principals’ Association, a number of management bodies and national authorities and agencies - the Post Graduate Applications Centre (PAC), the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS), the Joint Managerial Body (JMB) and Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI). It has also been referenced on a number of occasions by the Minister for Education and Skills and by the Teaching Council. Unless addressed properly, the scale of the crisis will increase further in the coming years as the number of students in second-Level rises by approximately seventy thousand by 2025.

The research clearly indicates that the crisis has emerged since discriminatory pay scales were introduced in 2011 and was exacerbated both by cessation of payment of qualifications allowances in 2012 and the increase from one to two years in the duration of the post-primary teacher training qualification – the Professional Master of Education (PME) from 2013. The single most important element of any viable solution to the crisis is the elimination of pay discrimination against new and recent entrants to the profession. For post-primary teachers that involves:

* Removal of the two additional points on the teachers’ salary scale for those who entered the profession on or after 1 January 2011
* Restoration of the teacher training qualification (H Dip/PME Allowance) and
* Reinstatement of incremental recognition for pre-service training

In September 2016, there was explicit recognition that pay is at the heart of the problem, when the TUI, the Irish National Teachers’ Organisation, the DES and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform reached an Agreement to incorporate the value of the Honours Primary Degree allowance into the salary scale for teachers appointed since 2011 – one of the allowances that had been withdrawn in 2012. This was recognised as an interim measure; part of an ongoing process towards pay equality. Further measures arose from the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020.

The crisis in teacher supply manifests in the following ways:

* Since 2011, there has been an alarming and unprecedented decline of over 50% in applications to the PAC for the PME programme. The output of graduates from these programmes has also declined by 27%.
* Those same cuts have led to a rapid rise in the number of recently qualified teachers emigrating. Between 2008 and 2014, the emigration rate of recently qualified post-primary teachers increased steadily, from 4% in 2008 to 18%-21% in 2014.
* Service to students in schools is suffering severe disruption because of timetable changes and restrictions necessitated by the lack of qualified teachers, including teachers for substitution (with a resultant fracturing of delivery and absence of continuity for students).
* Students are losing out on educational opportunities both inside and outside of school.
* The absence of subject specialist teachers to cover for colleagues who are engaged in work for agencies related to the DES such as the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, the State Examinations Commission, the Professional Development Service for Teachers, Special Education Support Service and Junior Cycle for Teachers.
* In many instances, schools cannot get teachers of Irish, Maths or Home Economics. However, the crisis is not restricted to a small number of subject areas; it is affecting a large and growing number of subjects. A November 2018 survey of principal teachers and deputy principal teachers in one hundred and fifty schools by the PDA found that 99% of respondents identified their school as experiencing teacher recruitment difficulties across a broad range of subjects while 58% of respondents identified their school as experiencing teacher retention difficulties in the previous twelve months. Furthermore, 75% of respondents said there had been a situation where there were no applications for a position in the previous twelve months, while 54% said their school had unfilled vacancies. 91% of respondents believed that recruitment and retention difficulties have impacted negatively on the service to students.
* There are more attractive opportunities in other graduate entry employments. The HEA (2018) found that graduates in the areas of natural sciences/maths/statistics, ICT, engineering/manufacturing/construction, and health/welfare are in a position to earn considerably more in other graduate entry employments than they would in teaching.
* There are worrying trends in the age profile of the teaching profession. The average age of post-primary teachers is 41.1. Over 15% of teachers are over the age of 55 but only 7% are under the age of 25. The average age on first employment as a post-primary teacher, (generally on part-time hours in a temporary position) is now over 26 years.

It is clear that the solution to the teacher supply crisis lies in a comprehensive plan for the abolition of discriminatory pay rates for new entrants. Stop-gap and ill-thought-out measures will not suffice. A recent HEA report (2019:140) acknowledges a “mis-match between teacher supply and demand”. A Teaching Council report (2017) made similar findings. It is also worth noting that the Minister for Education and Skills has himself made reference to the current and future challenges in teacher supply being a national priority (Irish Independent, February 25th 2019).

**Next Steps**

The TUI welcomes this research by the Oireachtas Committee and would strongly welcome any future initiatives of the Committee to further examine the issue of staffing resources for schools. This could include the Oireachtas Committee asking the DES to carry out an audit of non-teaching staff supporting schools. This data could demonstrate exactly how many non-teaching staff are available now compared to a decade ago. This data could further take into account the rapid rise in student numbers being experienced in second-level schools between 2012 and 2025. The TUI would also welcome a clear statement from the committee that discriminatory pay rates should end as soon as possible in order to resolve the current teacher supply crisis.

**Ends**

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**Glossary**

ACCS Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools

ADHD Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder

CAMHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service

C&C Community and Comprehensive

DES Department of Education and Skills

DPER Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

EPSEN Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs

ESOL English for Speakers of Other Languages

ETB Education and Training Board

ETBI Education and Training Boards Ireland

EU European Union

GDP Gross Domestic Product

H. Dip. Higher Diploma

HEA Higher Education Authority

INTO Irish National Teachers’ Organisation

ICT Information and Communications Technology

JMB Joint Managerial Body

NAPD National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals

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

PAC Postgraduate Applications Centre

PME Professional Master of Education

RCSI Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland

SCP School Completion Programme

SEN Special Educational Needs

SJI Social Justice Ireland

SNA Special Needs Assistant

SLT Speech and Language Therapy

TUI Teachers’ Union of Ireland

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