

**Teachers’ Union of Ireland**

**Comments on Circular on New Allocation Model**

**(February 2017)**

**Introduction**

TUI represents c.16,300 teachers and lecturers. In February 2017, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) invited a response on the draft new circular on special education teacher allocation. TUI welcomes this opportunity to address the issue. This commentary refers only to the draft circular for post-primary.

TUI wishes to highlight the significant concern as to who will do the profiling. School leaders and special needs teachers are already overworked, as are classroom teachers. Furthermore, there have been dramatic cuts to middle management posts and to the special needs allowance. It is now unclear whether the special needs teacher is being asked to do even more work. A time allowance would be necessary for this. TUI has particular concerns in relation to Sections 12,13 and 24 all of which will have workload issues but also place a burden of responsibility on our members.

There seems to be no account taken in the circular of the fact that students with special educational needs includes exceptionally able students.

Section 2 suggests that certain complex needs will still be assessed and that hours will be assigned for such assessments. Which complex needs will be included and how are the hours to be assigned? Are assessments still required for these specific needs? The Circular does not make provision for any assessment of complex needs. If hours are assigned to the school for assessed complex needs are they assigned to the student or is the school to decide on the usage of such hours also?

In relation to section 3, is there emergency application for students enrolling in the next two years with specific complex needs.

Section 5 makes reference to students with complex needs. Similar to above, TUI seeks clarification as to whether there is an emergency application process for students enrolling in the next two years with specific complex needs.

Section 6 makes reference to the 20% baseline. This is a very complex concept poorly expressed. Is it the case that the 80% will continue under the old model and that 20% of the national allocation will now be redistributed according to school size/student enrolment numbers?

Section 7 makes reference to NCSE/HSE/NEPS. It is asinine in the extreme to issue a new model that is supposedly free of the requirement to secure formal assessments but has no provision for dealing with complex needs to replace such formal assessments. It is irresponsible and reprehensible to fail to provide for the prospective assessment model in advance of changing the allocation model.

Section 8 makes reference to ‘teacher and school principal professional judgement’. TUI asks what supports are available to our members in undertaking what has, heretofore, been the bailiwick of the SENO and moving this responsibility without moving the resources. Indeed in an era where the qualification allowance that relates to this specific area of expertise has been withdrawn, is irresponsible, at best.

In relation to section 10, TUI is unclear as to what is meant by the term ‘fully recognised and registered teacher’. TUI is unaware of there being the possibility of being one without the other.

In section 12, identifying students may lead to all sorts of internal assessment disputes and a significant increase in workload in terms of record keeping.

Section 13 states that the class teacher will gather information. This is extra work on an already overburdened system. There appears to be a heavy emphasis on the classroom teacher who will in most of our schools have a full complement of 30 students in their classroom. TUI asks where is the time for support to be given to individuals or small groups within current allocation.

In the context of the reference to ‘fully qualified teachers’ in section 14 TUI asks that, in the absence of the qualification allowance, what incentive is there for such teachers to undertake additional training? Furthermore, what quantum of work is required of such teachers and how does it compare to their current workload.

In relation to section 16, how will single allocation be contracted? Will it be advertised as a distinct teaching post outside of the standard allocation and, in doing so, what objective ground may be inserted into such contracts?

In relation to section 18 on allocation of special education teaching posts, TUI asks will this be considered a valid objective ground for the denial of a CID?

In section 21, there is a reference that

*“a member of the special educational needs team might be assigned the responsibility for planning for the provision for special educational needs within the school”.*

TUI believes that this is a huge additional workload and would require a minimum of four hours i.e. an Assistant Principal post in all schools, and under the same conditions as the co-ordinators post (CL 18/02).

Under the revised model of special needs allocation, the NCSE insists that formal assessments of complex needs will no longer take place, and although they have thus far failed to find another model, they are to proceed with an allocation model premised on an assessment model that they will devise at some, indeterminate point in the future. Until then, the revised allocation model is to be introduced with absolutely no provision for securing the element of the allocation to support the most vulnerable members of society. This is irresponsible, at best. The system is not currently capable of introducing this allocation model. The current model should be retained until, at the very least, the following paragraph from page 8 is resolved:

*A model for the identification of students with complex needs in future is being devised by the NCSE, in consultation with the Health Service Executive and National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS) and further guidance will issue to post primary schools in this regard.*

In section 24, there appears to be planning which is more or less individual educational planning. TUI policy is, as outlined elsewhere in this submission, very clear on this matter. Furthermore, TUI must ask where is the training, money and time for this. Making schools responsible for planning will be a minefield with some schools possibly misinterpreting what is required.

The circular currently makes no reference to ‘greenfield sites’. It is very important that new schools have clarity that they will be able to access provision as required.

TUI wishes to put on record the assurances previously given to it and other stakeholders at fora organised by the DES and/or NCSE in relation to this model, and asks that those assurances be highlighted in the proposed circular. The assurances include:

* That €18m is being provided for 900 additional resource posts across primary and post-primary. The full year cost will be c.€54m. Approximately 250 additional posts per year will be provided annually thereafter to take account of the growth in the number of students affected.
* That regional training days will be provided in March/April 2017.
* That no application process will be necessary this year (other than for SNAs).
* That schools will have certainty of allocation soon.
* That no school will be disproportionately affected.
* That every school will have some resource (20% has been outlined) in order to be a welcoming school for students with SEN.
* That no child currently with a low incidence allocation will lose that allocation at least until they move from their existing sector.
* That the new model will not alter teacher contracts. In fact, security for teachers should be improved by the minimum two year allocation.
* That while pupil planning will be a requirement, it will not be oppressive and not a legal requirement as it would have been under EPSEN. The planning envisaged by the DES will not be prescriptive. TUI continues to believe that implementation of EPSEN should remain the benchmark of how to best support students with special educational needs. The position of TUI in relation to EPSEN and IEPs has repeatedly been outlined to the DES. This is especially relevant in section 24.
* With regard to the unified RT/LS post, it is not possible to have different qualification criteria. Hence existing teachers in either role will be able to stay on though new appointees will have to be qualified.

**Ends**

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**Glossary**

CL Circular Letter

DES Department of Education and Skills

EPSEN Educational Provision for Students with Special Educational Needs Act

HSE Health Service Executive

IEP Individual Education Plan

LS Learning Support

NCSE National Council for Special Education

NEPS National Educational Psychological Service

RT Resource Teacher

SEN Special Educational Needs

SNA Special Needs Assistant

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