

**Teachers’ Union of Ireland (TUI) response to the call for submissions by the Department of Education (DE) on the topic of its Statement of Strategy 2021-2023.**

**(November 2020)**

**Introduction**

The TUI represents teachers, lecturers and staff (19,000+) in schools, colleges and in out of school services 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; Social Progress Initiative, 2020; Irish Survey of Student Engagement 2018; HEA, 2019; Coolahan, 2017; Eivers, 2019; CSO, 2019; McKeown et al., 2019; CSO, 2020b; OECD, 2020a; Eurofound, 2020; McNamara et al., 2020; UNICEF, 2020) 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). ESRI (2020) found very high levels of trust of young people in the Irish education system.

The Irish economy was very strong starting into 2020 (ESRI, 2018; OECD, 2017; IMF, 2017; EU Commission, 2017; EU Commission, 2019a; NERI, 2018; ESRI, 2019; IBEC, 2019; Government of Ireland, 2019a; CSO, 2020a). However, the Covid-19 health crisis has led to a significant downturn in the economy (OECD, 2020b; EU Commission, 2020; DeBruin et al., 2020; Central Bank, 2020). However, it is vital that investment in education be stepped up to cope with the economic downturn. A cut to education investment would only lead to a deeper and longer recession.

Ireland has a very young population (Eurostat, 2015; Government of Ireland 2019b; 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, 2019b) indicates that the population of young people is likely to remain high for the foreseeable future though the number of people in Ireland under the age of 14 is likely to fall to 0.8588 million by 2039 from 1.0089 million in 2019 (Government of Ireland, 2019b). The DES (2012a, 2017) suggests that the number of students in the post-primary school system will rise by almost one hundred thousand in second level between 2011 and 2025 (322,528 to 416,897). The latest projections are that numbers in post-primary will peak at 402,000 in 2024/25 and fall gradually back to 2015 levels by 2036 (Government of Ireland, 2020). It is also expected that the number of students in higher education will rise by approximately thirty thousand in the forthcoming years (DES, 2018d). In this context, it is not sufficient to suggest that a world-class child society can be achieved with inadequate resources of time, money or personnel.

**Needs**

Teacher Supply

OECD (2020c)  *PISA 2018 Results:* *Effective Policies, Successful Schools*makes clear the significant negative effects for students of the continuing failure to appropriately resource Irish schools. Specifically, the report highlights that 44.8% of students are enrolled in Irish schools whose principal reported that learning is hindered by a lack of teaching staff, a figure way above the OECD average of 27.1%. This is hardly surprising given the continuing failure to invest appropriately in Irish education.

There has been a recruitment and retention crisis in second level schools for a number of years now, mainly due to the scourge of the two-tier pay system which sees those appointed after 1st January 2011 earn less than their colleagues. A TUI survey carried out among principals in September 2020 showed that 98% of schools have experienced difficulties employing substitute teachers over the past twelve months. 81% of these believe that pay discrimination is a significant factor in this. Teaching Council (2017) also demonstrated difficulties in teacher supply, as did TUI (2018).

Precarious Employment

Notwithstanding the step forward enabled by the Cush and Ward reports, precarious employment continues to be a serious problem especially in the higher education sector. Many academics and researchers continue to have difficulty in achieving full-time employment on recognised, nationally agreed contracts. Even in the State governed post-primary sector problems persist. Recently the TUI was given data by the ETBI which clearly shows that many ETBs have fallen far below the agreed 95% threshold for full-time employment.

New Entrant Terms and Conditions

Adjustment to pay scales for education staff in the last decade created discriminatory rates of ay based on when a teacher/lecturer/tutor joined the public service, and there were also significant changes in the pension entitlements of the same staff. Changes in recent years, negotiated by the unions, have ameliorated some problems of discriminatory pay rates. However, lifetime earnings for teachers who qualified in the last decade are approximately €50k less than their colleagues who qualified earlier. The pay differential for lecturers is approximately €17k whilst it is approximately €15k over a career for many staff working in further education. These differentials are unconscionable and grossly unfair.

Croke Park Hours

Croke Park hours and flex hours in their various manifestations in schools and colleges continue to be a running sore in the education system. Education staff have always gone ‘above and beyond’ in supporting their students. However, box ticking exercises merely damage goodwill. Over recent years the TUI has made a number of agreements which have resulted in better use of Croke Park and flex hours. However, the fact remains that these hours should be abolished and trust in the professionalism of teachers, tutors and lecturers restored.

Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT)

In post-primary, third level, and further and adult education settings, TUI members engaged in emergency remote teaching (ERT) from March until summer 2020. For many members, ERT continues during this academic year and is under discussion on a contingency basis should COVID-19 require the partial or full closure of some (or all) post-primary schools for any period.

ERT has been demonstrated to involve enormous educational, technical and workload challenges. Due to a range of issues, some students experience very significant difficulty in continuing to engage in education once it has been removed from the physical setting of the school, college or centre. The importance of the shared classroom environment and of the personal relationships and interactions at the heart of good educational practice cannot be overstated and their loss cannot be replaced. TUI members witnessed the impact of economic pressures on student engagement, not least in the great difficulties faced by some families and households in adapting their homes into suitable learning spaces in spite of their best efforts. The lack of appropriate devices and broadband access, both for educators and students, presented and continue to present severe limitations on what is possible, as do the lack of training and technical support. Learning resources, lesson plans and teaching strategies have to be replaced or rewritten creating massive workload issues. All educational interactions become more time-consuming and more likely to need repetition and reinforcement. Feedback and assessment take place in new settings and formats, many needing to be newly created and taking significantly more time and work by educators.

Investment in the Education System Generally

The TUI believes that ‘free education’ should mean genuinely free education. Barnardos (2018, 2020) has estimated that genuinely free post-primary education would only cost €127m. A useful first step would be restoration of the full capitation/block grant to schools/ETBs. This would only cost €18.5m. This is a tiny sum in the context of the State funding approximately sixty fee-paying schools to the tune of c.€115m (Irish Examiner, December 9th, 2013). Budget 2019 raised capitation per second-level student “by almost €15 to €310.80 for 2019-2020 but was still 10% short of what was paid in 2010” (Irish Examiner 10/10/2018).

Funding to achieve genuinely free post-primary education could be sourced, at no net cost to the Exchequer, through a financial transactions tax and/or the abolition of bogus self-employment which is designed solely to rob workers of employment rights and to place some businesses beyond the tax net.

It is important to note that Ireland only spends 1.2% of GDP on second-level education, compared to 2.0% in the OECD and 1.9% in the EU22 (OECD, 2019a). In 2020 Ireland fell even further behind at 1.1% of GDP and hence had the lowest spend on post-primary education of 36 countries in an OECD study (OECD, 2020d). The ratio of students to teachers in Irish post-primary schools is also above both the OECD and EU averages (OECD, 2018).

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, 2020d). The funding deficit, even aside from anything to do with Covid-19, will get worse in coming years as, similar to above, student numbers are estimated by the DES to rise by almost thirty thousand in tertiary education in the next ten years (DES, 2018d).

Even without an increase in student numbers over the next decade, the third level budget is forty percent (approximately €100 million) off where we were ten years ago (Irish Times, January 23rd, 2020). The Cassells report made clear that €600m was needed by 2021. The TUI would like to acknowledge the positive comments that Minister Harris made at a recent Education Futures seminar in relation to not wanting yet another committee to discuss the problems outlined in the Cassells report and that progress needed to be made on the issue in 2021.

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.

Further Investment in Special Educational Needs

NCSE (2014; 2018), Barnardos (2008) and Growing Up in Scotland (2012) all show that between a quarter and a fifth of all students in the school system have special needs. Recent research in Scotland (Times Education Supplement April 13th 2018) suggests that the proportion of students with additional support needs was 18% in 2012 and 27% in 2017. More special education teachers need to be appointed over and above any demographic increase in the student body. The allowance for special needs teacher qualification must be restored.

Some 2% of all children are currently being educated in special schools and special classes (NCSE presentation, December 13th, 2019). This equates to almost 20,000 students across primary and post-primary sectors. The TUI is not aware of any specific data for the post-primary sector alone. Provision of special schools and special classes should continue to exist until a viable, and fully resourced, alternative can be provided. Furthermore, a commitment to implementing the EPSEN Act 2004 is essential if provision for students with SEN is to be adequately and appropriately addressed. However, full implementation will only be possible when sufficient resources are allocated toprimary and post-primary schools. Over ten years ago, TUI (2006) emphasised that schools were not sufficiently resourced to implement specific elements of the EPSEN Act, in particular designing and delivering Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for SEN students. In the absence of adequate resourcing, many of the needs of students with special educational needs are falling on parents. The TUI has been calling for the full implementation, and resourcing, of the EPSEN Act for almost fifteen years. We have reiterated that call seven times in 2019 and 2020 alone. However, we have been told by successive governments that the funding is not available to enact the remaining provisions of the legislation. It is also important to note that education actions outlined by the DE in a presentation on October 20th, 2020 clearly indicates that any reasonable definition of SEN should include students who are gifted and talented. The TUI has long highlighted this group as a cohort of students with SEN who are not adequately supported by the DE and its agencies.

It is very important to note that a statutory entitlement to an IEP does not currently exist and will not exist until the relevant sections of the Act are commenced by Ministerial order. In an answer to a parliamentary question on March 6th 2019, the Minister for Education and Skills stated that

“*Legal advice provided to the Department also indicated that the EPSEN Act, as it is currently constituted, may not be implemented on a phased, or age cohort, basis*.”

The same parliamentary answer also stated that

“*The view of the Department was that the level of investment required* (to fully implement EPSEN) *could be significantly greater than that envisaged*” in 2006 i.e. €235m per annum.

Moreover, until and unless the DES/Government provides the requisite resourcing, particularly with regard to time and training, it is neither realistic nor manageable to introduce IEPs. Therefore, in the absence of appropriate resourcing, TUI members cannot be required to implement IEPs. To do so would create the false impression for parents/guardians that a school has a developed capacity to deliver the level of service promised in the EPSEN Act. it is the moral and legal responsibility of the State, acting through the DE, to provide the resources that will facilitate effective introduction of the requisite range of supports - including IEPs - for students with SEN.

The TUI cannot countenance an opportunistic transfer of that responsibility (or of the associated culpability) from the State to teachers. We have informed members that our objection to a medicalised, administratively heavy IEP process does not apply to normal, professionally appropriate and sustainable (classroom) planning by teachers for differentiated teaching and learning that takes due account of the strengths and needs of the students they serve and of the contexts in which they teach.

Guidance Provision

Recent changes in guidance provision (Circular 12/2017) and middle management posts (Circular 3/2018) also are a very small step in supporting students with SEN. However, a much larger move in terms of restoration of both is also needed. Guidance provision in the FET and HE sectors is also under significant strain. Additional staffing is essential if students are to be able to access education fully.

Lack of of LPL1 and LPL2 programs is a serious concern for students who are now in the senior cycle

Support Services on which Education Institutions Rely

The TUI recognises that this issue is beyond the immediate remit of the DE but the DE has significant influence on how other government departments and agencies may support schools and colleges. Schools rely heavily on support agencies, especially when working with students with special needs or students experiencing crisis.

Many of these support services are vital if a student with SEN 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 January 2019 the situation was only very slightly better with 2,523 children on a 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”. Downes (2020) has stated that in Sweden and Slovenia “all students have access to a school doctor, school nurse, psychologist and school welfare officer at no cost”.

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 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. Budget 2021 also provided a significant increase in the Tusla budget and the TUI welcomes this but, as outlined by the Tusla CEO in a webinar on October 15th 2020, some at least of the increase will go to plugging a deficit in its 2020 budget.

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). The TUI notes the recent Budget 2021 announcement regarding NEPS staffing but even then the numbers fall far short of government targets from 2016.

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, have not been filled. Furthermore, School Completion programmes have been stripped back. Cuts to the SCP programme amount to approximately one-quarter of its pre-recession budget (Irish Times, April 22nd 2017). The DE will, during the course of this Statement of Strategy, have influence on this as Tusla Education Support Services are due to come within the remit of the DE.

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 DEFHERIS, has put into the system. However, more will clearly be needed as the pandemic continues on into 2021. The issue of technology and the digital divide is just one example. The Digital Strategy provided welcome funding to the primary and post-primary system but even when it was announced three years ago the TUI made clear that it didn’t even cover the replacement of existing outdated technology. It also didn’t support the already underfunded higher education system. The pandemic has shown that students will not be able to access education on an equal footing with each other until significant funding for technology is provided to all levels of the education system. As the current Digital Strategy comes to an end, now is an excellent time for the DE, and DEFHERIS, to address the matter.

Findings of a recent survey of over 1,500 Teachers’ Union of Ireland (TUI) members in the Post Primary and Further/Adult Education sectors highlighted a range of concerns around health issues, resources in schools and increased workload.  The Union is insisting on ongoing engagement around the move to Level 5 restrictions and continual assessment of the potential health risk to school staff and students.

TUI is also calling for a national audit of safeguards in schools, a review of some health risk assessments and also the provision of resources to tackle the digital divide that discriminates against students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Key findings of the survey of over 1,500 members included:

* 23% of respondents say they have an underlying health issue that is of concern while 31% share a household with somebody who has an underlying health issue. 11% share a household with somebody over 70 years of age
* 71% do not believe that the enhanced teaching/staffing allocation provided as a result 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 of time
* 89% believe that the two-tier system of pay that discriminates against those appointed since 1st January 2011 continues to damage morale among teaching staff

Equality of Opportunity

Programmes such as DEIS and third level access programmes are an important step in addressing inequality. 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 student outcomes.
* Significantly improved student 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 for 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 fully 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. It is also essential that Home School Community Liaison Officers be appointed to every school. The Covid crisis has shown just how vital the link between home and school is, and not just in DEIS areas.

Island Schools

The TUI made a submission on the topic of island schools to the interdepartmental committee for island development in August 2019 but hasn’t heard anything back since. The TUI respectfully asks that the Interdepartmental Committee and the DE consider carefully the recommendations of the February 2018 Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills report on island schools. In particular the TUI would like to emphasise the importance of the following recommendations made by the Oireachtas Committee:

* restoration of the island allowance to teachers;
* additional funding to island schools to take account of higher running costs;
* additional teacher allocation above and beyond what is currently available, as to enable provision of as many subject options as possible;
* that all island post-primary schools be awarded DEIS status if they wish.

Curriculum

The NCCA has been involved in extensive work on the Senior Cycle review. The TUI has, and continues to, engage in a meaningful, professional way with the Senior Cycle review, on behalf of our members. However, given past experience, we believe it likely that efforts may be made to marginalise the voice of the profession. To be clear, any such efforts will fail.

*No reforms without teacher support*

Without doubt, the review will generate an abundance of ideas from all quarters that will range from good through whimsical to poor. This is a given, and broad, democratic engagement is greatly to be encouraged. However, it must be borne in mind that teachers are the critical group without whose support reforms will founder. It is teachers who will be asked to implement whatever changes emerge from the review. Our members care deeply about their work and are the central actors in curricular change. For the sake of students, teachers and the quality of the education system, the TUI will demand that any new model must have robust structures that retain public confidence.

We will not be ‘focus-grouped’ or otherwise sidelined. One way or another, we will be at the heart of things, and our voice must be heard.

*Quality must be safeguarded*

So what are the core issues for teachers?

Our position is clear and unambiguous – state certification is the seal of quality and our members are fundamentally opposed to assessing their own students for state certification purposes. Therefore external assessment and state certification are essential.

Also essential is the provision of the requisite time, resources, infrastructure and continuing professional development (CPD). Reforms must not increase workload. We have repeatedly made clear that the precedent of ‘professional time’, set in the reform of the Junior Cycle, is critical in this regard.

*Drift to demoralising bureaucratic drudgery*

In determining a viable way forward, we must learn from the successes and, perhaps more importantly, the failures in other jurisdictions. Changes to the curriculum should have value and be incremental and sustainable for both students and teachers. Reforms should not deflect from teaching and learning by adding pointless administrative burdens and importing meaningless measurements. Those who chose teaching as a profession want to be allowed to teach. They do not want to have their time wasted in the turgid exercises of ticking boxes or filling out endless rafts of forms. This demoralising drudgery is too often demanded of teachers in other jurisdictions – and regrettably, increasingly, here in Ireland also.

*Damaging effects of cutbacks*

It is necessary to point out that the dramatic increase in administrative workload in recent years is due in large part to cuts imposed by Government that hollowed out school management and student support structures. Ten years ago, one in every two teachers held a middle management position – roles crucial for the running of schools - in addition to teaching duties. Now, only one in four holds such a position, and everybody in the school community suffers as a result, particularly students.

It is essential that a longitudinal study of the effectiveness and impacts of the Junior Cycle reforms be carried out. This should guide the review process of Senior Cycle, ensuring that wise decisions are made. It would be reckless to embark on another a series of reforms without first taking stock of the effects, whether positive or negative, of the revised Junior Cycle programme on teaching and learning. Otherwise, we may fail to recognise what has worked and we risk repeating mistakes.

*National obsession with third level progression*

Any reform of Senior Cycle must cater for all students and their unique talents. At present, the range of levels across all Senior Cycle programmes caters for a wide breadth of academic ability. The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) facilitates students who may not otherwise have remained in school while the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), with its practical elements and second components, fosters key skills. Future reform must not marginalise or exclude any cohort of learners; it must be inclusive in nature.

It is worth highlighting that the excessive focus on CAO points is not a flaw of the current Senior Cycle itself. It is an unfortunate by-product of our national obsession with progression to third level, an obsession that distorts the true meaning of education and invites unfair and invalid comparisons between schools. This creates particular difficulties for the LCA programme.

*Department must learn from the Junior Cycle review*

Finally, the Department of Education must learn from its attempt to push through Junior Cycle proposals that, in their original form, did not protect the integrity and quality of the education system. That undue haste led to a protracted period of time marked by industrial relations unease, including two days of strike action in second level schools across the country, before sense prevailed and real negotiations ensued. It will benefit all concerned if, from the off, the powers that be engage meaningfully with teachers, represented by their unions, in the process of Senior Cycle review.

*Follow-on from the Junior Cycle*

Finally, it is vitally important that follow-on programmes be developed for students who completed Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes.

OECD TALIS report

It is deeply regrettable that whilst the DE funds participation in the OECD PISA, PIRS and TIMSS studies, it doesn’t fund participation in the related TALIS study. The TUI has repeatedly asked the DE to address this bizarre imbalance. To date the DE has not done so. Perhaps this new Statement of Strategy will be an opportunity for the DE to redress this imbalance.

**Summary**

The TUI calls on the DE to ensure that its new Statement of Strategy 2021-2023 addresses the chronic underinvestment in the education system. That under-investment is most clearly shown in inadequate funding of post-primary, further education and higher education.

**Ends**

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**Glossary**

ACCS Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools

CAMHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service

C&C Community and Comprehensive

CSO Central Statistics Office

DE Department of Education

DEFHERIS Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Skills

DES Department of Education and Skills

EPSEN Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs

ERT Emergency Remote Teaching

ETB Education and Training Board

ETBI Education and Training Boards Ireland

EU European Union

GDP Gross Domestic Product

HEA Higher Education Authority

IEP Individual Education Plan

LCA Leaving Certificate Applied

LCVP Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme

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

PISA Programme for International Student Assessment

RCSI Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland

SCP School Completion Programme

SEN Special Educational Needs

SJI Social Justice Ireland

TUI Teachers’ Union of Ireland

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