

**Teachers’ Union of Ireland**

**Submission to the Department of Education and Skills regarding** ‘**the draft ESD action plan 2018-2020’ (October 2018)**

**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.

The TUI welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the DES in relation to ‘**the draft ESD action plan 2018-2020’.**

**Background**

Ireland has an internationally acknowledged, high-performing education system and respected teaching profession (Teaching Council, 2010; OECD, 2013; DES, 2018a; OECD, 2015a; OECD, 2009; NAPD, 2016; Comhairle na nOg, 2017; Growing Up in Ireland, 2017; IPSOS MRBI Trust in the Professions Survey, 2017; Boyle, 2017; Scanlon & McKenna, 2018; EU Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018; Kantar Millward Brown, 2018; EU Commission, 2018; Social Progress Imperative, 2018; United Nations Development Programme, 2018) despite spending relatively little on education (OECD, 2015b; SJI, 2018, NERI, 2018) and historic underinvestment (DES, 2018b). The rapidly improving economic situation (OECD, 2017; ESRI, 2018; Central Bank, 2018; EY, 2018; IMF, 2017; EU Commission 2017; NERI, 2018) means that Government is in a good position to make a meaningful contribution to continue supporting students through the provision of support for ESD.

Ireland has a very young population (Eurostat, 2015). In 2008, we had the second highest proportion of 10-14-year olds in the European Union (CSO, 2009). The high birth rate in Ireland (CSO, 2017; Eurostat, 2017) indicates that the population of young people is likely to remain high for the foreseeable future. The DES (2012, 2017) suggests that the number of students in the 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 in DPER (2018) are that enrolments in post-primary are expected to rise 12.5% between 2018 and 2024. The DES (2015) estimates that the number of students in the higher education system will rise by thirty to fifty thousand between 2015 and 2029. This demographic growth creates obvious issues regarding the timely provision of ESD, as well as underlining the need for substantial investment in the education system.

**ESD – Generally**

ESD is very important in terms of society and the economy generally, as well as the education system specifically. The TUI welcomes the commitment of the DES to ESD but also draws the attention of the DES to the many other priorities which schools try to meet on a daily basis. It is important that the DES not engage in “initiativitis” (Fullan, 2008) or “repetitive change syndrome” (Abrahamson, 2004). Abrahamson refers to symptoms of overload, chaos, anxiety, cynicism and burn-out. The International Review of Curriculum and Assessment Frameworks (INCA, 2003) found that curricular overload was putting pressure on schools in many countries.

It is important that human rights are encompassed within ESD. For that reason it is important that specific reference be made to the vital role played by trade unions in the context of human rights and the sustainable development of society generally.

**ESD draft plan – Specifically**

The TUI would like the following specific comments to be taken on board by the DES:

2.1 Participation in the Lifeskills Survey must be optional

2.4 How does the DES intend to ‘monitor’ the number of SDG based projects undertaken? It would not be acceptable to the TUI for schools to have to ‘report’ on such matters as they have more than enough work to do already.

3.11 The DES should consult with the NCCA regarding ‘short courses and transition units’ as this is an area of curriculum development that is in flux and can prove to be controversial.

4.2 The DES should consult with the Teaching Council regarding the ‘accrediting of teacher participation in ESD training in the context of Cosan’ as this is an area of ongoing discussion with the education partners and the TUI has a very strong view that further discussions regarding Cosan must be had before any such accreditation, for ESD or anything else, could be even contemplated.

4.4 The TUI is unclear as to what this means and the implications of same.

4.5 The TUI recognises the excellent work carried out by the network of Education Centres and is anxious to ensure that any request to education centres to ‘monitor and report on ESD course provision’ would be light-touch.

4.7 The DES must consult with the teacher unions regarding the suggestion for ‘ESD to become a recognised part of the induction programme’ for teachers. Any proposal to change requirements for teacher induction and registration would be viewed most seriously by the TUI. Any proposal to change conditions could only occur after a negotiated agreement was reached.

4.9 The concept of future strategies making reference to ESD is noble but it is unlikely that every future strategy would need to reference ESD especially if that strategy had nothing to do with ESD.

6.4 The TUI believes that all students should be able to access ESD. For that reason it is regrettable that the DES has not announced that all students will have access to genuinely free education as an inherent part of the social contract. The TUI, and our colleagues in ICTU and its member unions, have repeatedly put forward suggestions as to how genuinely free education could be provided in all levels of the education system (for example see TUI, 2018; ICTU, 2018).

**Conclusion**

It is clear from the above that the ESD Action Plan 2018-2020 has many positive elements but could benefit from the amendments suggested above. In particular, reference should be made to the vital role played in society by the trade union movement. Furthermore, any changes to the work of schools and teachers can only take place following negotiation. Schools are already under significant pressure and ‘initiativitis’ is not acceptable to the TUI.

Ends.

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**Glossary**

C&C Community and Comprehensive

DES Department of Education and Skills

ETB Education and Training Board

ESD Education for Sustainable Development

EU European Union

ICTU Irish Congress of Trade Unions

NCCA National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

SDG Sustainable Development Goals

TUI Teachers’ Union of Ireland

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