

MAKING EDUCATION AN ELECTION ISSUE



GENERAL ELECTION 2024

Ahead of the general election, TUI posed a series of questions to the seven political parties with the most TDs at the end of the last Dáil – Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, The Green Party, The Labour Party, People Before Profit, Sinn Féin and The Social Democrats.

The following introductory texts on the key issues, some of which are sector-specific and some relevant to all members, were set out before each question. The questions and the respective answers from the political parties follow.

MAKING TEACHING/LECTURING A VIABLE CAREER – RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION CRISIS

The recruitment and retention crisis is worsening. Schools are experiencing unprecedented difficulties filling vacancies, a problem exacerbated by cost-of-living increases and the severe scarcity of affordable accommodation. While the accommodation emergency affects all of society and must be dealt with on a national basis, there are other measures that would effectively tackle these problems

COMMITMENT TO ADDRESSING THIRD LEVEL FUNDING CRISIS

At third level, the latest international indicators show that our paltry investment level is lagging, far behind what is required. Ireland's spend

(0.5% excluding R&D) is just half that of the OECD average and the ratio of students to lecturers has been consistently higher than international norms. Lecturers are experiencing high levels of work-related stress as a result of cutbacks and rationalisation measures in the sector. This is a shameful and unacceptable legacy of a refusal at political level to address the sector's funding crisis in any meaningful way. Any new Government must commit to a long term, sustainable funding model for the Technological University/Institute of Technology sector.

TACKLING BUREAUCRATIC WORKLOAD

Across all education sectors, the sharp increase in workload caused by bureaucratic and administrative demands is eroding personal time and resulting in needless meetings and a



box-ticking culture. All of this is sapping morale and deflecting from the core duties of teaching and lecturing.

VALUING IRELAND'S FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING (FET) SECTOR

Ireland's Further Education and Training (FET) sector has consistently proven itself in evolving to meet the needs of the economy and society, but significant additional funding is required to ensure that students have access to the modern facilities, equipment and appropriate digital infrastructure required to fully support today's high-quality education and training opportunities. Those employed in this sector must be valued in the same manner as other public sector educationalists. Despite undertakings by current and previous Ministers, engagement on important developments in the sector continues to be poor. The next

government should be committed not only to appropriate funding for this important sector, but to proactive engagement with the TUI as the voice of the practitioners.

SENIOR CYCLE REDEVELOPMENT

The TUI believes in positive change that benefits the education system. In terms of Senior Cycle redevelopment, there must be appropriate resourcing, meaningful consultation and proper planning if the redevelopment is to be successful. Adequate funding must be provided for all schools, big or small, rural or urban. Equality and equity must be paramount. The second level system must be properly resourced to ensure that Additional Assessment Components (AACs) can successfully assess forms of learning, competencies and skills other than those addressed in the terminal examination.

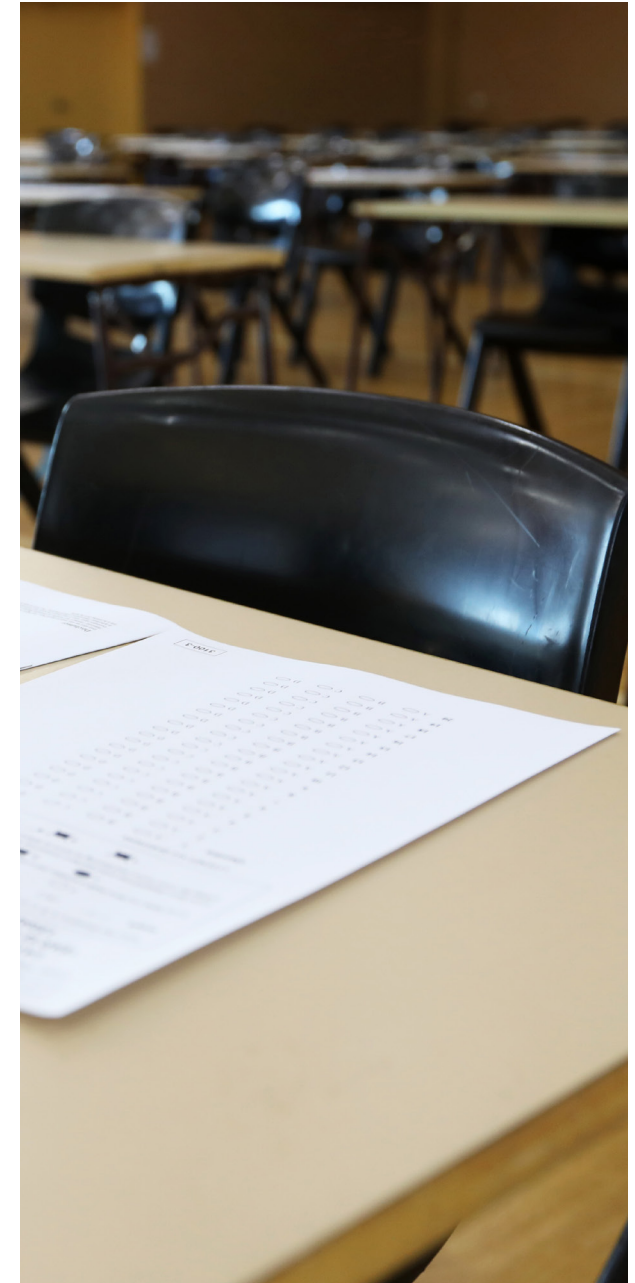
Teacher time is a key resource. Professional time of 40 minutes per week was provided to teachers to resource the reform of the Junior Cycle programme. It is entirely logical and unavoidable that the extensive change proposed at Senior Cycle must provide significantly more time to teachers to have any chance of success.

Viable jobs and a respect for work-life balance
Overall, if our education system is to be successful and if the needs of students are to be properly met, teaching and lecturing jobs must be attractive career options and have manageable workloads in a properly resourced education system. The political

system must commit to ensuring that teachers and lecturers across the second level, FET and higher education sectors can secure viable, full-time positions from initial appointment. They must also have access to career progression opportunities and fair workloads that respect work-life balance and do not encroach on personal and family time.

VIABLE JOBS AND A RESPECT FOR WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Overall, if our education system is to be successful and if the needs of students are to be properly met, teaching and lecturing jobs must be attractive career options and have manageable workloads in a properly resourced education system. The political system must commit to ensuring that teachers and lecturers across the second level, FET and higher education sectors can secure viable, full-time positions from initial appointment. They must also have access to career progression opportunities and fair workloads that respect work-life balance and do not encroach on personal and family time.



MAKING TEACHING/LECTURING A VIABLE CAREER – RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION CRISIS

Does your party commit to ensuring that:

- contracts of full hours are provided from initial appointment to second level teachers?
- posts of responsibility are restored to pre-cutback levels so that teachers have access to promotional opportunities that bolster staff retention?
- additional measures such as the halving of the two-year Professional Master in Education (PME) required to teach at second level and the paying of incremental credit for overseas teaching to those looking to return to Ireland are introduced?



Next year, the government will spend in excess of €16 billion across the Departments of Education and Further and Higher Education, and we are committed to increasing this further if we are re-elected to government. Over our term in government, we have created 2,000 additional Posts of Responsibility to provide additional support and career progression within schools.

We will continue this if re-elected to government. This government has committed to a multiannual €3.6 billion public sector pay deal to provide improved pay and conditions to public servants, including teachers, and we have committed to negotiating a new public sector pay deal if returned to government. Indeed, while many other parties have failed to make a sufficient allocation for the next public sector pay deal, no party has made a larger allocation than Fianna Fáil, demonstrating our commitment to public services and servants. We are happy to commit to examining all issues around teacher recruitment and retention.



The recruitment and appointment of teachers to fill teaching posts is a matter for individual school authorities. Teachers may be recruited on a permanent basis once the school/ETB is within its authorised allocation of teaching posts and the criteria outlined in Department of Education Circulars for filling teaching posts are

complied with.

Fine Gael has committed to introducing new administrative support roles in schools to reduce the non-educational workload of principals, assisting with tasks like managing hot meal programmes and free book schemes. We are committed to supporting school leaders and ensuring they have the resources they need, including funding and administrative support.

Fine Gael is committed to increasing the number of teachers, including exploring ways to recognise teaching experience gained abroad in salary calculations as part of efforts to attract qualified teachers back to Ireland. Reducing the time spent needed to secure a Professional Masters in Education would require careful consideration, in consultation with teachers, the Teaching Council and third-level institutions.



There is a crisis in recruitment and retention. We want to make the profession an attractive option for those considering it as a career and for those returning from abroad, including by examining salary scales. We are favour of all of the measures listed here. We are committed to introducing incremental credit for teachers who temporarily moved abroad to teach in private secondary schools outside the EU.

Labour

Labour will establish a Teacher Staffing Taskforce to consider positive action and improvement on key concerns like casualisation, pay scales, incremental credit for teachers who have worked abroad, and shortening the PME to one year, and we will act on its recommendations.

We support contracts of full hours, the restoration of posts of responsibility and increased support to encourage a more diverse workforce. We will develop key worker housing in our cities for public servants. Our Freedom to Learn proposal will allow people who want to train to become educators later in their careers to do it for free.

PEOPLE BEFORE PROFIT

We commit to supporting these issues.



Sinn Féin recognises the role that our teachers have in our society and we value the enormous contribution they make to the future of our children. There is an unprecedented level of teacher shortages in Ireland at present that requires urgent action. Schools report being forced to drop subjects as a result of the teacher recruitment and retention crisis. The shortfall

in the number of teachers is compromising schools' ability to meet pupils' needs. School principals, teachers, students and parents feel abandoned by government and their inaction to address this. A Sinn Féin government would tackle existing barriers preventing people from entering the teaching profession including establishing additional pathways into the profession. We would facilitate professionals who would consider using their professional knowledge in a teaching career creating professional entry routes that are accessible to all. Many teachers are working in temporary or part-time jobs with concerns around low pay and lack of job security. It is unsustainable for teachers to exist on fractions of a job. Sinn Féin would review teacher contracts and ensure that all teachers are given the opportunity to achieve their career potential. Many recent graduates are currently teaching abroad. Sinn Féin are committed to establishing a scheme which recognises this experience should these teachers choose to return home. Sinn Féin in government would undertake a comprehensive review of the Professional Master of Education (PME) course as currently structured. Frequently, this is cited as a major barrier both in cost and duration. Sinn Féin believes that through negotiation and engagement, barriers such as teacher transfers and the quantity of training places in state universities can be overcome and commit to doing so.

Social Democrats

Yes, our party commits to meeting each of these asks in government.



COMMITMENT TO ADDRESSING THIRD LEVEL FUNDING CRISIS

Does your party commit to a significant increase in funding to Institutes of Technology/ Technological University and an urgent reduction in the student/ academic staff ratio in third level institutions from the high of 23:1 set out in OECD's Education At a Glance 2023 to the OECD average of 17:1?



Continued, targeted and sustained investment in skills and apprenticeships will be crucial to meet the needs of employers in sectors as diverse as homebuilding and healthcare. In Government, we established the High-Level Skills Implementation Group to align national skills policy, and we have ambitious plans to meet the needs of the coming decade.

Fianna Fáil has significantly increased funding for further and higher education, investing almost €16 billion over the past four years to advance a more unified and better resourced tertiary education system across the island, including the establishment of five new Technological Universities. If returned to Government, Fianna Fáil will eliminate the core funding gap in the third level sector through use of the National Training Fund. The elimination of this funding gap should give third level institutions more scope to reduce the student/academic staff ratio and to invest in the delivery of high quality education.

Fianna Fáil will increase access to further education by expanding the CAO system to include more apprenticeship options and introduce a single application process for students applying for third-level courses, further education courses and apprenticeships. We will also work with the sector to develop a new 5-year Apprenticeship Action Plan for 2026- 2030, as well as to expand the range of skills categories that can avail of the National Training Fund.



Fine Gael is committed to increasing funding for third-level institutions, ensuring they have the resources they need to excel.



Yes, we are committed to addressing the third level funding crisis. We believe that education, as well as public services in general in this country need a huge amount of investment. To meet the challenges we face today, the state needs to expand as a share of the economy. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael Ministers for Finance have pursued a policy of using the proceeds of new tax raising measures exclusively to fund other tax cuts. We will seek to end this practice and instead use a portion of the proceeds from new tax measures to support enhanced delivery of public services.



Labour will allocate the €150m a year from the NTF much earlier than 2030 and increase funding for IOTs/TUs. We will close the funding gap and ensure the costs of public service pay agreements are provided separately to additional funding commitments.

We will bring spending per student up to the average of peer countries, align staffing ratios to best international practice, remove the employment control framework to provide more local flexibility and introduce a sectoral engagement forum and stronger dialogue between trade unions and HEIs to address terms and conditions including precarious employment and workforce planning.



We commit to supporting this issue.



The Higher Education sector is suffering from a major core funding deficit, currently just over €200 million. As a result, universities have tried to compensate by bringing in additional revenues by charging extremely high accommodation fees. Again, this places the burden of the

funding deficit on the backs of parents and students.

Sinn Féin would ensure that the National Training Fund (NTF) fulfils its purpose of being used to fund further and higher education and training. Other Sinn Féin priorities in this sector include: Removal of the Employment Control Framework to allow institutions greater flexibility to determine their own staffing requirements; An end to precarious employment and the use of short-term insecure contracts; Development of a new career pathway progression and additional employment rights for early career researchers, such as access to maternity leave and the WRC for dispute resolution.

Social Democrats

Our party manifesto pledges to address all of these key issues, including improving staffing ratios, increasing funding to third level and increasing R&D funding well above where it stands at the moment.



TACKLING BUREAUCRATIC WORKLOAD

Does your party commit to engaging with TUI through the relevant Departments to ensure that teachers and lecturers are no longer deflected from their core duties?



Teachers want to teach, and they must not be burdened with red tape or bureaucracy that distracts from the classroom. We will provide additional supports to education to ensure that this is the case. We will expand the Home School Liaison Co-Ordinator service to every second-level school with an identified attendance problem. We have committed to a new pilot for additional administrative supports for Principals and Boards of Management to reduce their workloads. We will build on the wellbeing and guidance supports that are in place for students.



Yes. And as mentioned in a previous answer, Fine Gael has committed to introducing new administrative support roles in schools to reduce the non-educational workload of principals.



Yes. Our goal is to ensure that the next boost to productivity benefits workers in a way that recent technological and educational changes have not to date. Artificial intelligence could potentially play a role in reducing 'busy work' and lowering the administrative burden, if handled and regulated properly. This must be a transformation for the better and one which takes the pressure off working people while increasing our material standard of living.



Yes, Labour will always engage with trade unions, and introduce a sectoral engagement forum and stronger dialogue between trade unions and the Departments and also HEIs to address terms and conditions including precarious employment, workforce planning and ensuring teachers and lecturers can focus on educating their students.

We will also address the scourge of precarious employment and casualisation, which threatens to undermine the quality and stability of the sector, support pathways to permanent contracts, ensure fair and equitable working conditions and address gender inequalities within the academic workforce.



We commit to engaging with the TUI as requested



Yes, Sinn Féin commits to working with the relevant stakeholders, including TUI, on this critical issue.



The goal of tackling bureaucratic workload is an important one, and we pledge to engage with the TUI as part of creating a plan of action to deal with it.

VALUING IRELAND'S FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING (FET) SECTOR

Does your party agree to engage fully with TUI to ensure that further education and training is secured as a properly staffed and properly funded system established and protected for the public good, and further ensure that those employed in this sector are valued in the same manner as other public sector educationalists?



Fianna Fáil will increase access to further education by expanding the CAO system to include more apprenticeship options and introduce a single application process for students applying for third-level courses, further education courses and apprenticeships. We will also work with the sector to develop a new 5-year Apprenticeship Action Plan for 2026- 2030, as well as to expand the range of skills categories that can avail of the National Training Fund.



Yes. Fine Gael will engage with all stakeholders and is committed to making apprenticeships and skills development accessible, relevant, and responsive to the needs of our economy.



Yes, we are committed to ensuring that public sector educationalists are valued in the same manner, no matter who they are teaching. We see the FET sector as crucial to the next stage of Ireland's development.

Our vision is to move away from a one-size-fits-all approach to further and higher education. The system must be flexible enough to adapt to people's varying needs and abilities. We want to

increase apprenticeships, especially in careers needed for construction, the digital economy, the green economy and any new areas as they emerge during the term of Government. We also want to improve coordination between state agencies to ensure that secondary and further education, upskilling programmes, and retraining address the economy's needs as we transition to green and digital futures. One of our priorities is to work with higher and further education institutes to additionally increase the number of places in courses for disability sector professionals.



Labour is proud to support community based vocational education as training and adult education courses are vital parts of our education system for securing a well-skilled workforce, and providing new opportunities for people when other routes aren't accessible or suitable. Labour has several commitments for the FET sector in our manifesto. We will expand enrolment in the FET sector to over 200,000 learners a year, ensure it is properly funded, and improve conditions and professional development for teaching staff and adult educators to boost recruitment and retention. We will also deliver an ambitious FET Colleges of the Future programme.



PEOPLE BEFORE PROFIT

We commit to engaging with the TUI as requested.



Sinn Féin recognise the importance of increasing the number of people completing apprenticeships to ensure we have the required number of qualified tradespeople to address the housing crisis. Sinn Féin will ensure they are attracted and supported throughout their training, particularly in the ETBs and TUs.

Of course, we also commit to ensuring that the sector is properly staffed and funded and that those employed in it are valued.

Social Democrats

Yes, we will engage with the TUI to ensure that goals around FET as outlined are met.



SENIOR CYCLE REDEVELOPMENT

Does your party agree to engage fully with TUI to ensure that the voice of the practitioner is listened to and that Senior Cycle redevelopment is properly planned, appropriately resourced and ensures equality and equity for students?



In terms of Senior Cycle reform, we want to ensure that Ireland remains among the top-performing countries in the world and to that end we have introduced the most far-reaching reform of the Leaving Certificate cycle in half a century. If returned to Government, Fianna Fáil will continue the reform of the Leaving Certificate in order to broaden the range of learning and examination approaches involved.

We are committed to fully engaging with the TUI and other teachers' unions, as well as students, parents and the wider school community as we continue to progress Senior Cycle reform. We are also committed to providing school staff with the necessary training and resources such as sample exam papers and classroom materials for Senior Cycle Reform. This has been publicly communicated by Minister for Education Norma Foley.



Yes, we will engage with all stakeholders.



Yes. We understand that changes to the Senior Cycle redevelopment are causing significant issues for teachers, students and parents, and we are committed to engaging with TUI

on these changes so that resourcing, proper planning and concerns about educational standards are addressed. In line with TUI, we are supportive of the introduction of the two new subjects, including Climate Action and Sustainable Development, proceeding in the 2025/2026 academic year.



Labour will hold a new National Convention on Education, inclusive of young people and children, stakeholders and trade unions, and an assembly of citizens to plan for a modern, secular, and equality-based model of education. A key strand of work for the Convention will be to consider Leaving Cert reform. The Leaving Certificate, even with continuous assessment and project work, is still an outdated system bound by rote learning and terminal exams that cause mental stress for students. In a digital age it is time to fundamentally review and replace our current system. Educators must be central to that process.



We commit to engaging with the TUI as requested. Our candidates were happy to support your recent protest and give solidarity to the teachers involved.



Sinn Féin share the genuine concerns that have been raised by teachers and representative bodies in relation to the proposed Leaving Cert reform. We believe this is an issue of educational quality and fairness.

The concerns raised around sufficient resourcing and adequate in-training are also shared by parents. For students to reach their potential, schools must be adequately resourced, and teachers must be adequately skilled and equipped to deliver any changes.

There's an education equality aspect to this that must be addressed. Schools who are currently struggling to pay bills, meet ongoing day to day costs in terms of heating and keeping the lights on, simply do not have the money to purchase any additional resources.

Without proper funding and resources, educational inequality will widen and more schools will be forced to drop subjects.

We commit to engaging fully with the TUI to ensure teachers voices are heard and that redevelopment is properly planned, appropriately resourced and ensures equality and equity for students.

Social Democrats

It's important that the voice of the practitioner is heard in any reforms or redevelopments within the system, and the Social Democrats will engage with the TUI during the process to make sure that happens, and the goals around planning, resourcing and equality are met.



VIABLE JOBS AND A RESPECT FOR WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Does your party commit to ensuring, through engagement between the TUI and the relevant Departments, that teaching and lecturing are attractive career options and that workloads within the professions respect work-life balance?



Fianna Fáil is committed to education, and has set out a range of ambitious policies to ensure that Ireland continues to have one of the best education systems in the world. Fianna Fáil is always willing to work with the TUI and education stakeholders to improve educational outcomes, support educators and deliver a better education system.

We recognise that our dedicated and skilled teachers are the very backbone of our education system, and that we must ensure that teachers feel valued and rewarded for their hard work. Fianna Fáil created Social Partnership as a working principle in Ireland, and we acknowledge the importance of public sector workers who provide essential services across the country on a 24/7 basis. If returned to Government, Fianna Fáil will continue to strengthen the Social Partnership model. We will seek to negotiate a new national wage deal following the completion of the Public Services Agreement in 2026.

We will ensure that the new national wage deal strengthens public services and recognises the central contribution of workers in the delivery of better public services.



Yes, we will engage with all stakeholders on this important issue.



Yes. In addition to the measures we have outlined, we want to launch a full national discussion of the future of education, by immediately establishing a Citizens' Assembly on the Future of Education, centring the views of both children and adults in education, as well as their teachers and lecturers.

We have championed work-life balance in Government and will continue to do this if we are part of the next Government. We are committed to a range of significant supports for workers:

- We will expand the right to request flexible working to all workers, not just those in caring roles.
- We have committed to convening a Citizens' Assembly on the four-day work week to examine the impacts of productivity, wellbeing and cost.
- We will promote collective bargaining. To do so, we will transpose and legislate for the provisions of the EU Pay Transparency Directive.
- We will introduce an additional bank holiday.



Labour will introduce stronger rights for workers, and better work-life balance including the right to flexible work and to switch off. We will negotiate public sector pay agreements in line

with wage growth and increase education investment by over €350m per year over the term of the next government with funding increases of approximately €250m per year for further and higher education. This will ensure teaching and lecturing are attractive career options and reduce workloads. Education, skills, and lifelong learning are essential to Ireland's future prosperity and Labour recognises the vital contribution of educators to our economy and society.

PEOPLE BEFORE PROFIT

We commit to engaging with the TUI as requested and to ensuring workloads are addressed.



Yes, Sinn Féin commits to engaging with TUI and other key stakeholders on this key issue. Ensuring that teaching and lecturing are attractive career options is critical for the health of our education system and our society.

Social Democrats

This is imperative for the future of the education system, and it's important that the TUI as representatives of educators are engaged with to ensure teaching and lecturing remain attractive career options. We pledge to engage with you and other stakeholders in this.

