

Statement on Teacher Supply

for the meeting of the

Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills

Tuesday 24th April 3.30 pm.

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We thank the Chairperson and the members of the committee for the opportunity to meet you today, and to further develop some of the points made in the submission we were invited to make earlier this month.

We lead DCU's Institute of Education, Ireland's only University faculty of education, and the newest, in its second year of operation since it was created through the incorporation of four separate institutions – St Patrick's College Drumcondra, the Church of Ireland College of Education in Rathmines, the Mater Dei Institute and the DCU school of education studies. We now have more than 4000 undergraduate and post-graduate students of education on the St Patrick's Campus of DCU, almost 140 academic staff, and some world-class researchers. We cover all phases of education, from early years through to adult and community education. The review of initial teacher education carried out in 2012 set a direction of travel for initial teacher education away from smaller colleges of education and into university settings where those preparing to be teachers can work with staff who are also researching in their specialist field, and have opportunities to engage with scientists, writers, musicians, mathematicians, social and business innovators and the wide range of expertise found in contemporary higher education institutions.

This is an important policy direction in the context of the teacher supply issues we now face. Our education system is committed to a highly qualified teaching profession, and to high quality teacher education. For some, the path to teaching can be six years – about same qualification period for doctors. We have a shortage of doctors in the health sector, and no one has suggested getting doctors trained faster! Teaching, like medicine, is a complex job.

And it is harder than it used to be. We do not claim that our graduates are ready for every situation that a classroom will present to them. But we do aim to provide our teachers with enough technical and professional knowledge and understanding as a basis for further learning, and for sound judgement. Many of those who graduate in 2018 will still be teaching in 2050; we have to ensure that they are as ready to learn as they are ready to teach.

That's a challenge for any system, but we consider it important to remind the committee that the Irish HE system continues to struggle in the aftermath of austerity, and in the absence of a sustainable funding model. Additional places in initial teacher education programmes, new programmes and flexible modes of delivery are contingent on the resources to support them. You have seen the facts, figures and tables about Irish Higher Education funding, but let us give you two very practical examples. One of our colleagues is the President of the European Educational Research Association, and in that capacity, hosted a recent meeting of the executive. The outgoing president leads the faculty of education in Utrecht in the Netherlands, one of the largest in Europe with 6000 students and 600 staff. He shook his head in disbelief when he heard that we worked with 4000 students and 140 staff. The reality of that ratio hits home when we sit down to plan for the delivery of our newest programme, a four year B Ed degree in Gaeilge and Modern Languages we hope to offer in 2019 to respond to the shortage of teachers in these areas in the post-primary system. This innovative degree that will see students spend time in European Universities, and in the Gaeltacht, and will include modules taught in the target languages is already generating queries from students in fifth year and TY. It draws on DCU's reputation for applied linguistics and for education, but our biggest challenge will be funding the staff to teach it, providing classrooms and library spaces for students, and the admin structure and staff needed to support placements in international and Gaeltacht settings. We agree with the DES that we need to expand our number of concurrent teacher education programmes, but we need to discuss how these programmes will be funded into the future.

In working with the HEA and the DES on generating additional places for next year, we have signalled, as have other institutions, where additional places can be made available, and

there has been a positive response from applicants. These places won't be realised unless additional human and capital resources are provided, and action is taken by the Department and the education partners to secure opportunities for school placement for the additional students.

I've just returned from a conference in Alberta in Canada on school leadership that included speakers from countries as diverse as Iceland, Australia, and Norway, as well as almost all the states of Canada. All have chronic teacher supply issues – they simply cannot attract enough applicants into teacher education programmes, although they can all remember the good old days when they could, when teaching was highly regarded, and when teacher education programmes were over-subscribed as they currently are in Ireland. If we want to avoid joining the very long list of countries with chronic teacher recruitment issues, then we need to take care when we describe our current difficulties. We need to draw on data rather than anecdotes, patterns rather than perceptions, and above all else, we need to avoid taking actions that may curtail the enthusiasm of those preparing to teach, or using language that might seem to blame those currently teaching for wanting to broaden their professional experience or save money for a house. Equally, we need to make sure that in every announcement made about system expansion or system development, account is taken of the impact on teacher supply.

We are confident that the new task force on teacher supply has the appetite for this task, and for the longer term goal of securing better data for workforce planning for the teaching profession in Ireland.

For some of our own students however it's too late. For our 300 or so students preparing to teach religious education and either English, History or Music in post-primary schools, on one of those oversubscribed and in demand concurrent teacher education programmes, waking up to the recent announcement about new arrangements for the teaching of religious education in ETB schools sent them online looking for international options, as the jobs they expected to move into in a growing sector appeared to have been swept away. We wonder too, if those graduating next year as primary teachers may be more inclined to get international experience on graduating if the career break that has long been a part of

the experience of the Irish primary teacher may not be as readily available to them. If teacher supply issues are to be managed effectively, then all future system developments, whether additional school places, new subjects on the curriculum, new policies on additional resources for special educational needs, and even reductions in the pupil teacher ratio, have to include consideration of the obvious and sometimes not-so-obvious impact on teacher supply.

Chairperson, we are happy to discuss any of these points made here, or any of the points made in our submission with members of the commission at today's session.

Ends.