

ASTI Submission on Teacher Supply to Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills

Wednesday, 10 January 2018

1. Introduction

Education is a vital public service which affects the lives of each and every citizen in this state. The opening sentence of the 2017 National Action Plan for Education states that “*education is at the heart of all our ambitions as a nation*”. Teachers matter and the quality of an education system reflects the quality of its teaching profession. Ireland remains among a handful of countries in the OECD which continues to attract high quality graduates into teaching. We cannot afford to be complacent about this. One of the biggest threat to our education system now is the problem of teacher supply. The recent joint submission on teacher recruitment and retention by the ASTI, TUI and INTO to the Public Service Pay Commission provides unequivocal evidence as to the pervasiveness of the teacher supply problem and the impact it is having on our schools. As the editorial headline in the Irish Times on Tuesday, 09 January 2018 stated, it is now time for decisive action on teacher shortages.

2. Ensure the attractiveness of teaching as a career

Teacher supply is inherently linked to the attractiveness of teaching as a career. The view that the teaching profession is undervalued by society has become the common currency among teachers. This is occurring in a political situation in which the expectations of what schools should achieve is ever-increasing and the expectations placed on teachers have never been higher.

The attractiveness of teaching as a profession is contingent on several factors. Chief among these are the status of teaching in society and the pay and conditions of work for teachers. Pay is critical in determining the status of any profession and increasingly so in a labour market in which alternative graduate entry opportunities are better paid than teaching. ASTI wishes to state unequivocally that a patchwork of piecemeal solutions cannot be countenanced as a means for dealing comprehensively with this issue.

Lower pay scales have reduced applications for teaching

It must also be unequivocally stated that the introduction of lower pay scales for entrants to the public service after 2010 has had an immediate and detrimental impact on entry into the profession. Applications for entry to teaching at both primary and second-level have, for the first time ever, been on a downward trend since 2011. Applications for second-level teaching have plummeted by 62% between 2011 and 2017. (Table 1) Research commissioned by the ASTI in 2017 on recently qualified teachers found that the level of pay of graduates was the main source of job dissatisfaction. By contrast, the primary source of job satisfaction was

'being able to help young people'. When questioned as to what the ASTI priorities for recently qualified teachers should be, 92% identified equal pay for all teachers.

Moreover, it would be short-sighted to assume that discontent about level of pay was confined to new entrants to the profession. The introduction of unequal pay scales has galvanised the entire profession who perceive it not only as unjust but as undermining the status of the profession. The common discourse now among teachers is that they would not encourage school leavers to apply for teaching. This is a deeply disturbing development.

In this context, the ASTI must put on record that it unequivocally rejects proposals that teachers in STEM or other subjects should receive additional remuneration. Experience in other countries have proved that such measures are not only deeply divisive and demoralising; they are also ineffective in attracting graduates to teaching because other factors such as working conditions and job security are poor. The ASTI is also opposed to any envisaged solution the might entail city allowances for teachers.

Casualisation of work endemic in teaching

Moreover, the problem of casualization in the profession has not ended with the introduction of CIDs after two years employment. Just 34% - one-third - of the teachers in the RedC survey were in permanent, full-time posts. (Table 2) The attractiveness of teaching as a profession has been deeply corroded by the problem of casualization. Surveys of teachers who have emigrated have underlined the difficulties of finding full-time work as the major '*push*' factor to leave Ireland and seek work elsewhere as a teacher.

Teachers working conditions have deteriorated

Teachers working conditions are absolutely central to perceptions of attractiveness of teaching as a profession. Teaching is a challenging job: the workload is heavy; the professional role is constantly expanding; occupational stress levels are high. Working conditions such as class size, classroom resources, supports for special needs students, deteriorated significantly during the decade of austerity. The moratorium on appointments to leadership posts has been highly detrimental: the absence of a sense of career progression has been deeply demoralising for teachers. Simultaneously, teachers have additional working hours outside classroom teaching including up to 5-hours per week in the Supervision and Substitution Scheme. Teachers are very sensitive to changes in working conditions which distract from their core focus on classroom teaching. This fact is under-appreciated by policy makers to the detriment of morale in the profession.

Cost of teacher education is prohibitive

In 2014, the second-level teacher qualification – the Professional Masters in Education – became a two-year programme. It now costs between €10,000 and €15,000 to qualify as a second-level teacher. (Table 3) This prospect, coupled with the knowledge of lack of permanent full-time jobs for newly qualified teachers is widely acknowledged as a major deterrent to entry to the profession. Moreover, this new model of entry is making the profession less socially diverse and inaccessible to graduates from less affluent backgrounds. The ASTI

strongly urges that student grant support measures, including a payment gratuity while on placement as is the case for student nurses, be introduced as a matter of urgency.

3. Striking the Balance – need for implementation of Teaching Council report

The Teaching Council's report on teacher supply was presented to the Minister for Education and Skills in December, 2015. It contained 14 recommendations for action in the immediate to short term. The majority of these recommendations do not necessarily require significant additional resources. Rather, what is needed is the resource of leadership across the stakeholder groups, in particular at Departmental and Ministerial level. For example, one of the contributory factors which delayed recognition of problems in teacher supply has been inadequate data collection and analysis. This situation is exacerbated at second level where there are three sectors with differential procedures as regards employment and reporting to the Department of Education and Skills.

Another singular problem in the Irish context has been the absence of any planning mechanism for teacher supply at national level. Workforce planning in the public sector is a relatively recent development with a workforce planning initiative put in place by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform as part of its commitments under the Public Service Reform Plan 2011.

Need for workforce planning in education

Moreover, workforce planning is not just about anticipating future needs but equally concerns policies to promote the quality of, and to upskill, the existing workforce (IPA, 2012). The four UK jurisdictions have education workforce planning measures in place for many years. The 2017 report of the analogous Scottish Parliamentary Committee on Education and Skills on teacher workforce planning sums up the challenge as follows:

The Committee appreciates that teacher recruitment is a concern internationally and that some of the challenges are not specific to Scotland. However, based on the evidence received, there is clearly scope in Scotland to: improve workforce planning processes; make teaching more appealing and improve retention levels; remove barriers for those wanting to become teachers; and ensure student teachers feel, and are, sufficiently equipped for the classroom

The Committee's conclusion endorses the ASTI's deep concerns about the long-term attractiveness of teaching as a profession. The Department of Education & Skills must, as a matter of urgency, establish the necessary structures to commence workforce planning for education. An immediate priority at second level must be that of ensuring that entry to teacher education programmes meets the demands for subject specialisms. In addition to the 14 recommendations in the Teaching Council's report, the Department of Education and Skills must also implement the measures which emerged from the national consultation on teacher supply hosted by the Teaching Council on October 5th – International Teachers' Day – last year.

4. Conclusion

There is overwhelming evidence as to the crisis in teacher supply at all levels of our education system. Systemic problems such as unequal pay; lack of employment security; poor working conditions; lack of career paths and opportunities for promotion; high public expectations all impact on the attractiveness of teaching as a profession in the medium to long-term term and on teacher supply in the short-term. While the Teaching Council's report - Striking the Balance – provides a roadmap for the Department of Education and Skills, the deeper systemic problems can only be effectively addressed by public policy and government decision-making.

TABLES 1, 2 AND 3

Table 1: Applications to for second-level teaching

The Postgraduate Applications Centre (PAC) was established in 1998 to process applications for the Higher Diploma in Education programmes for 4 NUI colleges - UCC, UCD, NUI Galway and Maynooth. It also processes applications to other post-graduate programmes in other institutions.

Year:	Applications received for second level teaching
2011	2,824
2012	2,158
2013	1,990
2014	1,422
2015	1,139
2016	1,056
2017	1,068
2018	<i>600 applicants on 9th January: closing date to be extended.</i>

Source: Post-Graduate Applications Centre

Graduates from PAC programmes

2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016
1,116	1,153	1,251	92*	818

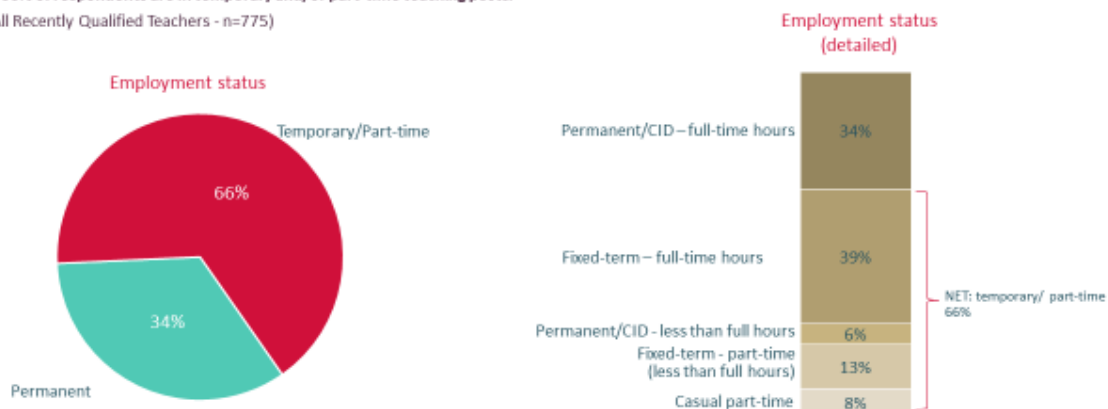
Source: HEA

**In this year, the programme changed from a one-year to a two-year programme.*

Table 2: RedC Survey of Recently Qualified Teachers, ASTI 2017

Employment status

Almost 66% of respondents are in temporary and/or part-time teaching posts.
(Base: All Recently Qualified Teachers - n=775)



Q: What is your employment status?

REDC

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Table 3: Cost of 2-year Professional Masters in Education (Level 9), 2017/18

UNIVERSITY	DURATION	COST €
UCC	2 YEARS	10,800
MIE	2 Years	11,128
DCU	2 Years	8960 (3760 yr 1, 5200 yr 2)
UCD	2 Years	12,200
Hibernia	2 Years	15,000
TCD	2 Years	12,580
NUI Galway	2 Years	9,900
NUI Maynooth	2 Years	10,800 (6,000 yr1, 4,800 yr 2)
UL	2 Years	10,000

