

## INTO Submission

# Putting Education at the Heart of Ireland's EU Presidency





John Boyle

## Introduction

On behalf of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO), I welcome the opportunity to contribute to Ireland's preparations for its Presidency of the European Union (EU) in the second half of 2026. This presidency will coincide with critical developments in European policy, which will have an impact on primary and special education here in Ireland, as well as broader issues impacting workers which have been set out by the Irish and European trade union movement, including the *Union of Skills initiative*, the *Digital Education Action Plan*, and the *Quality Jobs Roadmap*. The INTO believes it is essential that the European trade union movement is involved during the Irish Presidency of the EU, ensuring the perspectives of workers is brought to bear on discussions, principally through the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE).

***The INTO urges the Government to ensure that teachers' voices are central to these discussions.***

Our submission sets out detailed proposals to advance education, strengthen democratic engagement and promote decent work across Europe.

The INTO would welcome the opportunity to participate in both formal and informal gatherings and events that may take place during the Irish EU Presidency, which will explore the issues mentioned above.

John Boyle  
INTO General Secretary

# Priority areas

1.

## Delivering EU class size standards for Irish primary schools

The Irish *Programme for Government* commits to reducing Ireland's primary class sizes to the current EU average of 19. At the moment the Government allocates one mainstream teacher to every 22.5 pupils, far behind what peers in other EU member states have achieved for their primary pupils.

The Irish Government should use the platform of the EU Presidency to signal when Ireland's children can look forward to being educated in classes as small as those experienced by their EU peers.

Signalling an ambitious plan to tackle Ireland's overcrowded classrooms during the Irish Presidency of the EU would demonstrate that the Irish Government is a champion of education. It would elevate the status of primary education, making it an issue of EU importance, showcasing Irish leadership on the issue.

2.

## *Union of Skills* package

The European Commission is expected to launch a new *Action Plan on Basic Skills* under the *Union of Skills* initiative during 2025-2026. This plan will address underachievement in literacy, numeracy, digital competence, and citizenship education. The INTO recommends that Ireland advocates for:

- Enhanced teacher support through funded professional development programmes, particularly in literacy and numeracy interventions and digital pedagogy.
- Measures to improve the attractiveness of the profession, including competitive pay, manageable workloads and career progression pathways.
- Targeted student support, focusing on learners at risk of educational disadvantage and children with additional needs.

The *Teachers and Trainers Agenda*, anticipated in 2026, will address teacher shortages and improve working conditions. Ireland should use its presidency to influence this agenda by prioritising teacher well-being, workload management and structured career development. In that regard, implementation of the recommendations outlined in UNESCO's *Strategic Workforce Planning for Teachers in Ireland* will be vital to ensure that every primary and special school in Ireland can be guaranteed access to fully qualified teachers.

## 3.

## Digital education and artificial intelligence (AI) in schools

The *Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027)* remains the EU's framework for building a high-quality, inclusive digital education ecosystem. The INTO supports its objectives but shares concerns raised by ETUCE and Education International regarding AI in education. We propose:

- Clear EU-level safeguards on AI use in schools to protect data privacy and uphold pedagogical integrity.
- Investment in teacher training to ensure teachers can critically engage with AI and digital tools.
- Equitable access to digital infrastructure, particularly in rural and disadvantaged areas.
- Ireland should champion a balanced approach that explores innovation while safeguarding core educational values.

## 4.

## Multi-annual financial framework and ICT funding

In July 2020 the European Council adopted a €750 billion recovery package for Europe. The package, *NextGenerationEU*, was Europe's shared response to the severe health and economic crisis caused by COVID-19. Arising from this package, funds were provided to member states, including Ireland, to invest in digital ICT infrastructure at primary and special education level.

The next EU *Multiannual Financial Framework* (MFF) will set funding priorities post-2027. Previous allocations for ICT rollout in primary and special education were insufficient to meet Ireland's needs. The INTO recommends:

- Increased funding for ICT infrastructure in primary schools, recognising technology's role in modern pedagogy.
- Dedicated resources for teacher training in digital competence.
- Review of previous funding mechanisms, highlighting gaps and lessons learned with a particular emphasis on levelling the funding streams for primary schools with those available to post-primary schools.

Ireland should argue that equitable digital access is essential for achieving EU education and other key strategic objectives. With the expectation that negotiations for the next framework will begin in 2026, Ireland should seek key funding streams which can be utilised for the delivery of ICT infrastructure, with technical support for schools being a key feature and staff training being expanded.



## 5.

## Recognition of teaching qualifications

Maintaining high standards in teacher education is essential. The INTO notes challenges regarding recognition of primary teaching qualifications from other EU member states, particularly considering the ongoing teacher shortages evident from our own research. We propose:

- Review of recognition processes to ensure alignment with Irish standards.
- Engagement with the Teaching Council to address inconsistencies or barriers.
- Safeguards to uphold quality, ensuring recognition does not compromise professional standards.

Ireland should explore the current barriers to recognition of teaching qualifications and use the presidency to tackle any EU-wide obstacles which might exist. Teachers who have moved to Ireland with their families must be able to find a pathway to teaching here within a reasonable period of time. In that regard, targeted support programmes for those striving to achieve the required standards in the Irish language should be prioritised.

We note the recent Government decision to reintroduce a time-bound process enabling teachers who qualify outside Ireland to complete their teacher induction here. We urge Government to review the effectiveness of this process well in advance of the current deadline of December 2027.

## 6.

## Youth participation and civic engagement

Civil society expects Ireland to amplify youth participation and democratic values during its presidency. The INTO supports initiatives that strengthen civic space and promote active citizenship. We recommend:

- Structured engagement with youth organisations and school communities during policy consultations.
- Support for Erasmus+ and similar programmes that foster mobility and intercultural learning.
- Commitment to protecting civic space, ensuring education policy reflects democratic principles.

## 7.

## Quality jobs and collective bargaining

The European Commission launched a *Quality Jobs Roadmap* in December 2025, with legislation expected in 2026. The INTO asserts that quality employment must include the right to collective bargaining. This aligns with Ireland's recently published action plan on promoting collective bargaining and the four pillars of the *New Economic Model*<sup>1</sup>, which will roll out from 2026 onwards. We urge:

- Explicit recognition of collective bargaining rights in EU employment frameworks.
- Integration of quality jobs as a presidency theme, reflecting Ireland's commitment to fair work.
- Alignment with national and EU strategies, ensuring coherence between domestic and European policy.
- Additional measures to ensure that teaching becomes as attractive a career as it once was.

## 8.

## Standing up for international human rights law

During the Irish Presidency of the EU, we are calling on the Government to ensure a strong voice for the ongoing respect for and adherence to international human rights law, particularly in the condemnation of and sanctioning of states that engage in genocide or unprovoked aggression and attacks on the sovereignty of another country or people. In a world of creeping authoritarianism, Irish people rightly expect the EU to live by the standards on which the union was founded and ensure consistency of approach.

We encourage the Irish Government to use the Presidency of the EU to draw attention to the atrocities committed in Gaza and the Occupied Territories, Ukraine, South Sudan and elsewhere around the world.

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1. *A New Economic Model* | ICTU

# Conclusion

At a time when Europe faces geopolitical tensions, economic uncertainty and social challenges, Ireland's Presidency of the EU must cut through complexity and refocus on what truly matters. Education is not a peripheral issue; it is the foundation of a resilient society and a strong European Union. A presidency that champions investment in education – including lower class sizes at primary level, backed by robust EU funding and coherent policies – will strengthen every member state and secure the future of our Union.

But increasing investment in education alone will not be enough. Europe's success depends on quality jobs for all workers – jobs that provide fair pay, security, dignity and the right to collective bargaining. These principles are central to social cohesion and economic stability. Ireland should use its Presidency of the EU to make this connection explicit: strong education systems and strong labour standards go hand in hand in building a fairer Europe.

Let Ireland's rotational EU Presidency be remembered for its clarity of purpose and its commitment to the basics: ensuring every child has access to quality education, every teacher is supported properly and every worker enjoys the security of a quality job.

## Contact

For any queries in respect of this submission, please contact David Geary, INTO Assistant General Secretary/ Director of Communications at **[dgeary@into.ie](mailto:dgeary@into.ie)**.





Vere Foster House,  
35 Parnell Square,  
Dublin 1, D01 ET35.

[www.into.ie](http://www.into.ie)

[info@into.ie](mailto:info@into.ie)

01 804 7700