

**Written submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on
Education and Skills**

Barriers to education facing vulnerable groups

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Executive summary and Recommendations

Macro-level Issues

Policies to address the Intersectionality of Inequalities for Vulnerable Groups

There is compelling national and international research evidence that economic inequalities translate directly and indirectly into barriers to education for all vulnerable groups, not just those on low incomes and/or working-class-poor. While children with disabilities, those from ethnic minority, lone parent or immigrant backgrounds, Travellers, children in direct provision and other vulnerable groups such as those who are gay or lesbian, all experience unique barriers to education, in all cases those who are most adversely affected within these groups are those from poor families.

Recommendation 1.

We cannot resolve educational inequalities by modifying or working through the educational system on its own as taxation policies, housing, health, employment, welfare and childcare policies all impact on educational outcomes (Lynch and Crean 2018; Lynch 2018). Without equal access to economic and related resources there can be no meaningful equality of opportunity in education for vulnerable groups over time.

To promote substantive equality in education, there is a need to seriously reduce the economic inequalities in Ireland on an ongoing basis between the wealthiest 10% and the poorest 10% in particular. That is to say, public policies need to actively promote equality of condition, economically and socially, outside of schools and colleges so that there can be more equality of outcome within schools.

Recommendation 2.

Arising from Recommendation 1, Equality-Education-Proofing of fiscal, housing, health, transport, integration and rural and/or urban development policies needs to be undertaken on a systematic basis to ensure these policies do not exacerbate barriers for vulnerable groups in education, and that, where possible, they actively promote equality for such groups.

Where grant aid or financial supports are provided for vulnerable groups to overcome barriers to education (such as in HEAR and DARE in higher education), they need to be increased in line with the cost of living.

Recommendation 3

In Ireland, there is an almost perfect correlation between the amount and quality of education one gets and one's future labour market opportunities (CSO 2017). The rise in precarious work across all classes of society in the past 10 years, especially in the less-skilled areas of the economy², has had a serious impact on education as it intensifies the

² 20% of young workers are on temporary contracts in 2015 compared to 15% in 2004. See the report by the Nevin Institute 2017 <https://www.nerinstitute.net/blog/2017/05/18/the-growth-of-precarious-work-in-the-republic-of-i/>

competition for educational credentials and, relatedly, for secure employment. Moreover, fear regarding employment and long-term economic security drives fear and anxiety in education.

Because precarious work is so pervasive, there is less and less incentive to stay in education for those in low-skilled areas especially. Ensuring that all forms of employment are as secure as possible, so that any given job guarantees a sustainable livelihood (and opportunities for further education and progression), is key to creating a more sustainable and less exam-focused education system. This is especially important for vulnerable groups as many of them enter the less-skilled sectors of the economy where there is often limited security.

Governance and Policy-making

Under the Education Disadvantage Committee Bill (2017) the parties that the Minister has to consult with when establishing this Committee are largely professional interest groups in education (patrons, national parent bodies, management bodies and trade unions). Their role is to ‘*advise him or her on policies and strategies to be adopted to identify and correct educational disadvantage*’. The Minister is not required to consult with groups representing the socially disadvantaged and vulnerable when setting up the committee although they are to be represented on the committee itself.

Recommendation 4.1

As professional interest groups in education tend to be well-educated, relatively successful, white, ethnically Irish and middle class, it is imperative that those who live with educational disadvantage are also consulted when setting up that Educational Disadvantage Committee, to advise the Minister ‘*on policies and strategies to be adopted to identify and correct educational disadvantage*’. The Education Disadvantage Committee Bill should be amended to allow for this.

Recommendation 4.2

The Education Act (1998) defines *designated bodies* with a right to consultation on a wide range of education matters as being patrons, national parent bodies, management bodies and trade unions. As with the Education Disadvantage Committee Bill (2017) this does not give any civil society group working on the ground with disadvantage or organisations of (not for) the disadvantaged or vulnerable any right to consultation on educational policy generally. This is a democratic weakness of the 1998 Act.

Civil society organisations representing the educationally vulnerable and disadvantaged directly (not professional groups working with them) should be defined as designated bodies under the Act and the 1998 Act should be amended accordingly.

Inter-Agency Collaboration

Recommendation 5

Because education is deeply linked to other social services including health, children and family support services, youth services, mental health services etc., it is vital that there is a formal structure *and resourcing* for inter-agency collaboration in addressing vulnerabilities at

local level. This is already a key recommendation for overcoming disadvantage in the *DEIS 2017 Report* of the Department of Education and Skills (Goal 4).

National Statistical Data disaggregated by level and type of vulnerability

Recommendation 6

There needs to be a systematic compilation of statistical data on the social background of candidates taking all national tests of attainment, including both the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations. While respecting the anonymity of individuals and schools, this data must be disaggregated by social class, rural and urban status, and the identity of candidates on terms of the nine equality grounds covered under the Equal Status Acts. Data on citizenship status is also vital information, as is information about parental education and housing status.

Without proper statistical data, there cannot be long-term planning to address barriers to education for specific vulnerable groups, many of which are too small and idiosyncratic to have their needs addressed in an omnibus programme (like DEIS) that is not designed to meet their specific needs. Small groups such as, Travellers, Roma, children in care, children whose parents are in prison, and Deaf children would all be cases in point.

Meso-level Considerations

Role of Schools and Colleges

Parents will always seek ways to advantage their own children both in and out of school. Schools need to be regulated therefore in a way that minimises the opportunity for already-privileged parents to further advantage their own children through influencing school policy. Given what we know from extensive research in Ireland and abroad the following are key policy recommendations to reduce barriers at this level.

Recommendation 7.1

Schools with a wide social mix, in terms of social class, ethnicity, disability, Traveller and other statuses, are best for vulnerable children when these differences are managed carefully within schools, so that the vulnerable are integrated systematically and respectfully. This should be a stated objective of all schools.

Regulation of school selection needs to be implemented and monitored in a way that does not allow schools [and indirectly powerful parents] to exclude vulnerable children through direct or indirect forms of discrimination. Indirect discriminations are widespread and include targeting selected areas or primary schools when recruiting, having complex entry requirements that favour insider parents with knowledge, high voluntary contributions, costly (bespoke), uniforms, and selection on the basis of family history with the school (Lynch and Lodge 2002). While it is difficult to prohibit indirect forms of exclusion at the very least there should be a national policy noting that they be avoided as they are antithetical to equality in education. Indirect discriminations should be assessed in Whole School Evaluations and in

school appraisals in terms of a new **Equality and Social Inclusion Index** as proposed below under 8.3.

Recommendation 7.2

Given extensive Irish and international research evidence regarding the adverse impact of streaming, setting and tracking/banding on vulnerable children, it is vital that neither streaming or setting occurs in any form in primary school (for example by grouping children within class by tables into the top, middle bottom groups) or in the early stages (Years 1-3) in second-level schools. For this to happen, there needs to be an end to Foundation Level Irish, English and Mathematics at Junior Certificate level. In senior cycle, the Leaving Certificate Applied needs to be reviewed and overhauled as it is currently highly social class-biased in its uptake and its long-term value for students educationally is unclear.

Recommendation 7.3

Given that Eurostat figures show that a significant number of young Irish people (13% between the ages of 15 and 24 in 2016) are neither in employment, education nor training (NEETs), and that there are still a significant number Irish people over the age of 45 who have only completed lower secondary education, it is very important that these people have opportunities to participate in education if they wish to do so. *This requires schools and colleges to offer more flexible, accessible and affordable part-time courses for returners including the unemployed, carers, immigrants, people with disabilities, former prisoners and those who have experienced mental illness. The policy needs to be proactive rather than reactive, involving guidance and a contact point in schools and colleges; and there needs to be an incentive for colleges and schools to promote this type of education on a flexible part-time (or full-time) educational basis. The returners need to be supported by State aid if they have not availed of further or higher education to date. Local Education Boards need to have a mandate to actively promote such policies and devote funding to them.*

Role of Teachers

Positive, supportive non-discriminatory attitudes among teachers are crucial for enabling vulnerable children to perform well academically and feel at home in school.

Recommendation 8.1

Both in-service and pre-service teacher education needs to involve a core compulsory module on how to practice equality and inclusion for vulnerable groups. At pre-service level in particular, teachers should be assessed on their equality practices in classrooms as part of their overall teaching practice assessment. The Teaching Council needs to be mandated to ensure that this happens.

Recommendation 8.2

The Professional Development Service for Teachers' (PDST) mission is '*to promote reflective practitioners*'. *As the body responsible for teacher development, the PDST should include promoting equality and inclusion in schools and classrooms as one of its key objectives and provide in-service training and education for teachers accordingly. Where good equality practices and policies are operational in schools, these policies and practices should be documented and disseminated to other schools through the PDST.*

Recommendation 8.3

Whole School Evaluations should include an Equality and Inclusion Assessment of teaching practices and policies in all schools. At the very least that would involve undertaking a short survey of students (depending on age) and/or holding focus groups with vulnerable groups within schools to assess the veracity of policies designed to promote equality and overcome barriers for vulnerable groups. An Equality and Social Inclusion Index should be developed for all schools.

Recommendation 8.4

Use of Language and Labels – Although not researched systematically in Ireland, teachers can and do use disablist language when commenting on children in class and when discussing individuals and classes with other teachers and professionals. Smyth's (2017) research shows that children who are referred to as 'slow' or 'weak' are keenly sensitive to this type of labelling and find it demeaning.

A list of disablist and stereotypical terms (relating to age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, Travellers, Roma, colour etc.) should be compiled by teachers in consultation with vulnerable groups and the relevant bodies in the Department of Education and Skills, such as the Social Inclusion Unit and Inspectorate. The ultimate goal would be the adoption of a voluntary code among teachers and schools regarding respectful language-usage in schools, including language used between professional staff themselves.

Role of Community Groups, Community Education and Public Libraries

Ireland still has a reasonably high percentage of people who have left school without any formal qualifications (EUROSTAT 2016)³. Many of those are also the parents of future vulnerable children in school.

Recommendation 9.1

To overcome educational barriers for vulnerable young and older adult who have left schools there is a need to invest in Community Development and Adult Education (not only employment-led education and training) in areas of educational disadvantage both in rural and urban settings, and in Public Libraries. This should be an educational objective for all Local Education Boards with budgets allocated for this work.

Local community development and community education centres need to be supported on a systematic basis as these are often the first port of call for those who need support at local level to return to education and training (Fitzsimons 2016). There are excellent models of these community education programmes in Ireland (An Cosán in Tallaght and KLEAR in Kilbarrack) that could be replicated elsewhere.

Recommendation 9.2

Public Libraries are also a vital resource for low-income families, and for those who cannot readily access the internet at home. As observed in the *DEIS 2017 Report* Public Libraries '*have a central role to play in supporting family literacy, providing a space where parents and children access free literacy and numeracy resources, including extensive digital resources*'.

³ In 2016 some 13 % of Irish young people, aged 15-24 years, were neither in employment, education nor training (NEETs). This is much higher than in other EU countries: the figures were 4.6% in the Netherlands, less than 6% in Denmark, 6.7% in Germany and 7.7% in Austria.

Public Library resources need to be enhanced to limit barriers to education for vulnerable groups, including those in rural areas where there is poor internet access.

Modes of Assessment in Public Examinations

Most examinations in Ireland are either pen and paper (or their online equivalent) with primacy given to skills that can be tested through linguistic and mathematically-based intelligences. As the work of Howard Gardner (1983, 1993) and the ZERO Project in Harvard has shown, this is a very limited way to assess human capabilities educationally as all human beings have at least six other types of intelligences. Most of these either not supported formally in education (such as intra and inter-personal intelligences) or marginally supported (musical or visual-spatial, through Art and Design).

Recommendation 10

While the recent inclusion of Physical Education as a school subject is welcome, the more general failure to educate across different intelligences and abilities consigns many students to a sense of failure and increases their vulnerability in schools.

As this issue is not unique to Ireland, there is a need for an EU-wide initiative in Education to examine the possibilities of educating students across all their capabilities in schools and developing the methodologies achieve this. This is especially important for students who find themselves classed as relative 'failures' in the current system.

Micro-level Matters

Private Costs for Parents and issues for Family Carers

There are many barriers to education for vulnerable children that are experienced privately and may not be visible in public. Neither primary nor second-level education free at the point of access; even with the book grants, free meals and free transport, it requires substantial investment from parents via voluntary contributions, expenditures on extracurricular activities, books, and other school materials.

Recommendation 11

There is an urgent need to assess the full economic cost of 'free education' for parents for children up to age 16 and to offer financial, welfare or tax-related compensation for these costs for low-income families. Compensation needs to be given in ways that are accessible and private and do not demean those who receive it.

Recommendation 12

Those who engage in full-time family care work, most of whom are women, are generally unpaid and invisible in Ireland (Lynch and Lyons 2008). Given the nature of care work, especially with vulnerable adults and children, carers often cannot access education to improve their career and personal options after full-time caring ends. This leaves them vulnerable in later life, without either a career or pensions

Education-related child care and respite-care supports need to be put in place to enable full-time carers to access education on a part-time basis. There is a related need for more flexible educational options that accommodates different carer roles, including lone parents, people with adult children with disabilities, and people caring for sick/ disabled parents or other relatives.

1. Introduction

This submission has been prepared by Professor Kathleen Lynch. Kathleen is Professor of Equality Studies in University College Dublin. Equality in education is one of her major areas of research. She has published over 100 academic papers, and several reports on different aspects of inequality including social class, gender, disability, ethnicity, race, sexuality, religion, and age-related injustices. Her major books on education include *The Hidden Curriculum* (1989), *Equality in Education* (1999), *Equality and Power in Schools* (with Anne Lodge) (2002) and *New Managerialism in Education: Gender, Commercialisation and Carelessness* (with Dymphna Devine and Bernie Grummell) (2012, 2015). She published two papers this year on inequality in education, one specifically on the issues in Ireland, with Margaret Crean, in *Education for All? The Legacy of Free Post-Primary Education* edited by Judith Harford (2018) and the other in a major international text *The Sage Handbook of School Organization* edited by M. Connolly et al. (2018).

As an academic and activist, Kathleen played a key role in founding the UCD Equality Studies Centre in 1990 and the UCD School of Social Justice in 2005. She also initiated the setting up of the UCD-wide Egalitarian World Initiative Network (EWI) in 2005. She has been awarded several major EU, and Irish grants for her research. She served as an advisor to the EU Directorate General on Education and Culture (DGEAC) from 2007 to 2010 as part of NESSE (the Network of Experts in the Social Sciences in Education) during which time she authored a major published report on *Gender, Education and Employment* and also wrote the background paper for a report on *Early Childhood, Care and Education*. She has worked in a voluntary capacity with several voluntary and community organisations devoted to the promotion of social justice and equality.

She has also published on theory of equality and social justice with colleagues in UCD (*Equality: From Theory to Action*, 2004, 2009) and on the relationship between care and social justice (*Affective Equality: Love, Care and Injustice*, 2009). The latter book was translated into Spanish in 2014 and Korean in 2016.

She has presented on her research as an invited expert at numerous national and international fora, including EU-wide events organised by DGEAC in Brussels, and at conferences and meetings in the US, Australia, China, Turkey and several EU countries including Austria, Germany, Finland, Sweden, Poland and Spain.

Professor Lynch has advocated for an *equality of condition* approach to addressing educational inequalities rather than a simple equality of opportunities approach. In particular her work has demonstrated the central role economic inequality plays in generating educational inequality and the necessity of promoting a more socially just society more generally in Ireland if we are to have substantive equality in education.

She has also argued strongly for recognising the immorality of all forms of inequality, and especially inequality in education.

Drawing on Professor Lynch's academic and professional expertise and knowledge of educational inequality, and given the limited time available to prepare the submission, this paper will focus primarily on how economic inequalities impact on educational inequalities for vulnerable groups and how all forms of inequality intersect at macro, meso and micro levels in ways that exacerbate barriers for vulnerable groups. The rationale for this is based on the extensive research evidence showing that barriers to education are greatly exacerbated by poverty and a lack of related resources for all vulnerable groups.

1.1 Equality in Education: Ireland's Achievements

Ireland's educational achievements over the last fifty years have been significant in aggregate terms. Ireland is among an elite group of countries with relatively high rates of educational attainment, a low rate of early school leaving and a high proportion of graduates from second-level schools entering higher education (Byrne and McCoy, 2017). Recent EUROSTAT (2016) data show that while inequalities in educational attainment persist in Ireland, relative to other European and OECD countries, the proportion of students who achieve very low grades on international tests in literacy, mathematics and Science (PISA) are among the lowest in Europe.⁴

Moreover, Clancy's analysis of EUROSTUDENT surveys (2005-11) shows that access rates to higher education for blue-collar (working-class) students is higher in Ireland than in several other European countries, including Germany, France and Austria (Clancy, 2013).

Public investment, throughout the various stages of education, has had enormous dividends for Ireland both socially and economically. The investment returns on higher education in Ireland, for example, are measurable, and considerable in financial terms. In 2010–2011 alone, the gross income of Ireland's public higher educational institutions was €2.6 billion; the colleges generated gross output nationwide of €10.6 billion for this investment (Zhang, Larkin and Lucey, 2015). In

⁴ Within Europe, Estonia had the lowest number of students who only performed at the most basic levels of literacy, mathematics and science at age 15 (11.2%) followed jointly by Denmark and Finland (13.6%), followed by Ireland, at 15%.

http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=sdg_04_40&plugin=1

other words, higher education pays back to the exchequer a considerable proportion of its initial costs by contributing to both the economy *per se*, and indirectly through taxation on graduate-related higher-earning individuals, which, in turn, provides a dividend for social expenditures. Moreover, deepening the quality and diffusion of high quality education has also benefited people individually, in terms of quality of life, which, in turn, enriches Irish society, culturally, socially and politically.

However, as with all aggregated data, the general picture does not tell the complete story. The policies pursued have not always led to the kind of reduction in educational inequalities within Ireland that many believed it could or would, especially in terms of social class terms.

1.2 Understanding the Contradictions of Education and their Relationship to Inequality

Education is a basic human right enshrined in Article 26 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and Article 13 of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR) and Article 42 of the Irish Constitution. As such education is an **Intrinsic Good** for a person irrespective of its relative market value in terms of employment, as it a) enables the person to exercise capabilities, choices and freedoms generally in life, b) is indispensable for realising other rights and c) enables the person to overcome other social disadvantages.

But education is also a **Positional Good** that enables the person to gain social advantages vis-à-vis others, particularly in relation to employment. The more and better educational credentials one has the more likely one is to gain good and profitable employment and to be able to exercise political power and influence⁵.

The issue of inequality in education only arises in relation to the fact that education is **a positional good** that enables one to gain advantages vis-à-vis others. This paper will focus primarily on this issue and the barriers faced by different vulnerable groups in this regard. As inequality is relational, it will also highlight how a barrier for one group generally operates as an advantage for another. And it will highlight the

⁵ Regardless of its value to individuals, intrinsically or positionally, education is also a **Public Good**; it enriches cultural, social, environmental, political and economic life for all of society. The collective value of education is greater than the sum of its personal value to individuals

intersectional (interrelated) character of all barriers to education for vulnerable groups.

1.3 Three stages where inequality and barriers need to be addressed:

Macro, Meso, Micro

As educational opportunities are strongly linked to wider economic, cultural and social policies, inequalities in education for vulnerable groups are produced and reproduced outside the educational system as well as within it. These are the [Macro-level barriers for vulnerable groups](#). They refer to the ways policies in housing, health, transport, childcare, and family welfare, and in employment and taxation, impact on those who are most educationally disadvantaged. They refer to the large scale issues that impact on education and advantage some groups while disadvantaging others.

The second stage or context where barriers arise for vulnerable groups arise within the education system itself; these are the [Meso-level barriers for vulnerable groups](#). They include institutional and organisational barriers that arise within education. They refer to issues such as national policies regarding transfer to different stages of education, the fairness of public examinations and the accommodations and supports available for vulnerable groups.

Meso-level considerations also refer to what happens with schools and colleges in terms of selection at entry, the organisation of learning (streaming, tracking, banding), curricular options (higher, ordinary, foundation, LCA), teacher attitudes, and the ways in which schools and colleges manage diversity and inequalities within the school or college population itself.

The third stage where barriers arise are experienced is at the level of individual families and the individual child. They refer to how the cumulative impact of macro and meso-level barriers bear in on households and ultimately on individual children's learning. These are the [Micro-level barriers for vulnerable groups](#). They refer to the complex ways in which the idiosyncratic characteristics of a given childhood and

family context are cumulatively impacted by outside forces creating barriers for some and significant advantages for others. They also refer to the way family care arrangements can impact on vulnerable groups (such as when children become family carers) or full-time carers, and when people are excluded from education due to the demands of caring.

2. MACRO-LEVEL BARRIERS for VULNERABLE GROUPS

2.1 The Class Ceilingⁱ: Impact of Economic Inequalities

Why Economic Inequality promotes Barriers for Vulnerable groups in Education

A major international study of how economic inequality impacts adversely on the health and well-being of people across much of Europe and the OECD was published in 2009 by two public health specialists, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: why more equal societies almost always do better*. It shows that economic inequality not only impacts adversely on equality of opportunity in education but how it also promotes a climate of fear that promotes distrust, as well as anxiety and fear about the future, including fear among children (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). When there is economic polarization in society, people become fearful, they transfer that fear to their children and put pressure on them to succeed so they will not be among those who 'fail', or become 'losers'. The fear of being consigned to a life of low-paid insecure work drives the intense competition in education, especially in the absence of opportunities for security without education.

Economic inequality drives the wealth-poor middle classes to focus aggressively on education, to maintain or advance their class position (Ball, 2003; Crozier, Reay and James, 2011). It also keeps the poor in their place as the middle and upper class fight to protect their advantages in education by maintaining the educational status quo.

Thus, the relational character of inequality must always be kept in mind, not only are vulnerable groups facing barriers in competing for valued educational credentials, those who are privileged are active simultaneously in maintaining and protecting their own privileges.

While vulnerable groups face several ongoing barriers in relation to benefiting from education, and some of these are highly group specific (such as the barriers for Travellers, deaf children, those who are in State (social) care, or who are in direct provision), all children and adults share one common factor that impacts on their ability to benefit from formal education, namely their access to the economic resources that enable them to compete equally with others. The more resources one has (including money, social networks, emotional supports, cultural capital such as insider knowledge of how the system works, and prior education) the more advantaged one is educationally. This fact applies to all groups, be they children with disabilities, children of lone parents, people from ethnic minority background, mature students or pre-school children, women or men. How these resources are translated into competitive advantage for different groups varies considerably, but the sociological fact remains that any vulnerability is exacerbated by lack of money.

Two major national studies by Annette Lareau (2006) in the US and Richard Layte in the UK (2017) both show how family resources impact on how parents interact with each other and relatedly with their children. Lack of money and resources increases stress in families, which in turn, impacts negatively on children emotionally and even cognitively; this has a downward spiralling impact on their educational performance. Very poor families in particular experience considerable anxiety over lack of resources, which, in turn, lead to personal conflicts; this means that time is invested in managing poverty and its attendant tensions so children's education cannot be prioritised (Layte 2017).

2.2 Intersectional character of Inequality

Even though the Irish state has invested much in making education more egalitarian in terms of standardising and raising the quality of schools and teaching, this work is undermined by what is happening in other fields of fiscal and public policy. Economic inequalities in Ireland are among the highest in the OECD *prior to social transfers* (TASC 2015, 2016a); inequality has remained consistent over time, and was exacerbated during austerity from 2008-2014 especially among the poorest 10% (Lynch, Cantillon and Crean 2017). Such inequalities mean that children from poorer households cannot participate on equal terms with others within education as they do not have equal resources. While ethnic, disability, family and marital status all

have idiosyncratic influences on particular groups that adversely impact on their educational opportunities and attainments, an over-riding common ground factor that exacerbates other vulnerabilities is the relative lack of resources.

Moreover, children in Irish schools are well aware of the economic and social pecking order, and their relative chances of educational success vis-à-vis others in more privileged schools (Smyth 2017). Their aspirations and hopes are adjusted accordingly, as are those of their parents, and their teachers (Byrne and McCoy 2017) with a down-spiralling effect for those who are most disadvantaged.

The lowered expectations, and the tensions and anxieties that impact directly on learning, are also exacerbated by macro-level policies outside of education, such as housing. To take one example, we know from extensive research, in the US in particular, that having socially and racially integrated schooling is important for promoting equality in education for minority and marginalised students (Condrón et al., 2014) (provided they are not segregated within schools into low streams or tracks) (Oakes 1990). Having ‘access to socially privileged’ peers matters and this cannot occur in a segregated schooling system. Yet, in Ireland barriers for immigrants in particular are being generated in segregated housing policies that result in particular schools serving highly selective vulnerable/privileged groups to the exclusion of others.ⁱⁱ

In a technical sense, DEIS schools are also an example of institutionalized social segregation that is closely related to housing segregation, albeit more on the grounds of social class than race (although race and class can and are often closely related). While these schools do great work, those who attend them are, by definition, denied access to peer groups who have educational, cultural and economic capital that the disadvantaged could access if they got to know each other personally.

Recommendation

To promote substantive equality in education, there is a need to seriously reduce the economic inequalities in Ireland on an ongoing basis between the wealthiest and the poorest in particular. That is to say, public policies need to actively promote equality of condition, economically and socially, outside of schools and colleges so that there can be more equality of outcome within schools.

3. MESO-LEVEL BARRIERS for VULNERABLE GROUPS

3.1 Role of Schools

An analysis of social class-related inequalities in education over a twenty six year period, using data from the School Leavers' Survey, involving 55,000+ cases, from 1980-2006 highlight the existence of what is termed **effectively maintained inequality (EMI) in Irish education** (Byrne and McCoy 2017).

The patterns of social-class inequality over the period suggest that differences in a) the way children are tracked (streamed) in schools, b) the levels at which subjects are offered to different groups of students (foundation, ordinary or higher; whether there is a leaving certificate applied in place or not), and c) the level of funding supports available for students attending further and higher education, are significant factors in impacting on levels of inequality for different social classes. Most significantly they found, as have other studies, that students from working class backgrounds are also the most likely to be in lower streams (especially working class boys) and are less likely to take higher level subjects, in particular higher level mathematics. Smyth's (2017) recent analysis of curriculum differentiations (tracking and streaming within schools) by social class confirm that these patterns are persisting. In addition, Byrne and McCoy (2017) observe that students from working class backgrounds are most likely to be taking the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) which does not advantage them educationally relative to others; the LCA is not offered in schools with a large middle class intake.

While schools argue that there are legitimate reasons for stratifying students into different tracks and settings, (including the pressures from parents of the educationally more advanced for streaming as well), the net effect, in educational terms, is that there are large cohorts of students, mainly from lower income working class households, who only take all or most subjects at Ordinary level for the Leaving Certificate; this precludes them from taking most University-level courses as they simply cannot get the points required on Ordinary level papers.

It is not surprising therefore that entry to higher education is highly class-stratified, and while the proportion of students attending higher education has increased for all classes since free education was introduced, those from working class and lower income backgrounds are significantly over-represented in lower points courses in the

Institutes of Technology in particular where they have fewer career options: at the other extreme, 50 per cent of students from Ireland's most affluent areas study at one of the three most elite universities in Ireland (UCD, TCD or UCC), four times the rate of those from disadvantaged areas (TASC, 2016b).

Recommendation

Given extensive Irish and international research evidence regarding the adverse impact of streaming, setting and tracking/banding on vulnerable children, it is vital that neither streaming or setting occurs in any form in primary school (for example by grouping children within class by tables into the top, middle bottom groups) or in the early stages (Years 1-3) in second-level schools. For this to happen, there needs to be an end to Foundation Level Irish, English and Mathematics at Junior Certificate level. In senior cycle, the Leaving Certificate Applied needs to be reviewed and overhauled as it is currently highly social class-biased in its uptake and its long-term value for students educationally is unclear. Grants for further and higher education for vulnerable groups need to be significantly increased as they are completely out of line with the cost of living. (see my paper submitted to this Committee already, and enclosed as an appendix here, on the dangers of loans for those who are poorest)

3.2 Voluntary Contributions and Direct Expenditure as Barriers

'Free education' is not free at either primary or secondary levels. Ongoing educational costs including school books, extracurricular activities and school materials are paid for by most parents in Ireland unlike other EU countries.

State subvention does not meet the full cost of compulsory education for those who need it. The back-to-school allowance for low-income families was €125 for a child up to the age of eleven, and €250 per child after that age in 2017. This allowance does not meet even half the costs involved, as the average cost of returning to school varied from €340 (primary) to €775 (second level) for a given child in 2017. The net effect of this is that it forces poorer parents into debt (Barnardos, 2017). Although most second-level schools expect students to have a laptop or tablet, the cost of these is not covered and is circa €500.

As schools in Ireland are not fully fundedⁱⁱⁱ the majority are required to supplement their income by requesting 'voluntary contributions' from parents, a policy that is

deeply inequitable given parental differences in ability to pay: schools with the poorest parents have the lowest voluntary contributions even though they are the ones that need it most.

Moreover participation in extracurricular activities (such as swimming lessons which many would regard as a basic life skill) are often only available to those who can pay (Barnardos, 2017). There are also several hidden costs in schools such as the cost of taking public examinations; it costs €116 to do the Leaving Certificate in 2018 although those with a medical card are exempt. To appeal a grade in a Leaving Certificate subject costs €40 per subject. For anyone wanting to do medicine they must take the HPAT at a cost of €130 and a course to prepare one costs a minimum of €250.

Recommendation

There is an urgent need to assess the full economic cost of ‘free education’ for parents for children up to age 16 (including the costs of extracurricular activities, books, school trips, examinations), and to reassess the financial supports necessary for vulnerable children so that they can participate fully in education. From the evidence available, it is clear that there is a need to introduce a revised system of financial, welfare and/or tax-related compensation for low-income families, including family and community supports at local level. Compensation and supports needs to be delivered in ways that are accessible and private so that they do not demean those who receive them.

3.3 How School Choice Promotes Barriers for Vulnerable Groups

School choice is legally protected in Ireland in a way that is not allowed in many other European countries. While there are historical reasons for this, it has unintended consequences in creating an educational market between schools (Tormey 2007). This market works to the advantage of those who have most privileged. It is those with most resources, namely middle and upper class families who can and do exercise their school choices most often (Cahill and Hall 2014; Hannan et al., 1996). They can and do move to schools that are more educationally advantageous to their own children, an option that is not available to poorer parents.

The State aid that is given to elite fee-paying schools is an indirect barrier to the vulnerable as it keeps those who are less privileged outside valuable social networks not just in school (Courtois 2018) but through college into future occupational life (Franzini and Raitano 2013).

Recommendation

School choice is a constitutional right but it is one that can and should be exercised through tighter regulation in ways that do not privilege the already advantaged. In alignment with the existing per capita funding arrangements, an **Equality and Social Inclusion Index** for schools should be developed that rewards schools for including the most socially excluded groups be these the children of low-income families, children with intellectual disabilities, Traveller children or the children of low-income immigrant communities. A threshold would have to be set so schools were eligible for this funding, and those schools that do not include vulnerable minorities could lose funding on a pro rata basis.

State aid to fee-paying schools is not equitable financially, and it creates an elite mentality that is socially divisive (Courtois 2018). Those who wish to have socially exclusive schooling for their children should pay the entire cost themselves.

4. MICRO and MACRO interacting to Create Privilege

4.1 Private Investment of Parents: a Major Barrier to Equality for Vulnerable Groups

One of the most significant findings from the ongoing *Growing up in Ireland* survey is that social class inequality in educational attainment literally increases with age (TASC, 2016b). At the baby stages, namely nine months old, the level of household income a child is born into has no correlation with their inherent cognitive potential (educational ability) at that time. By the age of nine years, the incidence of speech and language difficulties amongst children in the bottom three deciles (bottom 30% in income terms) are double the incidence for children in the top 30% in income terms.

The link between economic and educational inequality is reflected in the fact that at the age of thirteen, a 1 per cent increase in household income predicts a 6.5 per cent increase in verbal scores, a 5.2 per cent increase in numerical scores and a 5.8 per cent increase in the total Drumcondra Test scores (TASC 2016b).

The fact that poorer children's academic performance relative to their more privileged peers increases with age is indicative of the fact that while schools can address some of the advantages that come from home, they clearly cannot address all of them. There is growing international evidence that out-of-school investment by privileged parents is a significant factor in perpetuating inequalities within education.

Why this is happening is related to the structure of the economy. Most households in Ireland own no productive wealth⁶, consequently parents rely on education to secure the future of their children. Over the past 50 years education has become the primary route to economic security and a major determinant of class positioning. While those with most resources cannot 'buy' superior educational credentials directly, they can protect their likelihood of acquiring these through investment in private (socially exclusive) schooling and tuition (Smyth, 2009).

The Private Educational Market and its impact

Ireland has a vibrant private 'educational market': as with other public services, those with sufficient resources are free to avail of these private services; they supplement public schooling with private investment. While fee-paying schools are one example of this, the use of private tuition (grinds) is an equally significant phenomenon. It is 'common sense' among those who are educational 'insiders' (Lyons, Lynch, Close, Sheerin and Boland, 2003, pp. 329-56) to get private tuition for their children prior to the Leaving Certificate in particular (Lynch and O'Riordan, 1998). And grinds are only one of the panoply of market services available for those who can pay for them. Summer camps, language travel and educationally relevant extracurricular activities are widely available for those who can pay.

The data from the *Growing Up in Ireland* study shows that most structured, out-of-school cultural activities are only fully accessible on a paid basis. The net effect is

⁶ The think tank Publicpolicy.ie reported that approximately 66% of the wealth of Irish households is in housing, John Fitzgerald *Irish Times*, Business, March 23rd 2018. As this is mostly home ownership it is not a realizable asset for most people

that ‘those in the higher income families are much more likely to attend’ (Smyth, 2016, p. 96).

The market for out-of-school tuition in Irish and music reflects the longevity (and widespread acceptance) of privately funded education. Private tuition in Irish and music is so well established that it is rarely if ever framed as a grind. Given that 40 per cent of the overall grade for Leaving Certificate Irish is now given for oral Irish, parents who can afford to send children to the Gaeltacht are at a distinct advantage in the Leaving Certificate Examination. Almost 50 per cent of the overall grade in Leaving Certificate music can be given for performance; yet, it is extremely difficult to excel in performance in the Leaving Certificate without undertaking private tuition over an extended period of time and the costs are very high: in 2017, standard one-to-one instrumental music classes were advertised on the internet at €25 for half an hour. The costs are prohibitive for low-income families (Conaghan, 2015). The introduction of the Higher Professional Aptitude Test (HPAT) assessment for medicine is a more recent example of a class-biased selection criterion; both preparation for the test and taking it has to be privately funded.

The proposal to increase the level of continuous assessment in public examinations, including the Leaving Certificate, needs to be closely monitored and regulated. There is ample evidence from other countries that any assessment that is undertaken outside of school hours is inevitably going to advantage the already advantaged. Even though they do not engage in anything that is illegal, students from more privileged families are inevitably in a position to have and use resources that will advantage them in preparing their project, out of school essay, art work etc. There is the added problem of monitoring the use of commercially-available online project materials, answers to problem questions, essays etc. that are widely available on the internet.

The relationship between private family investments in children’s education, especially out-of-school investment, in perpetuating inequalities in education is increasingly the focus of research attention internationally. A major study in the US (involving a meta-analysis of nineteen national studies over a fifty-year period) has found that social-class-based inequalities in educational attainment have risen in the US since the 1970s and these inequalities are directly related to rising income inequalities (Reardon (2011)). Those with private wealth are increasingly using this to

advantage their own children, especially by buying extra educational resources outside the formal educational system that increases their children's educational attainment (Duncan and Murnane, 2011).

Kaushal, Magnusson and Waldfogel's (2011) findings demonstrate the scale of this development. Families in the top income quintile (richest 20 per cent) are spending almost seven times as much per child each year privately on their children compared with the poorest 20 per cent: they paid \$9,000 per child for 'enrichment' activities such as out-of-school tutoring, athletic activities, test preparation, summer camps, second-language learning and cultural activities, compared with the \$1,300 per child that families in the bottom quintile (20 per cent) spent.

Recommendation

The scope and scale of private family investment in children's education in Ireland needs to be examined in detail in a national study as there is no substantive analysis of this to date. If, as is true increasingly in the US, parents are spending multiples *per capita* privately of what the State can invest in given child, this creates enormous barriers for vulnerable groups that cannot be resolved in education alone. Reducing inequalities between households in terms of income and wealth is especially important in addressing this private-investment related inequality.

4.2 Intersecting Inequalities and Barriers for Specific Vulnerable Groups

One of the principal observations made in this submission is that the barriers that vulnerable groups face in education can be divided along macro (large scale, State-level), meso (medium scale, institutional and organisational) and micro (local, household or individual-level) grounds. These stages are all closely inter-related and any one of them can impact adversely on the other.

The second major observation is about the impact of unequal economic conditions especially, but also unequal political, social and cultural conditions at all stages. The vulnerability of any given group is exacerbated by lack of economic resources in particular as advancing successfully within education is heavily resource dependent. The reasons particular groups do not perform well in education relative to others is not a random outcome of personal choices, it is heavily structured and dependent on

the macro, meso and micro-level barriers operating across the educational system for different social groups.

Another important observation is that while there are barriers that are discrete for specific social groups these intersect with social class (income-related) inequities to compound inequalities in education. For example, social class impacts adversely with ethnicity and race in limiting educational opportunities for Traveller and immigrant children (Devine, 2011; Darmody, Byrne and McGinnity, 2014). This is not to deny the fact that Travellers and immigrant children also face unique barriers relating especially to lack of respect for their culture and way of life, their language, their religious beliefs and/or even their mode of dress.

Children with disabilities are currently more likely to come from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds compared to the rest of the population (Banks et al., 2015). This creates a double disadvantage for those children as both their disability and their lower socio-economic backgrounds makes it more likely they will be placed in special school settings, or in very low streams which is educationally disadvantageous.

There are many children and adults with disabilities who are not from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds and these students experience unique barriers that are entirely due to their disability. A prime example would be the lack of knowledge among teachers and educators of Irish Sign Language which means that Deaf students cannot relate to their teachers or peers except through an interpreter, few of whom are available in mainstream schools or colleges.

I will make some brief observations here on two groups that experience intense and unique barriers, namely Travellers and immigrants, especially non-EU immigrants.

Travellers

Although a relatively small group in Ireland, accounting for less than 1 per cent of the population, research by the ESRI shows that Travellers stand out as a group that experience extreme disadvantage in education (Watson et al., 2017). Travellers are much less likely to have completed education to Leaving Certificate level: only 8 per cent have done so, compared to 73 per cent of non-Travellers; only 1 per cent of Travellers aged 25 –64 years have a college degree compared with 30 per cent of

non-Travellers. Travellers are more likely to have left school at an early age, with 28 per cent of Travellers over 25 years having left before the age of 13, compared to only 1 per cent of non-Travellers. When findings are adjusted for the fact that Travellers tend to be younger than non-Travellers (and younger adults generally tend to have higher levels of education in Ireland), the 'education gap' becomes even larger (Watson et al., 2017). Overall, the ESRI research shows that Travellers have not benefitted as much as non-Travellers from the general improvement in levels of education since the 1960s.

Recommendation

The need for an Integrated National Plan for Traveller Educational Advancement is urgent and self-evident. But for this to work, it must be a collaborative plan with Travellers and one that is linked into their plans for Traveller Accommodation, Entrepreneurship, Cultural Development, Health Care etc.

Immigrants

We also know from research that there are specific barriers for immigrants and other ethnic minorities in Ireland. Of particular concern, is the finding from the annual school census for 2013-14 that four out of five children from immigrant backgrounds were concentrated in 23 per cent of the State's primary schools. While children of immigrant background now comprise approximately 12% of the primary school population, and 10% of the secondary school population, greater clustering of immigrants is evident in secondary schools in urban centres and in schools more generally in disadvantaged areas (Devine, 2013).

What this shows is that there is a high level of ethnic segregation in schools and, relatedly in housing which must be urgently addressed. If this pattern persists into a second or third generation (as it has in other European countries) this has serious implications for prolonging the barriers immigrants experience in advancing in education and society. The introduction of an Equality and Social Inclusion Index for Schools and Colleges, with rewards and sanctions if necessary, could help address this problem but it can also only be addressed, if housing, employment, transport and other changes are also introduced to preclude ghettoization.

4.3 Mapping the Intersectionality of Inequality and Barriers in Education

Table 1 maps out visually how inequalities and barriers can be understood for different groups in Ireland. Table 1 is informed by empirical research undertaken on education (Lynch, 1989, 1999; Lynch and Lodge, 2002; Lyons et al., 2003) and work on egalitarian theory and practice (Baker, Lynch et al., 2009).

Table 1: Dimensions of inequality and generative sites of inequality for social groups

		<i>Dimensions of In/equality</i>		
	Re/distribution (Resources)	Respect/ Recognition (identities/difference)	Representation (parity in power and participation)	Relational Justice Affective equality = equality in the doing and receiving of Love, Care and Solidarity
Generative site of in/equality: social systems				
Economic System	XX Social Class (working class, poor)	x	x	X
Political System	x	x	XX Children, people with intellectual disabilities	X
Cultural System	x	XX LGBT /Deaf (Sign users)/ Ethnic minorities	x	X
Affective System	x	x	x	XX children experiencing love and care deprivations; women, carers,

This matrix is adapted from *Equality: From Theory to Action* (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon and Walsh, 2009)

What Table 1 shows is that, while the generative site of injustice (or the site where the major barrier arises in the first instance for particular groups) varies for different groups, all groups are affected by all types of barriers to a greater or lesser degree.

The Table matrix includes **four key dimensions** to be considered when discussing barriers to equality in education; inequalities in resources, inequalities in respect and recognition, inequalities in power and representation and inequalities in love, care

and solidarity. These dimensions are listed on the **horizontal bar** of the matrix. On the **vertical side of the matrix** four **major generative sites of inequality** are outlined, namely those that arise in the economic, cultural, political and affective (care) social systems.

The matrix provides a framework that allows the four dimensions of inequality to be considered in tandem with the generative sites of inequality across social systems. It shows how a social system may be specifically generative of inequality for a specific social group (marked by two XXs) but also how the other social systems also intersect with that generative system to reproduce inequalities, marked by one X.

It also shows how social groups experience inequality across all four equality dimensions regardless of the generative site and core dimension of inequality they experienced in the first instance.

One example

Social class inequalities are generated by the economic system on the left hand column in Table 1 yet people from lower socio-economic classes experience inequalities in respect and recognition generated by the cultural system as well. In educational terms, resource inequalities among working class pupils compared with middle class peers, contributes to their lower attainment (Layte, 2017); but being working class also leads to misrecognition of one's capabilities and lower expectations among teachers (Smyth, 2017) which compounds the impact of lack of resources. This shows how resource inequalities lead to respect inequalities.

We also know that schools as organisations are dominated by those from relatively advantaged social class backgrounds (Gillbride, 2013) and that those who dominate parents' councils, for example, tend to be from the middle classes (Lodge et al., 2004). This shows how representation (power) inequalities interface with class or economic inequalities. Finally, we know that poverty undermines love and care in households leading to stress that adversely affects children's learning (Layte 2017). Research from O'Brien (2008) and Feeley (2014) also show how affective practices (love and care) matter for good education. Feeley's (2014) study in particular shows how those who have lacked love and care in schools, and well as in State care, had seriously limited educational outcomes. All of this clearly illustrates the intersection of economic and affective inequalities for generating inequalities in education.

Recent developments in education that focus on the outcomes of schooling in terms of grades and league tables rather than on the development of the whole person, and the process of learning itself, marginalize interest in care in schools and colleges (Lynch 2010). This has negative implications for those who are most vulnerable as they become defined as being of 'poor market value' implicitly if not explicitly.

5. Conclusion: Why Equality of Condition Matters and Why Equality of Opportunity alone will not suffice

While international evidence confirms that the relatively privileged have maintained their social class advantages within and without education for many decades (Blossfeld and Shavit, 1993; Marsh, 2011; Reardon, 2011), this is not to suggest that the quality of education in schools is inconsequential in challenging inequality. Irish research shows that the quality of teaching, the inclusiveness of the curriculum and assessment procedures, and school organizational arrangements are important for mitigating the impact of social-class, ethnic, racial and gendered injustices in society (Banks, 2014; Devine, Kenny and McNeela, 2008; Darmody and McCoy, 2011).

Weir et al., (2017) provide a literature review of international and comparable Irish strategies to address educational disadvantage. The evidence reviewed included a review of strategies to address class size, preschool education, teacher professional development and teacher expectations, parental involvement and the DEIS programme. Whilst highlighting some of the positive outcomes of various initiatives and the effectiveness of DEIS in particular, the review indicates the persistence of educational inequality in the face of a wide array of strategies and resources targeted at disadvantage. This paper highlights the intersecting structural and institutional (macro and meso) reasons why such disadvantages persist.

This affirms the fact that while education can significantly enhance a given *individual's* capabilities and life chances, it cannot overcome structural (group-based) injustices arising from economic inequalities as the generative site of those injustices is not located within the education system in the first instance (Lynch and O'Neill, 1994; Lynch and Lodge, 2002; Lynch and Baker, 2005; Marsh, 2011).

It would be very difficult for educational (and economic) inequality to be sustained over time in democratic societies unless it was deemed morally justifiable. The moral justification for unequal outcomes in education is provided through widespread allegiance to a liberal code of equality of opportunity (EO).^{iv} There is a belief that the EO principle is an acceptable guide to policy in the distribution of social goods: it is encoded in EU treaties, and advanced within member states by a variety of legally binding directives. Its legal status adds to its legitimacy as a mechanism for distributing social goods, including education.

In educational terms, equalizing opportunity is about promoting fairness in the competition for advantage. It implies that there will be winners and losers, people who do well and people who do badly. An 'opportunity' in this context is the right to compete, not the right to choose among alternatives of equal value. So two people, or two different groups, can have formal equal opportunities even if one of them has no real prospect of achieving anything of value. For example, a society that allows only 20 per cent of the population to attend third-level education could, in this liberal sense, give everyone an equal opportunity to do so, even though in a stronger sense it would clearly be denying the opportunity for third-level education to 80 per cent of the population. Under an equal-opportunities framework, the purpose of having a principle of equality in public policymaking is to provide a fair basis for managing these inequalities, by strengthening the minimum to which everyone is entitled and by using equality of opportunity to regulate the competition for advantage.

The problem with the concept of equality of opportunity is that it pre-supposes the persistence of structural inequalities; it assumes that there will always be major inequalities between people in their status, resources, relationships and power. There is an assumption that a mixed economy of capitalism and voluntary effort, a developed system of social welfare, a meritocratic educational system, and a specialized and hierarchical division of labour define the institutional framework within which any progress towards equality can be made. The task for egalitarians is to make adjustments to these structures rather than to alter them in fundamental ways.

In contrast to liberal equality of opportunists, **promoters of equality of condition claim that inequality is rooted in changing and changeable social structures**

and institutions that promote inequality although it accepts that such structural and institutional changes are complex and take time. Equality of condition refers to the belief that people, individually and collectively, should be as equal as possible in relation to the central conditions of their lives, particularly in terms of their material conditions and the exercise of power. It is not about trying to make inequalities fairer, nor is it about giving people a more equal opportunity to become unequal; it is about ensuring that all of humanity have roughly equal prospects for a good and decent life. In education, it is not about just giving groups of people a formal right to education which in reality is unrealizable given pre-existing structural inequalities (e.g. due to lack of transport, money, books, or other cultural resources). Equality of condition recognizes the categorical and highly institutionalized character of social inequality that Tilly (1998) has identified. Because deep inequalities between peoples are encoded in laws and public policies in the form of property rights, relational and communication rights, and cultural and participatory rights and practices, equality of condition is focused on achieving changes in the organization of institutions, be these economic, political, cultural or affective.

Equality of condition also means paying more attention to how people are related, how the wealth of some is at the cost of the poverty of others, and how unequal power relations interface with inequalities of wealth, status, and other resources. In contrast to the tendency of liberal egalitarians to hold individuals responsible for their successes and failures in education, equality of condition emphasizes the influence of social class, race, disability, care responsibilities, sexuality, gender, regional location, and other factors affecting people's choices and actions.

Ireland's Educational System is not purely Meritocratic: addressing the issues

The equality principle governing Irish public policy, and particularly educational policy, is that of equality of opportunity which is theoretically based on merit. Those who adhere to the meritocratic position claim that those who work hard and are academically capable will do well in school regardless of their social background. The evidence does not support this claim: major social and economic inequalities inevitably undermine all but the thinnest forms of equality of opportunity in education

because privileged parents will always find ways of advantaging their children in an economically unequal society. The inability of formal education to overcome social-class and related resource-based inequalities is a reflection of the general inability of liberal equal-opportunities policies to deliver social justice in an economically unjust society.

This presents a major dilemma for educators; even when schools do their best to overcome the many social class (and increasingly ethnic/racial/disability-related) disadvantages that students experience within schools and colleges, they cannot eliminate the competitive advantage of the most advantaged in any substantive manner given the impact of out-of-school resources. Yes, there are individual exceptions, but the exceptions are deceptive and dangerous when taken as examples (role models) of what is possible for the majority; they prolong the meritocratic myth that hard work and academic ability are all that is required to succeed relative to others. What works for a few individuals from disadvantaged groups does not work for the majority within that group.

We need to have a significantly more equal distribution of wealth and income to have substantive equality of opportunity in education. And, because all forms of inequality are intersectionally related, we need to address inequalities and barriers at macro, meso and micro levels simultaneously.

And for this to happen, fiscal, health, housing, transport, welfare, employment, childcare and educational policies need to be aligned with each other and framed in an egalitarian way. This means dealing with pre-distributional and post-distributional injustices in the taxation, welfare and other social systems, and addressing power, respect, and care-related inequalities experienced by different groups at the same time.

Finally, given the relational nature of all forms of inequality in education, and in particular how the competition for advantage in an unequal society drives educational practice, it is important to remember that the vulnerability of some is exacerbated by the perpetuation of the privilege of others.

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ⁱ This term was coined by my UCD colleague Luciana Lolic.

ⁱⁱ The fact that the majority of children in a number of primary schools in Dublin 15 are primarily from ethnic minority backgrounds, is neither desirable educationally nor socially but this is not the outcome of educational policies alone, it is directly related to housing policy.

ⁱⁱⁱ Most Irish schools are private rather than public institutions in legal terms

^{iv} Equality of opportunity is a liberal concept. Liberal egalitarians typically define equality in terms of individuals rather than groups; while they vary between conservative liberal and left-leaning liberals, they all subscribe to the view that equality of opportunity means that people should in some sense have an equal chance to compete for social advantages. As they assume that inequality is endemic to society, equality of opportunity is about equalizing the distribution of educational (and life) chances within an unequal society. For a discussion on the difference between liberal ideas of equality and equality of condition, see Chapter 2 of *Equality: From Theory to Action* (Baker, Lynch *et al.*, 2004).