

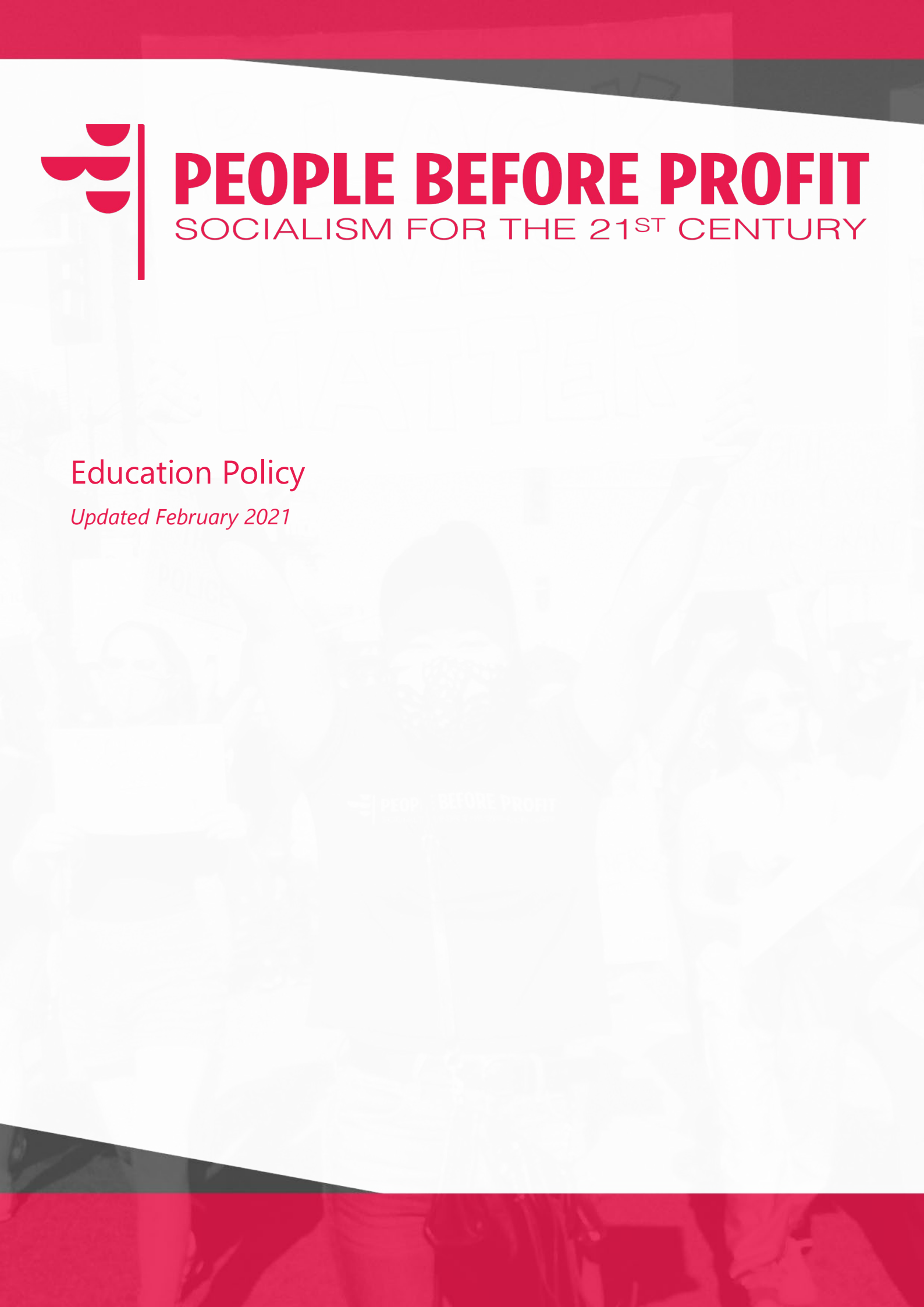


PEOPLE BEFORE PROFIT

SOCIALISM FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Education Policy

Updated February 2021



Summary

- **Education should be funded and managed exclusively by the State rather than handed over to various patron bodies.**
- **Develop a National Childcare Service to offer educational supports as early as possible.**
- **Bring class sizes down to a ratio of 18:1.**
- **Abolish all requirements for compulsory religious instruction.**
- **Capital Investment at primary and post-primary level to ensure science labs, computer labs and well-furnished classrooms with Wi-Fi access and iPads/tablets.**
- **All schools to be provided with fast, free and filtered broadband so that it can become an integral part of classroom learning.**
- **School transport, uniforms, meals, educational materials and play and PE facilities provided free in all schools.**
- **Small schools to be protected and supported in line with the wishes of local communities and parents, particularly in rural areas.**
- **Employ lab assistants to cater for Science and ICT classes**
- **Restore supports for vulnerable pupils and all those with special educational needs**
- **Autism proof all schools to give every pupil the chance to develop.**
- **Additional resources for disadvantaged and traveller students, including smaller classes and one-to-one tuition as necessary.**
- **Emphasize critical thinking and lifelong learning not rote learning for competitive exams.**
- **Introduce modules on philosophy, political economy, arts and media studies in second level to promote creativity and civic awareness.**
- **Reverse the increase in formal working hours imposed on teachers and SNAs through the imposition of "Croke Park hours".**
- **Support teachers in their fight to end pay inequality.**
- **Abolish university 'registration' fees; extend and improve maintenance and back-to-education grants.**
- **Subsidise accommodation for students who have to travel to go to university.**
- **Redirect money from giving R&D tax credits corporations to the university sector in order to do blue sky research.**

Introduction

Education is essential for a well-balanced and meaningful life. Access to education gives people confidence and practical skills as well as an ability to think critically about the world around them. These are some of the reasons that education is a fundamental human right.

It should be provided free of charge to all citizens at all levels: pre-school, primary, postprimary, third level, and adult education.

Putting this principle into practice has major implications for the way in which education is organised in Ireland. Historically, education has largely been left to voluntary organisations such as the Catholic Church, which continues to own and run 90 per cent of primary schools.

More recently, NGOs such as Educate Together and other charities have established themselves as patron bodies and are seeking to expand their networks of schools at both primary and post-primary level. Education should be funded and managed exclusively by the State rather than handed over to various patron bodies.

People Before Profit advocates the public ownership of all primary, secondary and third-level educational institutions in the State.

Education should be about helping each individual to develop their full potential. An educated society is not just more productive – it is also more harmonious and critically aware.

There are many positive points about Irish education. There is a high level of participation in third level institutions and proficiency in reading is quite high.

However, there are also significant weaknesses. There are far lower numbers of adults who return to some form of education after their formal schooling ends. Rote learning and preparation for exams dominates rather than a focus on critical thinking.

More investment in schools and the hiring of more teachers is required if we are to meet our growing needs. Enrolment in primary education is set to be highest in 2018 and there will be a peak in secondary education in 2025

Pre-school Education

- **Public childcare system initially at an affordable cost and, eventually, for free.** Lifelong learning should be offered to children as early as possible. To make this a reality People Before Profit would move towards a *National Childcare Service based on the Swedish model*. In place of the current subvention to privately owned crèches, we would transition to a publicly owned and funded childcare system. The current private system should be integrated into this new structure with parents paying a contribution fee of 3% of their income capped at €120/month for high-income earners.
- **Childcare workers should be guaranteed decent wages** and full access to training and re-training. The average wage of a childcare assistant is less than €11 an hour. This is despite that fact that these employees have spent years in professional training. Low wages contributes to low morale and has a detrimental effect on education.
- **Introduce 12 months paid parental leave, to be divided between the parents at their own discretion - paid in full by the employer.** Women are entitled to 26 weeks' maternity leave together with 16 weeks' additional unpaid maternity leave. There is only two weeks paternity leave. Private employers are not obliged to make up the difference between what the state pays out in social insurance and a workers normal wage. People Before Profit wants longer parental leave to allow families to establish the routines that become essential later in life.

Primary Education

Ireland does not have a publicly owned primary school system. Instead 95% of primary schools are owned and managed by the Catholic Church – and funded mainly from the public purse. One result is an excessive amount of time spent on religious instruction, particularly in Second Class, which coincides with Holy Communion.

Primary schools are also under-funded. Classrooms are not equipped to modern standards and most schools do not have science laboratories. There is a greater diversity in second level education, but there is still a high

degree of church control and significant underfunding.

People Before Profit Would:

- **End Church Control** – Take schools into public ownership and put them under local democratic control. Remove Section 37.1 of the Employment Equality Act which allows discrimination against employees in religious-run workplaces. Remove Rule 68 of Rules for National Schools which requires that a religious spirit must inform and vivify the whole work of the primary school.
- **Abolish all requirements for compulsory religious instruction** – allow religious groups (and non-religious groups) access to school facilities after school hours.
- **Protect Small Schools.** Small schools to be protected and supported in line with the wishes of local communities and parents, particularly in rural areas
- **Establish a maximum class size.** Our goal is a maximum number of students in any class, anywhere in the country, of 18.
- **Modern Resources.** Spacious, fully-equipped schools with multiple science labs, computer labs and classrooms with Wi-Fi access and iPads/tablets. Teaching and learning should never have to take place in dilapidated buildings or prefabs.
- **Reduce the core cost.** School transport, uniforms, meals, educational materials (including books) and play and PE facilities provided free in all schools.
- **Employ more Support Staff.** Irish schools badly need lab assistants to cater for Science and ICT classes. There should also be more guidance counselling.
- **Support vulnerable and disadvantaged children.** Full support for vulnerable pupils and all those with special educational needs; autism proof all secondary schools to give every pupil the chance to develop. The number of teachers and Special Needs Assistants (SNA) should match the needs of the school, based on a maximum class size of 18 students and on each individual student's need for an SNA. Expansion of the 'Breaking the Cycle' Scheme, piloted in the 1990s, to all DEIS Schools.
- **Free school meals** The WHO Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative (COSI) this year, revealed 1 in 5 Irish children are obese or overweight. This figure rises to 1 in 3 children aged 9-13 in primary schools recognised as disadvantaged.: People Before Profit supports the introduction of free school meals. This should include breakfast programmes, and hot meals for children in Primary and Secondary school. These meals should be provided in all publicly funded schools, not just those designated as disadvantaged, although tailored supports for schools in areas of concentrated deprivation should also be provided. The provision of nutritious school meals should be complemented with practical and age-appropriate education to teach children how to grow, prepare and cook healthy meals.
- **Move Away from Rote Learning.** Provide resources to move away from an overemphasis on final exams in favour of course work and critical engagement.
- **Library Grants.** Annual ring-fenced library grant to all schools.

Post-Primary Education

Many of the measures outlined above are applicable in the post-primary setting too. In addition, we would

- Substantially increase in the number of teachers employed in accordance with maximum class sizes and growth in pupil numbers due to demographic factors
- Ban commercial promotions and advertising, sales pitches, voucher schemes and branded lesson materials
- Ensure that SNAs have access to redeployment panels that operate on a similar basis to those of primary teachers.
- Introduce modules on philosophy, political economy and media studies to promote political engagement
- Provide a wider range of subjects and allow students greater choice

Higher Education

There is a massive corporatisation of the third level sector. This has resulted in corporate management methods and academics have seen authority ceded to external

'stakeholders', i.e. multinational corporations. The structure and content of degrees is changing from broader general academic studies to modular programmes which deliver specific skill learning and outcomes, devised to enhance 'human capital' for employers.

People Before Profit believes in a more critical university and information technology system with collaboration between students, lectures and other members of the staff. We would give employees more autonomy and reduce the bureaucratisation of the university system.

Beyond this access is the key issue. People Before profit believes that university education should be free and that nobody should be put off going to college for lack of money. We will therefore

- **Abolish all fees.** Currently, the 'registration fee' has been steadily increased so that, in reality, it has become a new fee.
- **Restore proper maintenance grants.** To guarantee access to students from low income backgrounds we would restore proper maintenance grants.
- **Extend the back to education scheme.** We need more investment in third level education to allow people to retrain.
- **Improve accommodation.** Subsidise accommodation for students who have to travel to go to university.
- **Create new staff structures.** Increase the role of lecturing and no lecturing staff in managing the university. One year sabbatical scheme to be made available to teachers to engage in upskilling/professional development/education
- **Create new student structures.** Increase the role of students in managing the university.
- **Reduce corporate influence on research.** Redirect money from giving R&D tax credits corporations to the university sector in order to do blue sky research.

- **Give employment right to tutors and demonstrators.** PhD's do not have contracts of employment, certainty of hours or pay, or the ability to pay into a pension scheme. Stipend value varies depending on discipline, but the maximum of €18,000 in the South, assuming a 40 hour work week. People Before Profit supports the campaign for PhD Workers Rights, and that gives our solidarity to those fight casualisation in the third level sector.

Educators

Education is one of the most important roles in any society. To make sure people want to go into the profession People Before Profit would reverse the cuts to education imposed by successive governments.

We would also end the scandal of pay inequity and make teachers more responsible for curriculum development and school management. Beyond this we would

- Reverse the increase in formal working hours imposed on teachers and SNAs through the imposition of "Croke Park hours".
- Support teachers in their fight to end pay apartheid.
- Fully funded professional development for teachers to meet the challenge of curricular changes and developments in the use of ICT
- Restore the compulsory retirement age to 65 and reinstate early retirement schemes.

BLAGG MOVES MATTER

