

Report of the Taskforce on Equality, Inclusion and Diversity

A Taskforce to promote equality, inclusion and diversity was set up as a result of a motion that was passed at Congress 2022. The motion, as seen below, explicitly called for the setting up of a taskforce to promote equality, inclusion and diversity in the classroom as outlined in the priorities listed.

Congress:

- a. notes the publication in 2021 of the ETUCE Action Plan on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion which highlights the following priorities:
 1. celebrating diversity among children, students, teachers, academics, school leaders and other education personnel;
 2. teaching for democratic citizenship and the transmission of fundamental values through education;
 3. inclusion of migrants and refugees in the education system;
 4. inclusion of ethnic minorities and indigenous people in the education system;
 5. ensuring gender equality in education, the teaching profession and society as a whole;
 6. achieving equality for LGBTI students and education personnel with the view to Creating safe, secure and inclusive learning and working environments for all;
 7. inclusion of students and education personnel with disabilities and special needs in the education system;
- b. calls on the CEC to ensure that these priorities are reflected in their negotiations and representations to the Department of Education, the NCCA, the NCSE, the Teaching Council and other bodies; and
- c. further calls on the INTO to set up a task force to actively promote and support inclusivity in Irish classrooms as a priority and to report back to members by Congress 2023.

Composition of the Group:

The above resolution was assigned by the CEC to Standing Committee I. It was decided that the most efficient and effective way of progressing the resolution was to form a taskforce with a representative from each of the National Committees along with Officials from Head Office. The Taskforce was chaired by Carmel Browne (CEC) with the INTO President, John Driscoll, also in attendance at a number of meetings. The other taskforce members were Gerard Murray (PDC), Margaret Murphy (EQC), Alice O' Donnell (EDC), Aoife Mullen (Acting Equality Officer), Maeve Mc Cafferty (Equality Officer), Sheila Murphy (INTO, AGS-Acting), Claire Garvey (Official) and Eithne Lannon (Intern).

Meetings:

The taskforce met on four occasions both in-person and virtually. These meetings were held on October 4th, November 7th, November 24th and December 5th 2022. It was proposed to have one further meeting in early January, at time of writing, to review the work of the taskforce. The agenda for each meeting was based on decisions made at previous meetings and further works that needed to be carried out between meetings as directed by the Taskforce. Meetings were chaired by Carmel Browne (CEC) and all individuals in attendance were given a full and open hearing. All ideas and suggestions were given proper discussion and consideration. Furthermore, all discussions were managed with sensitivity and respect. The taskforce decided to focus its work on two key areas which were:

- I. An audit of INTO work to date in equality, inclusion and diversity;
- II. An identification of further priority areas in equality, inclusion and diversity.

Area one: An audit of INTO work to date in equality, inclusion and diversity:

At its inaugural meeting on October 4th, the taskforce collated a list of all of the agencies which INTO engages with on equality, inclusion and diversity matters, including:

- Aontas
- Barnardos
- BelongTo
- Children’s Rights Alliance
- European Trade Union Committee for Education
- ICTU Disability Committee
- ICTU Women’s council
- INTO LGBT+ Teachers’ Group
- Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission
- Irish Network Against Racism
- Migrant Teacher Project
- National Council for Special Education
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
- National Disability Authority
- National Parents Council
- National Women’s Council
- St Vincent de Paul
- Tobar, Marino Institute of Education
- Turn To Teaching, Maynooth University
- Inclusion Ireland

*****A full account of INTO’s work in the broad area of equality, inclusion and diversity can be accessed in the equality section of the Congress Report and in the equality section of the INTO website.***

Area Two: Identification of further priority areas in equality, inclusion and diversity

The Taskforce acknowledged the significant good practice and wide range of agencies and organisations which INTO already engage with. The taskforce felt that a key role for the members of the taskforce was to ensure this good work was highlighted, and that INTO members had access to information on equality, diversity and inclusion. The taskforce identified key areas and looked at how they could better promote diversity and inclusion in schools.

Priorities identified by the Taskforce and Actions taken:

The taskforce planned and progressed their priorities through:

InTouch Articles:

As part of the workplan to actively promote and support inclusivity in Irish classrooms, members of the taskforce sought to have a series of articles included in the InTouch magazine during the year. It was hoped to identify a number of issues that could be brought to the attention of members via the magazine on topics that highlighted various aspects of inclusion and diversity in the classroom. The first article in the series was published in the November / December 2022 edition of InTouch. This was a thought-provoking article by teacher Sandra Ní Dhubhda on her experience as a teacher who is neurodivergent. Sandra's article outlined the personal challenges she faced during the recruitment process and provided practical suggestions for modifying that process to make it more inclusive. Her central point was that 'inclusive schools are inclusive of all members of the school community, and it is positive for a student to know that there are neurodivergent staff in their school'.

A further three articles are scheduled for inclusion in three editions of InTouch to be published before the end of the school year. One focuses on the inclusion – over the last year – of the many new pupils from the Ukraine into Irish classrooms. It is planned to have an article written by a primary school teacher from Ukraine who started teaching in Dublin in September 2022. There will also be an article by a primary school principal who welcomed 17 Ukrainian pupils to their school this year.

Another article has been submitted by Seyi Agbede on his experiences of inclusion and diversity, thus far, in teaching in Irish schools. Seyi explores barriers that he faced and identifies the supports and agencies that helped with his transition to the Irish system. The article also identifies what would be helpful going forward to promote inclusion and diversity in schools.

A further article, by Laura O'Brien, Principal, Scoil Choilm Community National School, outlines the strategies adopted in their school to promote an ethos of inclusion and to celebrate diversity in their school community. These include focussing on:

- Culture and Environment
- Inclusive visual imagery, resources and displays
- Promoting inclusion through literacy
- Student identity

- Tackling bullying and racism
- Affirming diversity within the school community
- Policies and planning

Books on Inclusion and Diversity:

The taskforce sought to review and select a number of books that would be relevant to the area of inclusion and diversity which could be collated into a thematic list, which would be available on the INTO website. The idea behind such a list is to formulate a thematic list of approved books that deal with the area of inclusion in some of its many guises. In theory this should make it easier for teachers to access books and resources on issues of inclusion. Children's Books Ireland are providing a bundle of books to be raffled as part of an upcoming webinar with INTO members on 11th January 2023.

Information on the INTO Website:

The taskforce decided as part of its brief on promoting inclusion and diversity that it would seek to establish, in conjunction with INTO Head Office, a specific webpage with resources and information which members could access in this area. This page will include links to agencies and organisations INTO works with, a book list, information on the INTO pride flag and other relevant resources.

Webinars:

The taskforce also sought to run a series of relevant webinars to supplement work already being done in this area for members on topics promoting inclusion and diversity, including:

- A webinar, entitled *Language Matters – Language Development Strategies to Support children with EAL in the primary school* which took place on Thursday 6th of October.

The webinar was designed and delivered by Aoife Merrins-Gallagher to enable primary teachers to develop knowledge and strategies for effective oral language development in linguistically diverse contexts. This webinar is available on the INTO website.

- A webinar in conjunction with Children's Books Ireland for teachers on *Exploring Diversity through Children's Books*. At time of writing, the webinar is scheduled take place on Wednesday, 11 January at 3.30pm and will provide an online guide for teachers on diverse and inclusive books that are suitable for the classroom.

The event will be in collaboration with Children's Books Ireland (CBI) and their CEO Elaina Ryan will provide an introduction to the topic followed by an overview of CBIs diversity and inclusion reading guide *Free To Be Me*. CBIs guide reviewer and book doctor, Dr Becky Long, will then explore a selection of specific titles that focus on Diversity, Inclusion and Representation ensuring that children can see themselves in what they read. This will be followed by a Q&A for all INTO members.

- The INTO collaborated with the Migrant Teacher Project on a series of webinars for Ukrainian Teachers in December 2022. The online seminars provided a broad overview of the Irish education system. INTO contributed to a webinar on Monday December 19th on the *Role of Trade Unions in the Irish Education System* highlighting the service offered to teachers. Over 35 teachers attended the webinar.

INTO Representatives on NCCA Curriculum Development Groups:

In September 2022, the NCCA sought four nominations from INTO to each of the following Development Groups (20 personnel in total):

- Language (Gaeilge, English and MFL)
- Maths, Science and Technology
- Arts Education (Visual Arts, Music, Dance, Film, Digital Media)
- Wellbeing (Physical and Health Ed, Social and Personal Values Ed)
- Social and Environmental Education (History and Geography)

As a result of the taskforce, INTO Representatives on the Development Groups will be asked to approach their work and consider curriculum development through the lens of inclusion and equality, emphasising INTO's commitment to inclusion and in line with the resolution. The INTO Education Section will coordinate a meeting of all INTO nominees in Spring 2023.

Longer-term objectives:

The taskforce acknowledges that its scope and time to deliver on its objectives was somewhat curtailed by time constraints, however, it is proud of the work it has undertaken to deliver on this resolution on behalf of members. The taskforce is reassured that the good work that has commenced under its remit will continue to be carried out and progressed by the CEC as part of their longer-term objectives to promote inclusion and diversity in its own work in trade union and education matters, as well as, influencing policy development in this area with their partners in Education. This includes, but is not limited to;

- the General Secretary engaging with the Director of the Teaching Council to ascertain what work is underway to promote diversity in the teaching profession.
- Promoting the pride flag all year round and enabling the Equality Committee members to take a more proactive approach to rolling out flags in each district.
- Seeking further articles of interest in this area for publication in InTouch.
- The design and development of a poster on equality, inclusion and diversity for all INTO staff room notice boards. It is anticipated that the EID poster will be distributed to all schools in September 2023.
- continued collaboration with the INTO LGBT+ Teachers' Group to promote their "Different Families Same Love/Teaghlaigh Éagsúla, an Grá Céanna" poster competition.
- Liaising with Management bodies through the Governance Manual review to ensure accommodations are offered to all candidates presenting for interview.

- Continue to work with the ICTU Disability Committee to progress work on reasonable accommodations and other work of importance to public sector workers with both visible, and invisible disabilities.
- Exploring future INTO summer courses with a focus on equality, diversity and inclusion
- The Equality Committee of INTO will continue to address and look to progress all 7 areas of priority set out in the ETUCE Action Plan on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion report.

The taskforce recommends that the INTO continues to liaise with other Organisations to ensure that Equality, Inclusion and Diversity remains top of their agendas.