Why Public Control of Education Matters: resisting the threats from within and without

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Why Public Control of Education Matters:

Education is a Vital Personal and Public Good regardless of its market value

1. Education is a **basic human right** and is recognised as such in international legal agreements that Ireland has ratified
   - *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (Article 26)
   - *The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (Article 13): Article 42 of the *Irish Constitution*

2. Education has an **intrinsic value for the development of the individual** – enables people to exercise capabilities, choices and freedoms

3. Education **credentials are vital for accessing other goods**, including employment, and being engaged in politics and public life

4. Education is **indispensable for realising other rights collectively and individually** – rights to housing, cultural expression, language, beliefs

5. Education **enables groups and individuals to overcome other social disadvantages**
Public control of Education matters as Education is a vital Public Good

- Education enriches cultural, social, political and economic life
- Education has a unique capacity to enable and enhance critical thinking, and critical thinking, in turn, enables the public to hold those in power to account
- Without public democratic control, there is a danger that critical areas of education would be completely overlooked (because critical thinking is often a threat to those in power, and critical fields of scholarship are not profit-making)

- Education is the only ideas-generating institution that is currently largely under democratic control – it is a safeguard against totalitarianism and demagogy

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Dangers of education being used for non-educational purposes – contradictions

- Personally liberating **BUT**

- Socially, culturally, personally and economically enriching **BUT**

- Potential to promote resistance to inequality and injustice through what it teaches and through pedagogical style – **BUT**

- Education is a public good **BUT**

- **Education can be used to indoctrinate**, directly, indirectly

- Education can work as a **form of social control**: people are publicly labelled in school as lesser/greater: graded/ranked/classified - can learn to feel unintelligent and incapable

- Schools can produce a consciousness that accepts hierarchy and inequality – stratifying and labelling children

- **Education is a product** that is sold and increasingly commercialised

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Perspectives on Public Services and Public Control of Education

- Three dominant types of welfare in capitalist welfare state Esping-Andersen (1990)
  - **Liberal Anglo-Saxon Model** *(means tested welfare and market solutions to social problems)*: England, Australia, Ireland*, USA
  - **Conservative** *(strong supports for traditional family welfare, especially through work-related insurance schemes)*: Germany, Netherlands, Austria
  - **Social-democratic** *(Nordic model)*: Universalistic welfare, non-commodifying of services (Sweden, Finland, Norway)
Ireland’s welfare model: oriented towards the Liberal Anglo-Saxon model

- High use of private market services (voluntary and, more recently, for-profit services in many service areas)
- In education (most schools are legally private organisations)
- Private tuition market grinds, private extracurricular activities
- Private for-profit providers of further and higher education
- Health and elder care, child care increasingly profit-led
- Few Universal welfare provisions, i.e. services that are not means tested
Privatisation as commercialisation is widespread in Ireland

- **(1) Transfer of public assets to private ownership**, through the sale or lease of public assets, land, infrastructure, and enterprises (Telephone infrastructure; energy Land for commercial developers)

- **(2) Closing public programmes which the private sector takes over** - services for long-term unemployed (Job Path – run by 2 private operators - Turas Nua and Seetec)

- **(3) Withdrawal of government from the provision of services**, contracting out in Service Level Agreements (SLAs) or vouchers (refugees in direct provision; care of the elderly, both in homes and now in the community; disability services also privatised increasingly)

- **(4) Withdrawal of government from financing services** and corresponding increased **reliance on private capital** (roads, housing) and **user charges** (health care, education)

- **(5) Introducing market norms into the governance of public bodies**
Ireland has pursued **Neoliberal** policies over the past 20 years – Anglo Saxon Model

- In market income terms (before tax) Ireland is the most unequal country in the OECD
- Half of those employed earn less than €24,000 per annum;
- Two thirds have an income of less than €37,000
- Only 10% earn over €70,000 (TASC 2016- Towards Cherishing All Equally)
- **Richest 10,000 individuals** had an income of €500,000 per head in 2017 (Answer to a Dáil question, 2018)
The poorest 10% in Ireland pay almost the same % of their income in tax as the richest 10%. The percentage of Gross Income spent on taxes by Irish households – from bottom to top groups (10%).

Neoliberal Ideology - a threat to Public Education

- Neo-liberalism is a theory of political economic practice, based on the idea that **human well-being can be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills** within an economic system characterized by strong private property rights....’ (Harvey, 2005: 2): **low value placed on non-market knowledge**

- Neo-liberalism attempts to explain how the world is, and prescribe how it should be: **it is both a normative (moral) and analytical (explanatory) capitalist framework**

- **Reducing Public Expenditure** is one of the principal goals of neo-liberal capitalism (creation of a small, cheap state): A related goal is to **turn public services into private-for-profit services**
Neo-liberalism prioritises the market citizen

- Neoliberalism is premised on the assumption that a person’s relationship to the State and other members of society is mediated via the Market.
- It builds on the *idealisation of choice in classical liberalism*, which prioritises freedom over equality.
  - *Freedom is defined in consumption terms: citizens are redefined as ‘customers’ with market preferences rather than democratic citizens with human rights and public interest obligations.*
- Neoliberalism is focused on creating privatised citizens who manage their own ‘risks’. Focus on *individual responsibility for failure and ‘owning’ success* – development of the ‘actuarial self’
Running the country like a business – allegiance to this in Ireland

• The Public Service Management Act (1997) instituted a technicist approach to management, strongly driven by business rhetoric:

  - Advocates of ‘running the government like a business’ and practitioners of ...[New Public Service Management] ......have sought, at least in part, to have the public service operate according to ‘market-like models’. NPM is based on an economic understanding of governance in which the market – or approximations to it – is regarded as the ideal mechanism for the allocation and delivery of public services. Central to this approach is the perception of the citizens as customers. (Collins, 2007: 31).

Neoliberal values are encoded in public institutions in nomenclature commercialising of language—‘customers’

- Department of Education (has a Customer charter)  
- Revenue Commissioners – There are 1,562 references to ‘customers’ on its website
- Unemployment Assistance changed to Jobseekers… ‘Probation and Welfare’ changed to ‘Probation’…
- Dependency is increasingly demonised – those who live on social welfare pilloried as not paying taxes yet the poorest 10% pay almost the same % of their income in tax as the richest 10%

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Proof of Commercialisation: Irish higher education

- Cutting of core public funding for HE between 2008 and 2018 – *privatisation by cutbacks* – 80% State funding reduced to <65%
- Proposal to introduce *student loans*
- *Privatisation through patenting*: Patenting effectively privatises/commercialises a good that has been produced on public money-
- *Licensing of commercial providers* of further and higher education, and now secondary education (Hibernia, DBS, etc.)
- Commercialisation is a breach of the core *principles of academic freedom*: common ownership, scepticism and disinterestedness
Research Commercialisation: Research Priority Areas 2018 to 2023: Ireland – No references to the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

- **ICT** Future Networks, Communications and Internet of Things
  - Data Analytics, Management, Security, Privacy, Robotics and Artificial Intelligence (including Machine Learning)
  - Digital Platforms, Content and Applications, and Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality

- **Health and Wellbeing** - Connected Health and Independent Living
  - Medical Devices
  - Diagnostics; Therapeutics

- **Food** - Food for Health
  - Smart and Sustainable Food Production and Processing

- **Energy, Climate Action and Sustainability** - Decarbonising the Energy System
  - Sustainable Living

- **Manufacturing and Materials** Advanced and Smart Manufacturing; Manufacturing and Novel Materials

- **Services and Business Processes** - Innovation in Services and Business Processes
Internal Threats: Commercialisation through new forms of governance schools and colleges: New managerialism
(Lynch, Grummell and Devine, 2012)

- **New Managerialism** is the mode of governance aligned with neoliberalism: it involves institutionalising market values, systems and processes in the governance of schools, universities, the civil service, public sector bodies and NGOs.

  - By adopting business models of operation Schools and Colleges institutionalise commercial values in their systems and processes by changing their nomenclature, systems and operations.

- New Managerialism heralds a new mode of governance that provides a unique type of moral regulation of education staff and students.
New managerialism – a new type of capitalist moral regulation

- New managerialism does not just service capitalism, it emulates its core norms/values; institutionalises capitalist values in systems of governance, and regulation

- Deception – Conversion to capitalist morality is portrayed as an efficiency, a simple change of style, a purely technical change

- Reality: Schools/Colleges then move from being centres of education to service-delivery operations with productivity targets
  - A focus on product/output leads to a profound shift in the cultural norms of education, from nurture (educare) and development to producing human capital outputs: ‘outputs’, GPAs, PISA scores, KPIs; (auditing, branding, targets, public surveillance)
Imaginaries of Neoliberalism create New Subjectivities; *a focus on market efficiency over-rides and weakens other values in education*

- First order social and moral values are reduced to second-order principles: trust, integrity, care, compassion, collegiality are subordinated to regulation, control and *competition*
- With the glorification of competition: *the amoral has become the necessitous* – documenting scores, attainments, ranks, citations,
- Staff and students *imbibe the values by living and practising them*

- *Schools/Colleges become places to have careers for teachers/academics/* rather than primarily places of education;
- **Teaching is diminished as a public value**
- Mediating education through business models of operation legitimates the pursuit of individualised *economic self-interest and credentials among students*, and *career interests* among staff

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New managerialism and indifference to inequality

- When schools and colleges are judged by measurable performances – non-performers are a liability in meeting targets - vulnerable students/staff become a ‘nuisance’

- Ethics are subordinated to pragmatism: efficiency is prioritised over equality of access, participation/ outcome

- Market accountability replaces democratic responsibility – elite universities and schools are actively encouraged to remain elite (money overtly and legitimately follows the successful- entrance scholarships, ‘merit’ scholarships etc.)

- Emancipatory role of education and research is not really part of public (or most academic) discourse

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Winners from commercialisation: threats to Public Education

- Neoliberalism producers winners as well as losers; it promotes some research and educational interests above others

- Winners
  - For Profit Providers
  - Commercial areas of STEM
  - Careerists/Opportunists in all fields
  - New Management and Monitoring Elite

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Academic Capitalism

- The State didn’t send out the secret police to transform higher education into an entrepreneurial sector: we have done that all by ourselves by taking the ethic of managerialism as the everyday practice of institutional life’ (Stuart Hall, cited by Giroux and Giroux, 2004: 45)
- Rise of the culture of ‘Stars’
- Do we all practice it! Self-promotion as an art form (publication of profiles on various websites, researchgate, academia.edu, tweeting, emails with new publication lists; etc.)
The Winners - Individualised Academic Capitalism

- That student developed a technology..., we’ve patented it all around the world now, okay. We’ve a portfolio of patents on it [named product].. We did commercialise one company. We’re now looking at doing our other [one] and the spin outs from that... The group of us, the two supervisors, Ronnie* and myself and the student who’s now a lecturer here, James... We tend to meet up still in the mornings. It’s kind of a, we called us ‘the breakfast club’ years ago, ... (Lecturer in STEM, IT) *pseudonyms (based on interview data for IRC Project on Working, Learning and Caring in Higher Education)

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Commercial gains from public investment

- ...I didn’t go to academia to escape industry at all, I like programming. It was more that you can’t do your research and development,.... in industry because industry is not really that concerned with it, and most research and development in computer science happens in universities. The way that they do partnerships [with industry] is very deeply problematic, in that the State is effectively subsidising individual companies for their research and development projects, and the companies, they basically get a bunch of free labour in order to do it, and the State gets very little back from it, and there is very little claw-back in terms of, I mean there’s a lot of money spent, a lot of public money spent and very little to show for it (Male Lecturer, Computer Science University B) http://www.irc-equality.ie/
Meeting Market demands

- You need to tailor your research ...to meet the, I suppose, the demands of your funding body... Increasingly in Ireland ......successful awards are applied research, they're not so much basic research. **There's a movement away from basic towards applied research so we're being forced in a way to align our research with industry.** (Male lecturer, STEMM, University A)

http://www.irc-equality.ie/

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- Objective 1. Providing a strong talent pipeline combining knowledge, skills & employability which responds effectively to the needs of our enterprise, public service and community sectors, both nationally and regionally, and maintains Irish leadership in Europe for skill availability

- IUA response to Budget 2019: Third-level funding is critical to generating the talent pool for the economy. Our future economic competitiveness will be eroded if the public funding deficit is not addressed…

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Are the gatekeepers of public interest values in education converted to capitalism, by practice if not by ideology?

- Naming and framing the values of education in commercial terms changes how we value it
- Conceptualising education through ratings and rankings leads to market values being internalised through daily practice, and this leads to a devaluation of work and people that cannot be measured, rated and ranked
The Technology of Measurement - Rankings, League tables, KPIs, is not morally neutral, it is premised on the value of market competition as a form of regulation

- Measurement operates both as representation and as value (Adkins and Lury, 2012)

- Valuations have a Performative power – recreate and reinforce what is already measured (new imaginings grow out of recorded practices) – the labelling of institutions, people, departments etc.

- As rankings and ratings are public events - they regulate through lauding and shaming simultaneously
Tyranny of numbers - cultural impact on education

- Because numbers have the status of absoluteness and unassailability, numerical recordings/rankings have an unwarranted truth standing that do not apply to narrative evaluations.

- Numbers present a semblance of objectivity – a myth that what can be hierarchically ordered can be incontrovertibly judged. Lead to self-fulfilling prophecies.

- Those ranked or rated lack control over their public definition – done to you even if you do not participate; Rank ordering numbers are emotional in their impact; they operate through fear.
Market morality undermines care for students, staff and each other

- So you’re having an early lunch and someone comes in and they break down in the middle of it. I, I can’t handle any more of this you know. So it depends on you on the day, but I find now I’m not as, maybe as compassionate as I was ‘cos I just haven’t the time. (Male, lecturer, AHSS, Institute of Technology)

- I don’t know all the names of my students, before you did, …and that’s been eroded and I think if you don't have that connection you know you're less likely to be motivated to care about that individual (Female, lecturer, Institute of Technology, AHSS) [http://www.irc-equality.ie/](http://www.irc-equality.ie/)
Care is programmed out..

You know I don’t really like the way that we make appointments just on your excellence in terms of science and teaching. I think it’s that sort of thing in banks that has got us into trouble. If we were promoting in banks on the basis of how much good you did in the last year, rather than, yeah..... We’d have a very different society. And you kind of feel that if that was the basis of promotion that there would be a caring society that isn’t there. It’s programmed out of it because of the kind of structures we have. (Male, Professor, Science, University A) http://www.irc-equality.ie/
Precarious work, women’s conflicts: care or career?

- I don’t have children. I’m thirty-five now. We would like to have kids, but we both feel that we shouldn’t have children until I have some security. It’s not even the money. It’s the time, the moving around. I couldn’t leave a baby and live in another city or country... Colleagues of mine were asked at interview boards if they planned to have children... [They] stopped wearing their wedding rings (Assistant Lecturer Female, University C – AHSS commuting weekly, replacing someone on leave) http://www.irc-equality.ie/
Concluding Remarks- threats to public education from without and within

- Need to problematise our liberal Anglo-Saxon welfare model
- Need to challenge the language and practices of neoliberalism as they are encoding new capitalist values in education, that are anti-educational, anti-care
- Need to name vested interests: why have business leaders been granted authority to govern and influence educational policy?
- Need to ask awkward questions: when do professional interest groups undermine education as a public good?
Resistance to neoliberalism needs to be proactive rather than reactive

- There are winners and losers in neoliberal politics; winners are not incentivised to protect public interest values in education. Many winners of neoliberalism are within the systems itself
- Commercial Areas of STEM are winners: market interests in this field that need to be researched and interrogated
- Public interest values are deeply Care and Solidarity led; these values are taught through arts, humanities and social sciences subjects and in basic sciences; there is a need to actively promote these
- Who are the gatekeepers of public values in education? DES, the Minister for Education, the Teaching Council, IUA, THEA, Professional bodies, NAPD, NCCA, IPPN, Trade Unions, etc. How can they be held to account?