

astir

Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland



Benchmarking fails to measure up

The future for
teachers' pay

Can the value
of education
be measured?

Voice care

Technology in our schools

Smile



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Example is based on average dentist charges for examinations and cleanings, three surface composite fillings and porcelain bonded to precious metal crowns (includes annual excess of €100).

Two easy ways to join

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[†]Terms and conditions apply.

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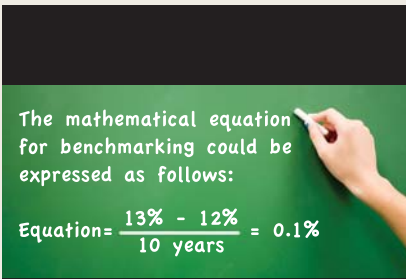
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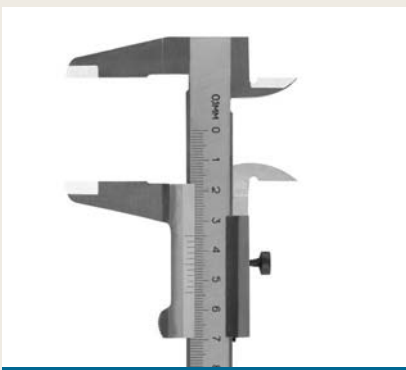
The mathematical equation for benchmarking could be expressed as follows:

$$\text{Equation} = \frac{13\% - 12\%}{10 \text{ years}} = 0.1\%$$

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good news about mortgages!

Budget 2008 means:

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First Time Buyers**



**Stamp Duty reforms
for those looking to
trade up/down
and investors**



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Developing our professionalism

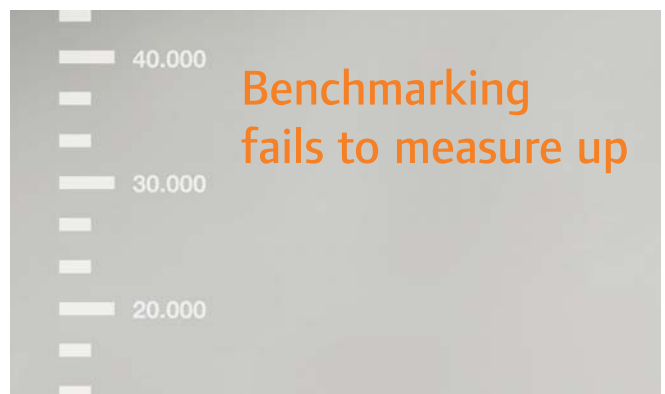
Since the times of the ancient philosophers, it has been accepted that an effective teacher never stops learning. An important part of the remit of the new Teaching Council is to oversee and create opportunities for the continuing professional development (CPD) of registered teachers. The Council is undertaking research to enable the rollout of CPD programmes for practising teachers after 2010. This time scale is a window of opportunity for the ASTI to provide accredited courses based on the researched needs of our members, and to bring them to our members using ICT and our branch structure.

The branch structure provides an ideal opportunity to facilitate group sharing of ideas and knowledge. In addition, it fosters collegiality. In a follow-up to the decision at last year's Convention to put time and resources into branch rejuvenation, the Vice-President, Honorary Treasurer and I met with every branch. At these meetings, branches indicated that they want, above all, information and input on issues that impact on their work as teachers.

Irish second-level teachers already have a reputation for partaking in postgraduate studies – some 40% of teachers have qualifications above those required for registration. Irish teachers have an innate love of learning and the concept of voluntary CPD is embedded in our psyche. It is important that this attitude and mindset is encouraged and supported. You will find the article on competencies by Andy Burke riveting reading, for much of what he covers is a timely warning for Irish educationalists.

It is imperative that we support and encourage the exploration of new knowledge and up-skilling of our members. But – and it is a big and serious 'but' – we must never, ever, under any circumstances, allow CPD to be used as the determinant of basic pay, as is already the practice in other countries. In such circumstances, love of learning and understanding of real education is replaced by a mechanistic, materialistic and utilitarian approach that would in time destroy what is best in Irish education. However, the spectre of 'basic pay for qualifications' is rendering many in Irish education sceptical of CPD. CPD is not in fact new; it is what large numbers of Irish teachers have been choosing to do on their own initiative for many years. They see it as deepening their knowledge and obtaining new insights to share with their students. The new CPD developments are to be welcomed. The challenge for ASTI is to ensure that we are to the forefront in providing our members with the easily accessed, enriching and accredited CPD they so evidently want, based on their feedback.

An important corollary is that our Association will then be empowered to seek enhanced pay scales for all, universally agreed, because our teaching cohort is exceptionally well qualified across the board. That builds collegiality, which is vital for good teaching.



The arrival of the Teaching Council, with its complex legislative remits, has created a new landscape, which compels us to review and re-evaluate the role our Association will play in championing the professional development of teachers. It is important that we are aware, proactive and strategic, rather than waking up too late to missed opportunities.

We have not been aided by the failure of Benchmarking II to recognise the strategic value of education to our society, both socially and economically, when it effectively clawed back hard-earned gains made in Benchmarking I.

We have a golden opportunity to use CPD to enhance the conditions of our work, to lessen stress and to be a means by which our strategic value is leveraged. CPD can give us – as it has other professional groups – the language and vocabulary to articulate our worth in ways we have not done so far.



Patricia Wroe
ASTI President

ASTI awards

Lorna Mahon and Martina O'Rourke were recently awarded ASTI student achievement awards for their performance in the Higher Diploma in Education at TCD. Both are currently working as music teachers in Dublin. Lorna originally intended to become a classical singing teacher and studied vocal training while completing her BA in music and geography at NUI Maynooth. After graduating with a first-class honours degree, she completed a masters in performance at DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama. It was during this time that she decided to pursue a HDip in education. Currently teaching music in Mount Anville Secondary School in Dublin, she believes her background in performance has benefited her in her studies and in her teaching. She "views every class as a performance of sorts and the students as the audience". She hopes to balance her teaching and singing careers over the coming year.

Martina also studied at NUI Maynooth, graduating in 2006 with a BA in music and economics. She has been playing music since she was four and

decided to pursue a career in music teaching during her undergraduate degree. She sees music as a very important subject, as it allows students an opportunity to express themselves. She attributes her interest in teaching to her own school experience: "I had fantastic teachers throughout my school career who were really inspiring and who fostered a love of learning". Martina is currently teaching in Mercy College Coolock and would like to explore the area of music therapy in the future as she is particularly interested in how music can be used to treat behavioural problems. David McEvoy was awarded the UCC ASTI award, having achieved the highest mark in teaching practice during his PGDE course. Currently studying for a postgraduate degree in mathematics, David completed his teaching practice in St Patrick's College, Gardiner's Hill, Cork, and hopes to begin teaching next autumn. David continues a family tradition of teaching, as his father Martin recently retired after a lifetime of teaching in Coláiste an Chroí Ró Naofa, Carrignavar, Cork.



ASTI award winners Lorna Mahon and Martina O'Rourke pictured with Elizabeth Oldham, Senior Lecturer, Education Department, TCD, and Patricia Wroe, ASTI President.



Professor Cathy Hall, Education Department, UCC, presents the ASTI Award to David McEvoy, with John Mulcahy, Chairperson, Cork South Branch.

Curriculum update

Senior cycle developments

Following recommendations in the Report of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship early last year, plans for the development of a senior cycle subject, politics and society, are currently being prepared. This subject will follow on from CSPE at junior cycle. This is part of a wider overhaul of second-level education to be undertaken by the NCCA, which includes a review of the way maths is taught and the development of a number of senior cycle short courses and Transition Year units. No date has yet been fixed for the introduction of the course but the NCCA has drawn up a draft syllabus, which will be made available to schools. The subject will be available at both higher and ordinary level, and the content will be drawn from sociology, political studies and philosophy. The syllabus is to be organised around three key concepts – interdependence and conflict, sustainable development, and equality and diversity. Assessment will take the form of an examination and an active citizenship project, which will account for 20% of the marks awarded.

Revisions to Junior Certificate science syllabus

Following deliberations by the NCCA Junior Cert Science Course Committee, a number of clarifications are to be made to the syllabus document for Junior Certificate science. A revised syllabus in Junior Certificate science was introduced on a phased basis with effect from September 2003.

The first cohort of students to follow the revised syllabus sat the Junior Certificate examination in June 2006. It is established practice for the NCCA to institute a review of the implementation of a new or revised syllabus after the first cohort of students has completed the course.

The revised syllabus document, with the clarifications included, is now available on the NCCA and Department of Education and Science websites.

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Global Campaign for Education



Established in 1999, with a mandate to campaign to see the Education for All goals and strategies agreed by 185 world governments in 2000 implemented by 2015, Global Campaign for Education is now at its midway point. Around the world, over 72 million children are still out of school, and 800 million adults are illiterate. This reality is undermining development efforts and is hindering the global fight against poverty. Around the world, national coalitions of charities, trade unions, parents and citizens' groups have mobilised to keep the Education for All goals to the forefront of development aid policies.

In Ireland, the Irish Coalition for the Global Campaign for Education has brought together a strong spectrum of teacher unions, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, the National Youth Council of Ireland plus development agencies such as Concern, Sightsavers, Oxfam, Action Aid Ireland and Suas. The Coalition is currently organising for the 2008 Global Campaign for Education Action Week, which will be held from April 21 to 27. The theme for this year's event is 'The World's Biggest Lesson' and on April 23, as part of the week of celebrations and events, children and adults from all over the world will attempt to break the world record for the largest simultaneous lesson. Campaign material was sent to all schools in late February and teachers are encouraged to engage in some of the recommended actions, including bringing politicians into schools to discuss issues around global justice and Irish aid policies.

If you want to take part, more information on the Global Campaign and this year's events are available at www.campaignforeducation.ie.

School opening

Trinity Comprehensive School, Ballymun, was officially opened by the Minister for Education in September 2007.

Ballymun was the first comprehensive school established in Dublin in the mid 1960s. As the population of the area expanded, it divided into three separate schools for junior boys, junior girls and senior students. The present development sees the three schools reunite and forms part of a large-scale urban regeneration project currently underway in the Ballymun area.

Young Scientist awards



BT Young Scientist 2008 winner, Emer Jones, pictured with Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin, and Chris Clark, Chief Executive Officer, BT Ireland. Emer is a student at Presentation School, Tralee.

Emer Jones, a second-year student at Presentation School, Tralee, was named BT Young Scientist of the year 2008 in January. Emer was one of 1,128 students who took part in the competition, which showcased over 500 projects from across Ireland. Emer's project, 'Research and Development of Emergency Sandbag Shelters', examined the use of native materials to enhance the stability of emergency sandbag shelters used in disaster relief and demonstrated that the use of wood or bamboo could save time and reduce cost, while maintaining stability. Emer was assisted and encouraged in her project by teacher and ASTI member Kay O'Mahony, who describes her as a wonderful student with excellent research skills.

Emer visited the Young Scientist Exhibition in January 2007 to get inspiration for her own project. She found that the technology strand was of most interest to her and, in the wake of current concern about climate change, she became interested in the increasing need for emergency structures. As well as praising the content of Emer's project, the judges praised her excellent presentation skills. Kay O'Mahony attributes these, in part, to the help of her classmates, who used one class before Christmas to prepare her for questions she might be asked during the exhibition. Emer will go forward to represent Ireland at the 20th EU Contest for Young Scientists, which is due to take place in Copenhagen in September. Further awards were presented to students from Holy Rosary College, Mountbellew, Clongowes Wood College, Kildare, and Coláiste Choilm, Ballincollig.

Non-permanent pay

During the past year, the ASTI has made representations on behalf of a number of part-time teachers who were being paid out of school funds at a rate less than the Department rate. All of the teachers in question were being paid by fee-paying second-level schools. Where representations were made by the ASTI on behalf of teachers, the outcome was that the schools agreed to pay the correct rate.

A survey conducted recently by the ASTI among qualified part-time teachers who are paid privately by their schools has shown that despite legislation to protect part-time workers, some teachers are still being paid an incorrect rate for their work.

Urban design schools project

Three Mayo schools – Carrowbeg College, Rice College and Sacred Heart Secondary School – are taking part in an innovative competition to redesign the town of Westport using 3D digital modelling software. Teams of students from these schools will use Google Sketchup software to create an alternative vision of individual sections of the town. The students' designs do not have to be realistic, giving them the chance to be creative without restrictions. The initiative will encourage them to examine and engage with the built environment and offers practical experience in the use of 3D design software. Google Sketchup software is widely used at third level in urban design, architecture and planning courses. 3D imaging software such as computer-aided design (CAD) is to be used in the assessment of the new Leaving Cert subject, design and communication graphics.

New NCTE course

The NCTE is offering a new online course, 'The Internet – a Teaching and Learning Resource', this spring. The course covers areas such as: searching for educational content on the web and how to use this to enhance teaching; how to successfully implement Internet and/or email projects; and, how to deal with the area of Internet safety in the classroom. It also looks at future trends in ICT hardware and software. For more information go to: www.ncte.ie/onlinecourses. To register online go to: <http://www.ncte.ie/ICTTraining/OnlineRegistrationForm/>.

STARS Programme

Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) launched the 2008 STARS Programme in January. The programme offers teachers the chance to participate in research projects in third-level colleges during the summer months. Announcing this year's programme, the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Micheál Martin, said: "Teachers have a vital role in bringing the excitement and opportunities of science to a new generation. This programme is important because it gives teachers an opportunity to see science in action and to broaden their knowledge, which they can pass on to their students". The STARS initiative was originally introduced in 2004 by SFI, working closely with the Irish Science Teachers Association (ISTA). The deadline for 2008 applicants has now passed but more information about the 2009 programme can be obtained by contacting Tracy Moloney, Tel: 01-6073085, Email: star@sfi.ie.

Language awards

The European Award for Languages – The Language Label (EAL) is designed to recognise and endorse creative initiatives in language teaching and learning. It is awarded annually to a limited number of projects in each EU member country. Examples and descriptions of previous winning projects can be found at www.leargas.ie/education. An individual award, Language Ambassador of the Year, is also on offer. This award recognises the achievements of individuals involved in the teaching and promotion of languages from any sector. The closing date for both competitions is March 31. Further information and application forms are available by contacting languages@leargas.ie or by phoning 01-8871258.

Request for photos for ASTI history



Lucan teachers participating in the 1985 pay dispute.

Do you or your branch have interesting photos of local ASTI events, activities or activists from times past? John Cunningham, the historian who is writing the history of the ASTI to mark our centenary year in 2009 is interested in accessing old photos. For more information contact Brigid Fitzgerald at ASTI Head Office or send your photos (with return address) to Brigid Fitzgerald, ASTI Head Office, Thomas MacDonagh House, Winetavern Street, Dublin 8.

Syllabus introduction postponed

The Department of Education and Science has stated that it is postponing the introduction of two new Leaving Certificate technology syllabuses and a new Leaving Certificate art syllabus, all of which are complete and awaiting implementation. The implementation dates for the new subject architectural technology, which replaces construction studies, and new syllabuses for engineering technology and art, were due to be announced shortly. All three syllabuses have recently been previewed in ASTIR magazine in the expectation that they would be taught in schools from the 2008/09 school year. However, the Department of Education and Science has informed the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) that due to "the more difficult budgetary environment" in which the Department of Education and Science is now operating "it has not been found possible to secure funds this year for the implementation of the revised syllabuses". Commenting on the decision to postpone the introduction of the new syllabuses, ASTI General Secretary John White said: "Teachers have been committed to the modernisation of the curriculum. This decision to put a stop to essential reform in subjects such as art and technology has consequences for the development of the whole second-level curriculum, the educational development of young people, and Ireland's future economic wellbeing". He also pointed out that while Ireland is rated as one of the wealthiest of the OECD countries, it is at the bottom of the spending league when it comes to the amount invested in each second-level student relative to the country's per capita wealth.

Dungarvan Branch retirement function



The Dungarvan Branch recently honoured three long-serving colleagues at a dinner held at Lawlor's Hotel, Dungarvan. Presentations were made by Pat Hurley, ASTI Vice President. Pictured (from left) are: Front row: the three retirees – Maria Ryan, Ardscoil na nDéise; Keith Dransfield, St Augustine's College; and, Angela Conway, Principal, Ardscoil na nDéise. Standing: Kevin Kiely, Dungarvan Branch Secretary; Pat Collins, Dungarvan Branch Chairman; Pat Hurley, ASTI Vice President; Michael Barry, ASTI Standing Committee; Shiovaun O Sullivan, Dungarvan Branch Treasurer; Liam O'Mahony, ASTI Hon. National Organiser; and, John Cunningham, Dungarvan ASTI.

Tuam Branch retirement function



A dinner took place recently to mark the retirement of 15 members of the Tuam Branch. Pictured are: Back row: Gerry Fahy, Tuam Branch Treasurer; Jarlath Gaffney; Ray St John, ASTI Honorary Treasurer; Pat King, ASTI Assistant General Secretary; Kevin O'Dwyer; Patricia Wroe, ASTI President; Billy Hannon; Pat Gilmore; Pat O'Boyle; Gabriel O'Connor; and, Tommy Davin, Chairman. Front row: Delores Mullins; Mary Quelly; Carmel Heneghan; Ger Gannon; Bernie Shiel-Regan; Mary Molloy; Mary Murphy; Deirdre Tobin, Secretary; and, Mary Mullin. Missing from picture: Teresa Togher.

Seachtain na Gaeilge

Seachtain na Gaeilge 2008 will be held from March 3 to 17, and aims to promote the Irish language and culture at home and abroad.

Primarily, Seachtain na Gaeilge encourages people to speak Irish over the course of the fortnight and to encourage others to do so. In addition, schools and regional groups around the world participate annually by organising events such as céilidh, music sessions, lectures, reading clubs and street shows.

The festival has been evolving for over 100 years and in recent times has used chart music as a new medium to promote the Irish language. Since 2005, CDs showcasing popular Irish musicians have been produced in conjunction with the festival. Seachtain na Gaeilge has also made use of the internet and has produced websites – www.snag.ie, www.seachtainnagaeilge.bebo.com and www.myspace.com/snagceol – to promote the festival and Irish culture.

Irish Aid Volunteering and Information Centre



Teachers Seamus Reilly and Martina Flanagan, and students Daniel Byrne, Vishnu Anilkumar and Ciaran Twanley, from St David's Secondary School, Artane, are pictured at the launch of the Irish Aid Centre. Last year, a group from the school travelled to Nairobi as part of the Irish Aid Immersion Programme.

An Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, officially opened the Irish Aid Volunteering and Information Centre on O'Connell Street, Dublin, in February. The state-of-the-art centre will provide information on overseas development challenges, Ireland's effort to fight poverty and opportunities for individuals to get involved in development aid, at home and abroad. Irish Aid is Ireland's official programme of assistance to the poorest countries in the world, and visitors to the centre will be encouraged to think of ways in which they can make a personal contribution to development, whether through volunteering or taking steps towards sustainable living. A specially designed educational programme is available in the Centre's workshop for second-level school groups.

A programme of events planned around international days such as World AIDS Day, Africa Day and International Human Rights Day, has also been developed by Irish Aid and more information on these and future events can be found on the Irish Aid website – www.irishaid.gov.ie/centre.

Teaching Council update



If you have registered with the Teaching Council, you will have received, last month, an important mailing from the Council regarding your registration. The mailing included a letter confirming your registration with the Council. It is important that you retain this letter pending receipt of your Certificate of Registration later this year. You should also have received a registration renewal form. The deadline for the return of documents for renewal was March 3, 2008. If you neglected to return your renewal form by the deadline, you are requested to do so immediately. If you fail to do so, your status as a registered teacher will lapse and this will be noted on the register, which will be publicly available. This will also mean that when Section 30 of the Act comes into effect your salary will no longer be payable from State funds. Should you subsequently wish to renew your registration with the Council, you will be required to re-register under the terms of Section 31(5) of the Teaching Council Act, 2001, i.e., you will be required to undergo the full application process. To retain your registered teacher status, you must renew your registration annually and, with effect from March 28, an annual registration fee of €90 will be payable. You can opt for this fee to be deducted directly from your salary, or you can pay by cheque, postal order, bank draft, or credit/debit card. The renewal fee can be claimed as a work expense for income tax purposes and the Revenue Commissioners will notify each teacher and their employer of the tax relief when the Council confirms that payment has been received. The Register will be available to access online later this year via the Teaching Council website, www.teachingcouncil.ie.

RSTA news

RSTA outings

Kilmainham Gaol

The RSTA, in conjunction with members of the NASUWT (retired), is organising a trip to Kilmainham Gaol. The trip will take place on April 8, 2008. Lunch will be in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham and there will be an opportunity to visit the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA).

Belfast

A trip to see *Orpheus in the Underworld* at the Grand Opera House, Belfast, will take place on April 23, 2008.

It is hoped to visit Stormont and have lunch there in June; details have yet to be arranged.

Please see the RSTA website – www.rsta-ireland.com – for further information.

Calling all members

If you would like to share memories of events in your teaching career or recollections of events that were significant to you, please forward them to:

RSTA National Secretary,
Eileen Kelly,
17 Acorn Road,
Dublin 16,

for inclusion in a newsletter.

Teachers' flat rate expenses – are you claiming yours?

The Minister for Finance sets a flat rate sum for expenses incurred by teachers, which may be deducted from annual income for the purposes of determining tax liability. The following teachers' flat rate expenses were agreed with the Revenue Commissioners with effect

from January 1, 2007. They will continue to apply for the years 2008 and 2009.

For further information contact your local revenue office, or visit www.revenue.ie.

| | |
|--|------|
| School principals | €608 |
| Other teachers | €518 |
| Part-time teacher (on full-time hours) | €518 |
| Part-time teacher (not on full-time hours) | €279 |

Guidance counsellors:

| | |
|---|------|
| (a) employed full-time in second-level schools | €518 |
| (b) Engaged mainly in teaching general subjects, but also doing part-time guidance counselling (additional allowance) | €126 |

The future for teachers' pay

ASTI President, PATRICIA WROE, writes the following article as a contribution to the debate on the future for teachers' pay.

The linking of benchmarking with the national pay agreement, Towards 2016, has proved to be a clever mechanism to remove relativity claims from public sector pay bargaining. In hindsight, it bought this outcome in the first tranche of benchmarking awards. The second and most recent Benchmarking II exercise exposed this truth by the clever manner in which it significantly discounted all public service pay by 12% for pensions. In effect, the average 8.9% gained in Benchmarking I is negated by a 12% discount in Benchmarking II – simple mathematics. We have to ask the question: has benchmarking been good for education, particularly as we look to the future? In answering this, let us consider some key facts:

- prior to benchmarking, teachers' pay was severely out of line with other comparable professionals;
- over the last 20 years, education has become a strategic issue for Ireland in positioning its international competitiveness for the future. Benchmarking has not closed the pay gap between teachers and other comparable professionals;
- while, on the face of it, teachers got 13% in Benchmarking I, other groups also progressed and the sizeable pay gap identified between teachers and other comparable professional groups was not closed; and,
- Benchmarking II, by discounting 12% for pensions, has effectively negated the Benchmarking I pay improvement as it is worked through over time, and again widened the gap between teachers' pay and that of other comparable professionals.

Past struggles and current debates

Let's look at what some teachers had to go through in 2001 to achieve these modest gains. They had to take industrial action; face the opprobrium of society and had to experience other teaching union colleagues commenting negatively on them in the public arena. Five years after achieving a small success for education, we are only just now getting over some of the fault lines caused by our determined attempts to achieve a pay structure that reflects the value of teachers to society, not to mention their strategic worth to the economy and their self image as professionals of equal rank with other professionals.

In the debate that took place at our recent January 2008 CEC meeting, views ranged from "Let's revert to a previous strength of our Association – withdraw our labour and demand more pay", to "We did not do badly out of benchmarking and if benchmarking can deliver 13% we should stay with it".

Benchmarking brought about a once-off feel-good factor but, in the longer term, I do not believe it has the capacity to deliver on teachers' pay.

Another view, from people disillusioned with benchmarking and who see that it has delivered little to them and their future professional role, say: "We are paralysed and locked in, because the vote of other unions has the power to coerce us to accept a change in our working conditions that we ourselves voted to reject".

What are we to make from all of this? Well, we could revert to the traditional model but our experience has told us that unless we are very prepared and very united, then this as a strategy could lead us to the same kinds of issues from which we have only just about recovered – division from our teaching colleagues and division among ourselves. Another alternative is that we stick with benchmarking and believe (naively?) that by putting forward more sophisticated arguments we can overcome the inertia, the politics and the lottery that benchmarking really is. This, however, has to be taken in the context of the fact that benchmarking was set up to remove all relativity claims. Or, we reject benchmarking, but develop creative ways of working with the other teaching and lecturing unions and partners in education to convince society of the social and economic value of education and to state that, as professionals, we demand to be paid the same as comparable professionals precisely because of our value.

Value of teaching not recognised

What is the proof that as professionals we are not achieving the value and pay other professionals achieve? The evidence is threefold. Firstly, men are turning away from the role of teacher in society at



The mathematical equation for benchmarking could be expressed as follows:

$$\text{Equation} = \frac{13\% - 12\%}{10 \text{ years}} = 0.1\%$$



both first and second level. Interestingly, where pay levels are more in line with comparable professionals, male teachers and lecturers still dominate. Secondly, comparable professional groups, typically chartered engineers and accountants, are achieving salaries of €80,000 with 10 years working experience, a salary that the classroom teacher will not achieve within their working life, and these comparable professionals expect to have final salaries of at least €100,000. Many of these comparable professionals also enjoy many lifestyle attributes to their work that teachers are denied. Thirdly, there is the inordinate focus of the media on the teacher experiencing professional difficulties (using such terms as 'bad' or 'non-performing' teacher with an inference of proliferation such that it would seem that any other kind of teacher is a rare breed), notwithstanding the repeated evidence from OECD and PISA reports that education in Ireland is of a consistently high quality and standard.

I believe that in the past we have shown that we have the courage and commitment to do different things.

Challenges

The challenge for teachers and their representative organisations is complex, but it can also be seen in simple terms.

The complexity of the challenge is bringing a realisation of the huge range of contributions that teachers actually make, while the simple challenge is developing a unified response across their membership that achieves this.

This is up for debate. There is no easy answer. The imperative is to find new ways for teacher unions and partners to position education's strategic value both in the economy and our community, as well as within our own memberships. The focus of this has to be the establishment of teachers as recognised professionals, who make this contribution and are paid in line with other comparable professionals.

And most important in all of this, particularly for each teacher association and union, is that they maintain their own collegiality, integrity and unity throughout this process.

Let's summarise. Is benchmarking the way forward? I'm going to call this: while benchmarking brought about a once-off feel-good factor, in the longer term, I do not believe it has the capacity to deliver on teachers' pay. Do we have alternatives? Yes, I believe we do.

As alternatives, they present challenges that require us to do different things; however, I believe that in the past we have shown that we have the courage and commitment to do different things. Now we must realise that it is difficult to do this alone. We need to work in collaboration with others, but be careful not to be subsumed. And I believe that teaching unions need to be thinking now of distancing themselves from benchmarking. They need to be exploring pay mechanisms that reflect their value to society. We need to develop a coalition, both on the way we determine pay and, through co-ordination of a common PR and communications strategy, that constantly reinforces the value of teachers and the beneficial outcomes they create for society.

This process needs to start now and it may take us serious time to get this right. But I believe that if we are ever to exercise strike action again, it will have to be at the end of a line of sophisticated and well thought out strategies and actions that do not isolate us from our natural supporters in our role as educators.



Patricia Wroe,
ASTI President.

The price of a job: public service pay determination and benchmarking

ASTI General Secretary, JOHN WHITE, explains the background to public service pay determination in the modern era.

The ASTI has expressed its bitter disappointment with the Report of the Second Benchmarking Body, which has awarded no salary increase to teachers. The gap that exists between the lifetime earnings of teachers and those working in comparable careers in the public and private sectors has not been addressed in the Report of the Second Benchmarking Body. The Report recommends that no increases be given to teachers, despite evidence that the longer one spends as a teacher, the more marked the disparity between teachers' lifetime salaries and those of benchmarked comparators. This disparity is further exacerbated for second-level teachers because many of them spend up to eight years in part-time work before obtaining a permanent position.

In its Report, the Benchmarking Body stated that the pensions of public service groups are significantly more valuable than those of private sector groups and that the superior value of public service pensions should be quantified at 12%. This was taken into account in examining grades in the education sector.

Other public sector groups have also expressed disappointment with the Benchmarking Report, as the vast majority of public servants received no increases. It is unlikely that public service unions will agree to enter another benchmarking process, which would be reporting in 2012, if the terms of reference remain as in Benchmarking II. Any successor to benchmarking will have to be able to deal with the new demands upon individual groups such as teachers, and recognise the changes in conditions of service consequent upon societal change.

Change is inevitable

It is sometimes said that the world has changed more in the last 20 years than in the previous 100 years. This is perhaps particularly true in Ireland where our country has been transformed socially, economically and technologically in recent years. Like all other social structures, trade unions have been profoundly affected by these changes. However, unlike in some countries, surveys show that trade unions in Ireland are still highly regarded and the absolute numbers in unions have continued to grow, although this has not kept pace with the phenomenal growth in employment. Over one million workers are not members of any union.

This article endeavours to consider the impact of these changes on how public service trade unions such as the ASTI conduct their business, based on the view that organisations must adapt to new circumstances. The ASTI must use all the skills at its disposal in adapting to these changing circumstances, in order to obtain the best possible deal for the teaching profession.

The price of a job

While dedicated teachers may not see their role as merely 'a job in pursuit of payment', but rather are committed to the education of young people, that is not how the wider community sees it. The role of a trade union as defined by law is to regulate the relationships between employers and employees. One of the key relationships between employers and employees is the salary/wage to be paid to the employee. A salary/wage is the 'price' of the job, which is agreed between the employee and the employer. Determining the price of the job is an activity engaged in by unions and employers, which reflects the realities of the society within which they operate.

In a market economy operating with the minimum of regulation and the maximum of competitiveness, the price of a job is determined in the same way as the price of a product: how scarce the product is, and how much the purchaser is willing to pay, determines its price. In a socialist economy, of course, prices are determined differently but, since 1989, capitalism has been triumphant world wide. The social market, which is the dominant ideology in the EU, mitigates the rawer effects of crude capitalism. The social market can be defined as capitalism that has regard to social coherence and fairness. The social market influence has been responsible for a raft of legislation governing industrial relations, much of which has improved conditions for workers, but it has meant that unions are increasingly operating within a legislative rather than a voluntarist framework.

In this globalised, deregulated context, tempered by the EU social market, the role of strong, competent and well-supported trade unions has never been more important. This is the climate within which the ASTI seeks to obtain a salary for teachers that recognises their worth to the community.

Situating public sector pay

Seeking salary increases for teachers was never simply a matter of going into the Department of Education and Science, demanding a particular salary and using industrial muscle to achieve it. In the absence of a raw market whereby each teacher would be paid whatever somebody was willing to pay without regulation, there must always be some kind of structure for situating public sector pay. The right to take industrial action, however, must remain in the arsenal of unions as a last resort.

Priestly Principles

Since the 1950s, there has been an acceptance of what is referred to as the Priestly Principles in relation to public service pay. These principles arose out of the Priestly Commission on Public Service Pay in England and have been broadly accepted in Ireland. In summary, these principles state that a public



servant should be paid the same salary that a good employer in the private sector pays to a person carrying out comparable work. Public sector pay could not be determined unfettered by the economic realities of society. Of course, there can be pragmatic and *ad hoc* settlements and these may be justifiable on occasion but they are not sustainable in the long term. Comparison with comparable private sector employment has been seen as a fair system in that it should ensure that equivalent work or work of equal value is paid in line with that in the private sector. However, recent reports by the Review Body on Higher Remuneration and the Report of Benchmarking II have highlighted the unfairness inherent in recent pay movements in the private sector, whereby enormous salaries are paid to chief executives and salaries to middle-ranking employees are depressed. Benchmarking II has delivered no increases to teachers because over the past 10 years, with the operation of raw market forces in the private sector, chief executives' salaries have taken giant leaps while there has been no equivalent increase for other employees. This is, of course, a matter of great concern to teachers, given that our comparators in the private sector have not made giant leaps in salary, and marks the end of benchmarking, at least in its current form.

Pay reviews

For the past 40 years, pay increases for public servants under the terms of various national agreements have been the same as for private sector workers and, when there were no national agreements, public service agreements were based on pay movements in the economy in general. There were also special reviews for individual groups. In these reviews, teachers argued their case by reference to movements in public and private sector pay. Awards from pay reviews were sometimes satisfactory and sometimes unacceptable, leading to industrial action. The Loudon Ryan Report on teachers' pay is an example of the latter. In their submissions to these review bodies, unions of course presented their case in the best possible light, relying on their own sources of information. The public service employers did likewise, leading to frequent discrepancies in the two sets of material. This process led to the concept of marker grades such as the executive officer grade in the civil service, to which teachers were traditionally linked. In the PCW agreement (1997), there were general increases and a provision for local bargaining. This led to major problems because those groups who settled early, including teachers, did less well than those who settled later because of growth in the government finances. The ASTI took nine days of industrial action in pursuance of a salary claim at that time and sought to process a claim at the Conciliation Council and at the Labour Court outside of the benchmarking process.

Benchmarking

In the discussions on the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness, there was considerable evidence that in a booming economy (in the days before mass immigration and with a tight labour market), private sector salaries, in accordance with market forces, had moved significantly ahead of the public sector and it was agreed that instead of a plethora of review bodies applying disparate criteria to different groups, one body should be established to conduct research into public and private comparators and to make recommendations. This was the Benchmarking Body. Awards of 13% were made to teachers when the Benchmarking Body reported in 2002. The awards were phased in over a period, with a portion backdated. Benchmarking II has awarded 0% as outlined and discussed above.

Module 2 of Towards 2016

Trade unions are now faced with the task of enhancing their members' salaries in the next round of talks on Towards 2016. Since benchmarking has not delivered, Towards 2016 will have to. As stated above, another benchmarking process is unacceptable to the public service unions. In the discussions on Module 2 of Towards 2016, the four unions – ASTI, INTO, IFUT and TUI – have set forth the following in a joint position paper:

- (i) pay increases must be significantly ahead of inflation and should comprise increases to reflect increases in the consumer price index (CPI) and to reflect growth in the economy;
- (ii) the pay agreement should be of briefer duration than previous agreements and should not be for more than two years; and,
- (iii) the mechanism through which any agreement is ratified should obviate the problem whereby its provisions are voted upon by groups not directly affected.

Teachers have delivered an excellent second-level service to the community. The government must deliver a fair salary in return.

If you would like to respond to this article, email feedback@asti.ie.



*John White,
ASTI General Secretary.*

Leaving his mark on education

GEMMA TUFFY talks to Fine Gael's education spokesperson, Brian Hayes TD.

Brian Hayes, Fine Gael's recently appointed spokesperson for education, was still in his 20s when he was tipped as a future party leader. But whatever the political pundits might think, the Dublin-based TD is clear about his goal for the foreseeable future: to leave his mark on the education landscape. This, he says, he hopes to do whether he is in government or in opposition.

For Brian, a former second-level teacher, education is where it's at. "I am a Christian democrat. Christian democrats fundamentally believe that all individuals should have the same rights and opportunities to achieve their potential. The only way to give everyone the same rights and opportunities is through education. There are many government policy areas where it's impossible to make an impact, but in education you can." While his spats with Government politicians over recent months have sometimes made headlines, he is adamant that he has no interest in "Punch and Judy politics".

"My job as opposition spokesperson is to do everything I can to hold this Government to account. I particularly want to do this during my first year as education spokesperson because already the Minister [for Education] and the Government have broken a whole series of promises." He cites the promise in the Programme for Government of an additional €350 million per annum for education over the next four to five years, which has already been reneged on in year one. At second level, a commitment by the Taoiseach in relation to class size in Irish, English and maths "has been thrown out the window by the Department and the Minister. People need to know this."

Funding

But would Fine Gael deliver on these commitments if it was in government? Going into the last general election, Fine Gael did not make a specific commitment to reduce class size at second level. "I am not going to treat teachers and professionals as fools by making commitments I cannot keep, as this Minister has done," he says. In its 2007 election manifesto, Fine Gael proposed a school excellence fund amounting to €100 million per annum for primary and second-level schools. Schools would submit funding proposals to the Department of Education and Science, which could, for example, be for additional teachers in order to reduce class sizes. This proposal, says Brian, would not only mean increased funding for schools, it would mean a new way of thinking in relation to how schools are funded: "It would allow individual schools to decide their priorities."

"The only way to give everyone the same rights and opportunities is through education. There are many government policy areas where it's impossible to make an impact, but in education you can."

Brian Hayes is TD for Dublin South West and Fine Gael education spokesperson. He was educated at St Joseph's Garbally Park, Galway, NUI Maynooth, and Trinity College. He qualified as a second-level teacher but left the classroom early in his teaching career to work as Fine Gael's youth and education officer. He was first elected to the Dáil in 1997.

Far right: Brian Hayes pictured at a visit to Gorey Community School.



League tables

One aspect of Fine Gael education policy that has caused consternation among some teachers is the publication of examination results. Brian accepts that newspaper league tables promote a narrow concept of education and fail "to celebrate what goes on in our schools".

"I think the absolute epicentre of a decent society has got to be its support for its education system and integral to that is respect for teachers, and there isn't enough respect for teachers in this country at the moment."

Fine Gael's proposal is, he says, a novel one. "Every school would produce a report on an annualised basis, to the parents of that school, about everything that is going on in the school. We want to celebrate that the senior team got to a final, that three students took part in a debate, that a musical is taking place, that we have recorded improvements in our results in the Leaving Cert – all of this information together. If people really are serious about putting an end to the crude league tables that we currently have, which simply measure participation in third level, then they have to produce something better.

"The pathetic league tables that the papers have published belie the notion that many schools are doing extraordinarily well. The fact is, whether you're for them or against them, league tables are not going away. Let's reform them and introduce a fairer system."

Supporting teachers

In its policy statements, Fine Gael refers to the need to "pay public servants by results" and the need to reform the public sector. How would this apply to teachers? Brian stresses that his party is referring to "senior civil servants and government ministers" and not teachers when it talks about payment by results. "I want to make this absolutely clear from the start. I am not interested in coming down on teachers to show other people that we are firm. I fully appreciate the job that teachers do. They have huge responsibility.

"There needs to be a pay policy for teachers that is not only in their interest, but that delivers for them. It must be open and transparent. I think there is frustration among teachers at the moment, not least because benchmarking has delivered virtually nothing for them this time around," he says.

His agenda for education reform includes "re-engineering" our approach to science, maths and technology. His recent proposals on this included laptops for all second-level pupils, training for teachers, and increased technical support for schools.

Teacher training and professional development is another area in need of reform: "I think a Victorian aspect of our education system is that teachers are given positions in which they remain for many years without any real new education opportunities."

"There needs to be a pay policy for teachers that is not only in their interest, but that delivers for them. It must be open and transparent. I think there is frustration among teachers at the moment, not least because benchmarking has delivered virtually nothing for them this time around."

Teachers' status

While second-level teaching in Ireland still attracts a very high calibre of graduate, Brian Hayes is concerned that a diminution in the status of teachers in recent years will begin to impact on recruitment into teaching. "I think the absolute epicentre of a decent society has got to be its support for its education system and integral to that is respect for teachers, and there isn't enough respect for teachers in this country at the moment. We expect teachers to be social workers, child minders, psychologists. We need to get back to the basics: respect for the education system, respect for teachers, and allowing teachers to do the job they are trained to do."



Gemma Tuffy,
Media and Communications Officer.

Can the value of education be measured?

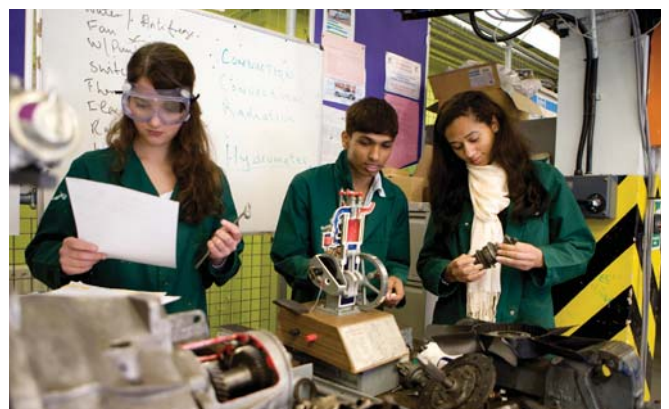
Does measuring education enhance its value?
ANDY BURKE summarises his recent paper on the subject.

The development and utilisation of competencies-based standards in education generally, but particularly in teaching and teacher education, is generating crosscurrents in the minds of educationalists. For the purpose of this article, we take competencies-based standards to mean standards or targets whose achievement can be measured quantitatively or verified through observed behaviours and evaluated against identified performance indicators or benchmarks. At first sight the approach may appear to be simply a pragmatic accountability mechanism for ensuring value for money in terms of adequate achievement levels on the part of students and satisfactory performance levels on the part of teachers. On closer scrutiny, however, it will become evident that the identification of competencies-based standards, for whatever purpose, raises fundamental issues about the nature of 'education', the relevance (or otherwise) of what is being done in schools to 'education', and the appropriateness (or otherwise) of current teacher education programmes to the needs of schools and the requirements of education in the 21st century. A recent paper by the present author attempts to analyse some of the issues at the heart of this debate. Its contents and conclusions may be summarised as follows:

- Competencies-based standards reflect an approach to life and education that emanates from positivistic thinking in Western philosophy. Positivism demands that we confine ourselves to the 'sense world' of empirically verifiable facts and quantifiable data and avoid being drawn into the 'non-sense' realm, where claims do not lend themselves to tangible verification or scientific proof (e.g., statements on the ultimate ends of education, the meaning of life, human and/or religious experiences). In the education arena, positivism is reflected in the attitude that only what is measurable really matters, coupled with a belief that what can be measured can

be managed and those responsible held accountable. This approach can result in a narrowing of the concept of what educating entails and an over-reliance on, and confidence in, measured achievement (e.g., examination results). Traditionally, it has tended to concentrate on those subjects and forms of intelligence (linguistic and mathematical) that are more easily measured and neglect others that are more difficult to quantify or assess.

"It is remarkable that teachers do as well as they do [and] manage to run classrooms filled with community, inquiry, wonder, and joy despite the dampening effects of the testing/accountability axis."



- This trend has been aggravated by an over-emphasis on the needs of national economies, the availability of jobs, the requirements of financial accountability for public expenditure on education, and by the demands of the knowledge economy, where prosperity depends on people's ability to out-invent and outwit their competitors, where there are winners and losers, where those countries and/or companies with the requisite competencies win, and where lifelong learning tends to mean continuous updating in the competencies required for competing economies. Such concentration on competencies has led to the commodification of education, where economic considerations tend to set its outer parameters and upper limits.
- In favour of this approach, it could be argued that it provides ministries of education with a transparent mechanism for measuring the quality of education and for ensuring value for money invested therein. In addition, the approach facilitates the development of a transparent and equitable basis for the mutual recognition of teaching (and other) qualifications across national boundaries.
- It is argued, however, that the effort to meet these reasonable requirements and national obligations has led to the development of a strong, and almost unstoppable, trend towards thinking largely in quantitative terms about teaching/learning and, in more recent times, to the utilisation of business language and concepts in education debates and policy documents. This approach tends to operate on an input-output model, entails the specification of precise objectives, the identification of effective strategies for achieving them, and the development of performance indicators to verify delivery. This in turn provides a basis for the auditing of schools and teachers, and often results in the drawing up of league tables to provide parents (customers) with information on which to base their educational purchasing decisions. It is difficult to argue against this approach since it seems to be a workable and responsible policy option on the part of governments and is welcomed by many parents. However, one of the major dangers of a competencies-based standards approach, with its adoption of business-based language in the description of its operations and definition of its targets, is that it involves a re-definition of what education entails and a narrowing, even trivialisation, of the role of the teacher.
- Both Paulo Freire and Jerome Bruner argue that pedagogy is never 'innocent'. It is a medium that carries a message and is always underpinned by some philosophy of life and theory of education. Seldom, if ever, will one find the proponents of the competencies-based standards approach engaging in an analysis of its underlying rationale beyond presenting its pragmatic benefits as a *modus operandi*. Some would argue that there is a deliberate attempt to avoid such analysis since it would reveal the limitations of the positivistic thinking that underpins approaches of this kind and the

commercial considerations that inspire them. Richard Pring (2000) argues that the current tendency to use business terminology in education parlance and policy documents entails a fundamental re-definition of education itself. Changing the language in effect changes the culture and ethos of schools, and the nature of the education that is expected to take place in them. He says:

"By thinking in business terms ... we are being asked to think of education differently. ... Answers to what it is to be human are already implicit [in that way of thinking]. ... As we think in business terms, so the ethos of the school is transformed from a place of moral and professional deliberation to one in which the teachers are skilled in meeting other people's targets. ... The spiritual and moral dimensions are virtually eliminated; exposure to what is inspiring and heroic becomes irrelevant; the openness to diversity and deliberation is seen as a threat to the rational planning of the political masters".



"As we tend to value the results of education for their measurableness, so we tend to undervalue and at last ignore those results which are too intrinsically valuable to be measured."

- It is not the first time that this problem has been encountered. Several of the sophists in classical Greece, with their eye on the jobs market, specialised in 'grinding' students in the knowledge and skills needed to work in various areas of the civil service or to win their arguments in the law courts – a trend that was aggravated by the increased job opportunities in the Roman Empire. These 'grind schools' were severely criticised by Plato and Aristotle for schooling their clients but failing to educate them.

The 'payments by results' system that operated in Britain and Ireland in the latter half of the 19th century is another example of the identification and application of quantitative benchmarks in education with unwelcome results. In 1911, Edmond Holmes, a recently retired Chief inspector of Schools in the UK, wrote a stinging critique of its ill effects: "The pressures on teachers to deliver results," he said, "were transferred to pupils and resulted in schools being both hives of industry and of misdirected energy". His most fundamental criticism of the system was its over-reliance on test scores as the sole measure of school/teacher effectiveness. He wrote: *"Whenever the outward standard of reality (examination results) has established itself at the expense of the inward, the ease with which worth (or what passes for such) can be measured is ever tending to become in itself the chief, if not sole, measure of worth. And in proportion, as we tend to value the results of education for their measurableness, so we tend to undervalue and at last ignore those results which are too intrinsically valuable to be measured."*

The Primary School Certificate Examination (PCE) in the Irish Republic is another example of a centrally dictated standards and measured competencies approach to education. The PCE operated on a voluntary basis from 1929 to 1942 with about 25% of pupils sitting tests in a broad range of subjects.

From 1942 to 1967 the PCE became compulsory by Government dictat. Eamonn De Valera (a former secondary teacher) regarded the PCE as a benchmark test of teachers as much as it was an evaluation of pupil achievement levels, and defended the narrowing of examinable subjects to Irish, English and Arithmetic. In 1941 he said:

"I am for cutting off every frill so as to make certain that the essentials are properly done. I do not care what teachers are offended by it. I am less interested in the teacher's method of teaching than I am in the results ... and the test I would apply is the ... examination"

The PCE was terminated by the Department of Education in 1967 since it was incompatible with New Curriculum thinking.



In search of a balance between earning a living and living a life

While we have been down the competencies-based standards road before, the assault on education this time – couched in attractive business-type terminology and reinforced by utilitarian attitudes to education in society – seems more plausible and, for that reason, it is more difficult to counteract. While it is important to provide an educational challenge to it, one must critique the approach without denying the value of competency and accountability measures to ensure basic standards in, and accountability for expenditure on, education. One must also recognise the needs of expanding economies and acknowledge the inter-dependence of education and economic productivity. For Reich (2001), the knowledge society is a Trojan horse. In handling it, the critical challenge is "to find a balance between earning a living and living a life", and educating for both.

While the proponents and providers of competencies-based schooling persist in referring to it as 'education', it is questionable whether it merits that label now any more than it did in the grind schools of Greek and Roman times. In a thought-provoking critique of modern 'education', Ivan Illich (1971) said:

"For some generations education has been based on massive schooling. ... Why not, then, conceive of education as the product of schools? ... I feel sure that it will soon be evident that the school is as marginal to education as the witch doctor is to public health"

John Goodlad (2000), who has been involved in major reviews of teaching and teacher education in the USA, recognises and regrets that "education today has largely passed out of the hands of educators and is subject to constant pushes in different directions from politicians and business leaders [who] have embraced the behaviourist, linear model and attitudes of the corporate world [and] hate to hear that problems are complicated". In face of this reality, however, Goodlad suggests that efforts should be made to educate business leaders about 'education'. While he recognises that "they would come with an incredible array of prejudices, they are bright people who are used to looking at issues and problems".

In the final analysis, the most effective antidote to a narrowly focused, utilitarian type of teaching is well educated teachers.

As a counterpoint to positivistic and pragmatic notions of what education entails, the present author briefly traces a much richer vision of education from Plato and Aristotle to modern writers such as Bruner, Buber, Dewey, Dunne, Emerson, Gardner, Goodlad, Hargreaves, Palmer, Pring, Roszak and others, and invites readers to hold this mirror up to the competencies-based standards and business approach to schooling.

Finally, he argues that getting the balance right between earning a living and living a life will fall heavily on the shoulders of teachers. They must help to promulgate and promote a different vision of education and persuade the public that "a marketing model ... serves the cause [of education] poorly when it assumes that the customer is always right" (Palmer, 1998). Hargreaves (2003) is explicit in this regard. He says:



"State education and its teachers must preserve and strengthen the relationships and the sense of citizenship that the knowledge economy threatens. It must deal with the human consequences of the knowledge economy – teaching beyond as well as for it, adding values to the agenda of reform that build community, develop social capital and forge cosmopolitan identity... Teachers should not just be catalysts of the knowledge economy; they should also be essential counterpoints to it. This means making teaching into a moral, visionary profession once more. ... It means teachers recapturing their status and dignity as some of society's leading intellectuals, and not being mere technicians, instruments and deliverers of other people's agendas."

"Education today has largely passed out of the hands of educators and is subject to constant pushes in different directions from politicians and business leaders."

In the final analysis, the most effective antidote to a narrowly focused, utilitarian type of teaching is well educated teachers. This, in turn, has important implications for the education of the educators – for Silberman (1976), the most neglected aspect of teacher preparation in the USA. In this regard, Gallagher (2005) says:

"It is remarkable that teachers do as well as they do [and] manage to run classrooms filled with community, inquiry, wonder, and joy despite the dampening effects of the testing/accountability axis. It seems they must develop their professionalism covertly."

The full paper was published by the Centre for Cross Border Studies in November, 2007. With the Centre's permission, it has been posted on the ASTI website – www.asti.ie. To economise on space, the detailed references provided therein are not included in this summary.



Dr Andy Burke

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PRESENTATION BROTHERS

Technology in our schools

BRIGID FITZGERALD looks at the use of ICT at second level, and talks to Donal O'Mahony and Tommy Flynn, two teachers who are leading innovation in their schools.



It is widely acknowledged that Ireland's recent economic success can be attributed, at least in part, to our highly skilled workforce. The term 'knowledge economy' is mentioned in almost all discussions on the subject. However, despite its predominance in almost all sectors of enterprise, information and communications technology (ICT) did not, until recently, feature prominently in Irish education at first and second level. The first IT education initiative, *Schools IT 2000*, was launched in 1997 and served largely to provide funding for infrastructure rather than the integration of IT into the curriculum. Moves are being made, and have been made, however, and ICT is slowly making its presence felt in second-level education.

The National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) was established in 1998 and has since provided training to 80% of teachers in the use of ICT, including Internet use, web design and digital media. One recent initiative has seen 97% of schools successfully networked to the Schools National Broadband Network. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), as part of its ICT plan, aims to establish the role of ICT as a teaching and learning tool, and as an integral part of curriculum and assessment. As part of this, the new Leaving Cert technology subjects will encompass the use of particular software programmes as part of their curriculum and assessment.

Early last year, under the National Development Plan, the Minister for Education and Science announced an allocation of €252 million to develop "an e-learning culture in schools that will ensure that ICT usage is embedded in teaching and learning across the curriculum". Moira Leydon, ASTI Assistant General Secretary, Education and Research, points out that: "The words 'embedded' and 'culture' are key. ICT integration requires not only the allocation of funding for hardware or training in the use of software, but that ICT becomes a part of the way schools operate, the way teachers teach and the way students learn".

The 2005 OECD Pisa Report, 'Are Students Ready for a Technology Rich World?', indicated that Ireland had one of the lowest percentages of frequent computer users among OECD countries. Access to ICT hardware and software in schools will limit instances of 'digital divide' and will help to prepare all students for the use of ICT in everyday, professional or academic life. It is acknowledged that the advent of the digital age has made most things easier and more efficient. Most sectors have embraced digital technology and never looked back; why should education stay behind?

Learning benefits of ICT

Properly implemented, ICT in education has many benefits. Students can use technology to learn, progress at their own pace and gain control over their learning. Curriculum and assessment are changing, and more project and course work is being introduced. ICT encourages students to develop knowledge and explore work independently, and to become responsible for their own learning. The NCCA points out in its ICT policy that "our young people are capable, independent learners, able to use ICT confidently, creatively and productively". The use of ICT can, according to the NCCA, "add value in teaching and learning, by enhancing the effectiveness of learning, or by adding a dimension to learning that was not previously available. ICT may also be a significant motivational factor in students' learning and can support students' engagement with collaborative learning".

ICT and teachers

Learning ICT skills is important, but most commentators acknowledge that ICT should form part of the learning experience if it is to be of most use. In-service training for teachers needs to focus on this aspect. Teachers must be equipped to develop productive ways to use ICT in their teaching. Teacher confidence, both in their own ICT skills and in the relevance of ICT in education, is vital for successful integration. ICT cannot be foisted upon teachers. According to Moira Leydon: "Like any change in education processes, the integration of ICT is contingent upon the conviction of teachers that it will enhance the teaching and learning process. Support and consistent policy is vital to this and an integrated, coherent approach must be taken if the potential for ICT in education is to be recognised". If schools and teachers are to make the initial effort to integrate ICT, they need to be assured that it will be worthwhile and that ongoing support, financial and otherwise, is available. Recent policy in relation to ICT has meant that developments are largely being led by individuals, or groups within individual schools, who are making that initial effort. Their experiences have shown that, with well-defined curricular aims, teachers can take on technologies to support their teaching and that this can enrich the teaching and learning experience. Two such teachers are ASTI members Donal O'Mahony and Tommy Flynn.



(From left): Donal O'Mahony and students at Portmarnock Community School have integrated Moodle into their learning experience. (Pictures by Tommy Clancy.)

Moodle in Portmarnock

Donal is an assistant principal at Portmarnock Community School, which is one of the first second-level schools in Ireland to introduce Moodle to its students. Moodle is a virtual learning environment (VLE), which is widely used internationally at third level. Donal, a teacher of religion and history, undertook a masters degree in education and training management with an e-learning strand in Dublin City University last year, and wrote his dissertation on the use of online collaborative learning at second level.

Donal used his fifth-year history class to test the use of Moodle. The idea of the virtual learning environment is that teachers can upload notes, video clips, digital images, links to useful websites, sound files, PowerPoint presentations or any kind of resource that may help their class. Their class can then access this information at home or anywhere with Internet access. The learning is not just one way, it is collaborative and interactive. The students can comment and engage in online debate. They are offered the chance to reflect and process information, and formulate ideas to share.

The project was popular from the start but Donal was keen to ensure that it was worthwhile and his analysis of the project showed that real critical thinking and learning was indeed taking place. The ideal situation as Donal see it is "technology happening in the background and the focus being on learning and education – technology is an enabler, a catalyst". The students in Donal's history class say the online forum and Moodle allows everyone a voice, helps in their research and makes class less boring. They can access notes if they miss class or lose them, which benefits in their revision. It also offers a chance to relate to history in a different way and makes it more relevant to their lives.

This year, with the support of the principal and dedicated funding, the project expanded to the whole school and 10 teachers have become involved. Donal says that there is an initial learning curve and some teachers fly and some struggle, but "the important thing is to set realistic and attainable expectations – many projects fail because they set out with unattainable goals. It is also important that teachers are not compelled but are free to get involved to whatever level suits them. Moodle allows slow burn".



Digital Dundalk

Tommy Flynn, the Transition Year Co-ordinator at St Mary's College in Dundalk, has brought technology into the classroom in a different way. He has been involved in implementing digital media projects with a number of classes and this year the school is producing video on the Power of One campaign. As part of this, the students get practical experience of shooting video and digitally editing it. The school won the Digital Media Award for Best Secondary School in 2005. Tommy also encourages students in his German class to listen to German language podcasts and he is a big advocate of Scoilnet and Teachnet. Tommy uses a data projector a lot in class, as do other teachers in the school. He says that while preparing resources initially requires time, once it is done it is of great benefit and they can be used again and again. Students are IT savvy, according to Tommy, but need to be directed in ways that they can use it to benefit their education. Like Donal, he says the important thing is to incorporate ICT into the curriculum and learning. This year the Transition Year class is undertaking distance learning with Dundalk Institute of Technology (DKIT), where Tommy will teach web design and students will upload their projects onto Moodle for assessment by DKIT.

If you would like to respond to this article, email feedback@asti.ie.



Brigid Fitzgerald
Administrative Officer for ASTIR magazine.

Teacher awarded €10,000 for age discrimination

A recent equality case taken by the ASTI highlights the need for open and transparent appointment procedures in schools. ASTIR reports.

The Equality Tribunal has ordered a school to pay €10,000 to a teacher and to adhere to good practice in selection procedures for promotions in the future. The case was taken by the ASTI on behalf of Mary Francis O'Conghaile, Mercy Mean Scoil Mhuire, Galway, who experienced age discrimination after she applied for the post of principal in her school. Mary applied for the position in 2004 and was among a number of candidates called for interview. During her interview for the post she was asked what she believed to be an ageist question. She was unsuccessful in her application and the post went to a 'considerably younger' candidate. Mary brought her experience to the attention of the ASTI. Efforts were made to resolve the matter without success and it was referred to the Director of the Equality Tribunal under the Employment Equality Acts, 1998 and 2004.

Mary, who was 58 years of age, was asked why she was applying for the job "at this time in her life".

Discriminatory question

In the ASTI's submission to the Equality Tribunal, it was claimed that during her interview for the post of principal, Mary, who was 58 years of age, was asked why she was applying for the job "at this time in her life". She believed that this question implied that she had to justify her interest in the job with regard to her age. The school, which was represented by a solicitor and barrister during the Equality Tribunal process, alleged that the question asked was: "Can you offer the selection committee a brief outline as to why you feel, at this stage in your career, that you are the most suitable candidate for the position of principal?". The school also stated that this question had been put to all of the candidates for the position. However, the Equality Officer stated that: "While the respondent submitted that the same questions were asked of all candidates, the question could have had a different significance for each of the candidates depending on the particular stage of their careers at which they found themselves". Speaking to ASTIR, Mary stated that while she felt she did a good interview for the post, she was thrown by this question and "grappled" with her answer. After the interview, while she felt positive about her performance, she also felt that something wrong had happened. She sought information from the Board but, unhappy with their response,

she ultimately decided to take a case against the school. "It was not pleasant. I found it daunting, but I thought, if I don't say that this is not okay, then I am saying that it is okay," she told ASTIR. Mary told the Equality Tribunal that she was not questioned on her experience or the role of principal in the school. This, together with the age-related question, led her to believe that her age meant that her application for the post was not being taken seriously. In its response to this claim, Mercy Mean Scoil Mhuire told the Equality Tribunal that the interview records "demonstrate clearly that this is not accurate". However, the ASTI argued that as the school had failed to retain the interview notes taken and marks awarded at the interview, Mary was left in an impossible position in that she could not challenge marks or comments that were no longer in existence. The Equality Officer found that: "One of the interview board members submitted that the questions on the post of principal related to the general position of principal and not solely to the post of principal of the school in issue". The Equality Officer added that the very limited notes submitted by the school to the Tribunal indicated that while the complainant was questioned on the role of principal it was unclear whether she was asked about her experience. "The very limited notes retained by the respondent make it difficult for the respondent to rebut the complainant's claim," said the Equality Officer.

"It was not pleasant. I found it daunting, but I thought, if I don't say that this is not okay, then I am saying that it is okay."

Change in marking procedure

During the Equality Officer's investigation of the complaint, it also emerged that the marking of candidates for the post of principal under a specific criterion was changed shortly before the interviews took place. The Equality Officer concluded that: "While there may have been an attempt to level the playing field, the amendments made to the marking sheet prior to the interviews indicate that the successful candidate's application was uppermost in the interviewers' minds".

Interview notes

Excellent
 Good
 Fair

The Equality Officer concluded that, taking all of the facts into account, the school had failed to rebut Mary's claim of discrimination. "I therefore find on the balance of probabilities that the respondent discriminated against the complainant on the age ground in relation to the post of principal in 2004." As well as ordering the school to pay €10,000 in compensation to Mary for the effects of the discrimination, the Equality Officer ordered the Board of Management to "adhere to good practice selection procedures in all future promotions, including applying a formal marking system agreed prior to any consideration of CVs, ranking candidates by reference to that marking system and retaining all notes".

Lessons for schools

ASTI Assistant General Secretary Pat King says the outcome of the Equality Officer's investigation contains a lesson for all schools. "It emphasises how important it is for boards of management to ensure that their recruitment processes comply fully with employment legislation.



Mary Francis O'Conghaile

"It also highlights the importance of orderly and transparent recruitment and interview procedures, including the need for proper record keeping and the retention of the individual notes and marking sheets of each member of an interview board." Pat King added that central to the case was the issue of a question put to candidates: "It is clear from the outcome that the onus is on the interview board to ensure that questions are neither discriminatory nor open to misinterpretation."

Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013

The Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission offers funding for a range of activities for schools and teachers.



These include:

Comenius In-Service Training
training for staff involved in school education
Deadlines: 31 March; 30 June; 30 September
www.leargas.ie/education/comenius/comenius_ist.html

Comenius School Partnerships
pupils, students and staff from schools across Europe working together on joint projects
www.leargas.ie/education/comenius/index.html

Comenius Assistantships
encouraging intercultural awareness and language learning
www.leargas.ie/education/comenius/clah.html

Contact Seminars and Preparatory Visits
opportunities to meet potential project partners and prepare for partnerships
www.leargas.ie/education/seminars.html

Study Visits
networking opportunities for education and vocational training specialists
www.leargas.ie/education/tp/studyvisits.html

If you are interested in finding out more about these or any other activities under the Lifelong Learning Programme, please contact us at: Léargas, 189 Parnell Street, Dublin 1 (01) 873 14 11 or visit: www.leargas.ie/education





Voice care

Teachers are paying increasing attention to the issue of voice care. BRIGID FITZGERALD investigates.

Teaching is an occupation that relies heavily on vocal communication and often requires that the voice be used for continuous and long periods of time. As such, a teacher's voice is a valuable asset, but one that can be put under a lot of strain during the working day. The number of teachers expressing interest in recent ASTI vocal fitness seminars indicates that voice care is an issue of increasing concern to teachers. This is a positive trend, as a lack of awareness and training, coupled with the nature of the job, means that teachers are at a high risk of developing voice disorders at some point in their careers. Voice problems generally manifest themselves in symptoms such as hoarseness or broken voice, inability to raise the voice, lowered pitch and vocal tract discomfort.

Prevention is better than cure

Teachers use their voices more every day than most professions – cumulatively about 75 minutes each day, according to VHI. Additionally, they have little time for vocal rest or recovery, and are exposed to sore throats, viruses and other illnesses throughout the working day. These illnesses and their secondary symptoms have an effect on the voice. Any infection should be taken seriously and treated medically to lessen the duration and avoid further infection. Dry or cold air can often contribute to throat or vocal irritation, and it is important to drink plenty of water if speaking for long periods.

Teachers who teach large classes or in large classrooms may struggle to make themselves heard over classroom noise. When managing your class, consider practical aspects that may conserve your voice, such as location, grouping, concise phrasing and visual communication. Where possible, avoiding speaking over noise, reduce unnecessary noise and bring students closer to you rather than trying to make your voice

stretch – vocal strain is a chief cause of vocal damage. John Daly runs voice training seminars for teachers, giving practical advice on how to use the voice without damaging it. John says that voice fitness is a big issue for teachers and training is vital to ensure that teachers can avoid developing voice problems. He believes that this should be an integral part of teacher training: "A one-hour lecture is not enough. It should be every week so that teachers know what to do at the end of it. It should be ongoing". According to John, the amount of time spent talking each day, together with stress and a lack of training, leads to misuse of the voice. He breaks this misuse into a number of categories: speaking at the wrong pitch, shouting, bad posture and improper breathing.

John has found that many teachers speak in a monotone voice and their pitch is often too low, which puts strain on the voice. Every person has an optimum pitch level at which their voice is most efficient, and which requires the least amount of effort. Many of the voice disorders encountered by teachers occur as a result of excessive effort during speech and John advises teachers to do exercises to determine their correct pitch. Vocal training reinforces and develops the natural range of voice skills and this is of benefit to teachers, not only from a health perspective, but also in improving their communication skills. According to John: "Breath is the fuel for the voice. Teachers need to learn to breathe properly, improve their posture and become relaxed. If you are not relaxed in the classroom your voice will be affected, your whole body will be affected". Breathing should be rhythmic and relaxed and it is important to pause during speech to allow time to breathe. Any imbalance in posture can affect breathing and increase levels of tension. Teachers should aim for easy alignment of the head, neck and upper body.

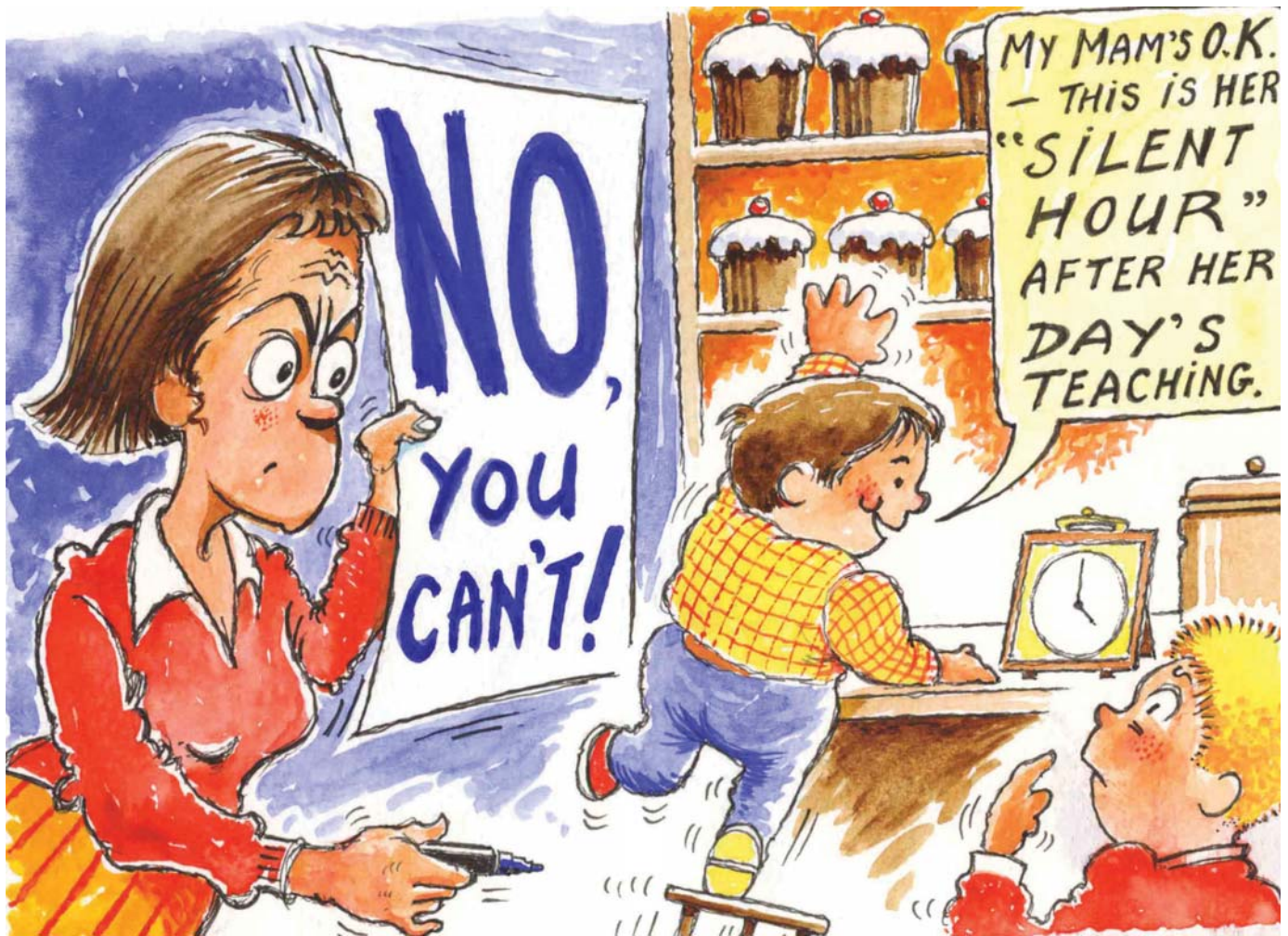


Illustration by John Brennan.

Recognising the problem

According to one teacher currently experiencing chronic voice problems, including pain and voice loss: "The voice is delicate and it is important to recognise that voice problems are serious and cannot be ignored". This teacher identifies her initial failure to recognise her symptoms as a significant contributor to her current condition. At first attributing her repeated sore throats and voice loss to infection or tiredness, she continued to work despite her discomfort. Speaking while suffering from a sore throat or hoarseness can cause irreparable damage to the voice and diminish vocal range and flexibility. This teacher stresses that: "One of the important things is not to ignore the symptoms, rest your voice, attend a speech therapist and get information on what to do and what not to do".

Young teachers in particular may feel obliged to talk more than is necessary during lessons.

If you are consistently hoarse or have sore throats, you should consult your GP and, if necessary, arrange a consultation with a specialist. Voice problems are usually curable but certain voice conditions can only be alleviated through voice/speech therapy.

Silence is golden

Vocal rest is vital for both prevention and recovery. John Daly urges teachers to have a period of silence after class, or to take an hour in the evening when they don't speak at all. He has noticed that a lot of young teachers are attending seminars and is concerned that young teachers in particular may feel obliged to talk more than is necessary during lessons. He

encourages teachers to "mix the lessons; have some talk, some written work and some practical work. Experienced teachers may know this, but younger ones have to learn it". Rest and relaxation is also vital for recovery and it is important that this vocal rest is true rest, as forced whispering can cause damage and should be avoided.

Vocal fitness must be taken seriously by teachers and their employers. The ASTI hopes that the occupational health service for teachers, currently in development, will offer assistance and advice relating to vocal health. Management should ensure that risks to the voice are minimised. To this end, voice care in-service seminars on the subject should be considered because, while awareness is important, practical training in breathing and vocal techniques is vital. It is important to find out what measures will help to prevent problems developing and, if a problem does develop, it is key that it is recognised, taken seriously and treated. Your voice is your tool; you cannot afford to lose it!

Further information

ASTI runs a 'Vocal fitness for teachers' course as part of our professional development in-service programme. Look out for notices in ASTIR and Nuacht, and on our website – www.asti.ie.

VHI have practical voice care advice for teachers on their website – www.vhi.ie.

The Voice Care Network UK offers advice for teachers and other occupational voice users, and has a number of publications available for purchase at www.vcnmembers.co.uk.

If you would like to respond to this article, email feedback@asti.ie.

Facing the final hurdle

GERRY MacRUAIRC offers some advice on the crucial final stages of writing a thesis.



The purpose of this, the final article in the series of three, is to explore some aspects of the final stages of thesis completion. Coming to the end of the road with a thesis requires considerable effort on the part of even the most resilient of individuals. When you think that you have nothing left to give, you are required to go that extra mile. You have been with this thesis for what seems like forever and really you have nothing left to say. All you want is for someone to take the thesis away from you, finish it and hand it in. But hang in there; the quality of the finish is vital to the overall standard of your work. It is necessary, therefore, to dig deep, find your reserves and go for it!

The final chapter

When writing the final chapter of your thesis you need to be at your best in terms of quality writing, insight, clarity and coherence. It is here that all your work has to come together. The final chapter provides the author with the opportunity to reflect on the findings of the research and interpret them in the context of the objectives of the study, and the literature and theory explored in the first part of the thesis. It is vital not to rush this and to be aware from the start that time set aside for the concluding chapter is sacred. I usually recommend allowing three weeks to write and edit this part. It is time well spent and is often the part of the thesis that, when finished, brings the most satisfaction. When you have finished you will have a sense that it has all come together; in most cases you can actually feel this happening as you are structuring and writing the chapter.

In the final chapter, the most salient findings of the research are drawn out and highlighted explicitly. It provides the author with the opportunity to defend the research, and assess its merits and the overall contribution that the work makes to the area being examined. What are required here, as one of my colleagues in UCD states, are "strong coherent arguments

firmly grounded in the data" (Murtagh, 2007). It is also important to outline and discuss the perceived limitations of the research and critique the extent to which these limitations have impacted on the outcomes. This is not a time to attack your study. Instead, it is a time to indicate that you have reflected on the process you have been through and are aware that there are limitations; however, you stand over your findings. In this regard, it is important to be careful not to make statements or claims that are not supported by the data. Authors should also be careful not to force or massage the claims they make to make the overall argument fit together neatly. Coherence is important, but the integrity of the work is also essential. Final chapters typically conclude by outlining implications or recommendations, or both, depending on what emerges from the research and what final message the author wishes to send. This is also where you get to say what has become a bit of a cliché: 'Further research is needed in this area!'

One last look

As you are completing the final draft of your thesis, there are a number of factors to keep in mind. You need to ensure that you work reads fluently. You should make sure that the structure of each section is logical. Sections need to flow from one to the other and the judicious use of summaries at the end of sections, and indication of what is coming up, will contribute to overall coherence. The whole idea of writing critically is something that you should have been developing throughout your postgraduate work. As you review your work, make sure that this active engagement involving questioning, evaluating, making judgments, finding connections and categorising, is evident throughout your work. This will give the overall product a definite edge. Then, just when you think it's all over, you have to write a 500-word overview of your thesis – the abstract. All of this in 500 words?: they must be mad! The following format may help you as you

approach this task. An abstract is a self-contained summary and should be written in simple, clear and understandable language. It should not reference the main body of the work but, typically, should begin by describing the purpose of the study and, in some cases, referring briefly to the rationale of the study. This should be followed by a very brief overview of the methodology. The final section should describe the main findings of the research and refer to the contribution your research makes to the field. Keep it simple, keep the sentences short and avoid any development of the points you are making.

Some final tips

Outlined below are a number of what I hope are helpful hints that may support you in your work at this time. Microsoft Word is really a great resource if you know how to exploit it. One excellent feature is the table of contents facility. Assign a heading style to each heading you use in your text. Then go to the tool bar, click on 'reference', click 'index and tables', click 'table of contents', make sure that headings one, two and three are included in the list, and then click 'insert table of contents'. Hey presto, you have a perfectly formed table of contents on your first page, with page numbers all in the right place.

Checking your bibliography can be a real chore. If you are using the Harvard style of referencing, one way to do this is to print out your bibliography and, with this hard copy in front of you, go to the toolbar, click 'find' and insert a bracket into the 'find' box. This will lead you systematically through all your references and you can tick them off as you go.

Formatting problems like splitting tables between pages or the odd single sentence at the top of a page can be stressful. Check through your thesis for all of these issues, fix what needs to be fixed and then save the document as a PDF file. A PDF file will ensure that everything stays in place and you can then print it from this version.

Ah yes, the printer. Printers have an uncanny knack of being a bit cantankerous if you wait to print until the night before, so give the printer scope for a margin of error and make sure that you have a few days' contingency built into your timeline for this final phase of the research.

And now for the good bit. As you head into the university with your hardbound work you cannot help but feel a bit proud of what you have done. This is a great personal achievement and all that is left for you to do is ... celebrate!



Dr Gerry MacRuairc

Dr Gerry MacRuairc is Director of Masters' Studies in Education in the School of Education and Lifelong Learning, University College Dublin.

APPRECIATION

Mary Geary (1929-2006)

Mary Geary was an inspirational teacher and an educator par excellence. Her dedication was total and her commitment life long. She was extremely well read both in English and in her beloved Irish, and she recalled with enormous affection summers spent with her family, colleagues and pupils at Brú na Gráige in the West Kerry Gaeltacht.

Mary's teaching career began in the UK in 1950 where she taught in a private Catholic school. She returned to Cork and married Pat, and was a full time mother, devoted to Lís, Donncha, Máire and Dara.

Her next professional challenge came when the Presentation Sisters opened a 'Secondary Top' in Ballyphehane in 1966. The 'Secondary Top' was established to cater for students who wished to continue their education further than primary level and who were unable to do so because there was no secondary school within a reasonable distance. The Inter was taken after two years and the Leaving after four. It was innovative, challenging and had potential – perfect for Mary and other teachers like her. Mary began to employ new methodologies such as theme and team teaching, and extended the curriculum. This aspect of Mary's career drew her eventually to work with the Shannon Curriculum Development Programme, where she played a pivotal role in devising the Social Environmental Studies Programme (SESP) and the Senior Cert. It was a time for new ideas in a new Ireland. Mary was a woman of vision who thought and taught outside the box, and encouraged her pupils to do likewise. Anything that improved the educational development of her pupils was worth doing and was at least worth a try. For example, she introduced a type of part-time transition year programme for the fifth years, incorporating the study of cultures and languages such as Japanese and Arabic, promoted an annual arts week for senior students, and encouraged debating and public speaking. She was a woman of vision, and this is surely evident when we look at the Transition Year programmes in our schools today. She had a vision for the young ladies of Ballyphehane, many of whom have since excelled in journalism, law, arts, music, science, medicine, education, business and commerce.

Mary welcomed and encouraged young teachers, and was delighted as they achieved their potential, especially if they were past pupils. The warmth of the staffroom was commented upon by anyone who crossed the threshold when 'Mrs G' was there. Her welcoming words, her sense of fun and of course the 'cuppa' were never too much trouble. When the Curriculum Development Units were set up in Trinity College and Shannon Comprehensive School, Mary was by then Deputy Principal. She and her principal, Sr Maura Ward, delighted in the SESP, which linked geography, history, civics and ecology in the Junior Cert. With Sr Maura's strong support, students were studying from authentic documents as opposed to rote learning from textbooks. Her commitment to a wider learning brought her students to appreciate theatre and film. She encouraged art, music and drama in the school. She would have been so proud to see the official blessing and opening of the school theatre in 2006. (In fact, Mary died on the day scheduled for the first performance). D'éag Máire ar an 5ú lá i mí na Nollag 2006. Ar dheis lámh Dé go raibh a hanam uasal. Méala mór a bás dá clann uilig agus dá cáirde go léir. Molann a hobair í.

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Múinteoirí Gaeilge - Tá Spleodar, óg-eagrais a ritheann cúrsaí i nGaeltacht Chonamara, ag lorg iarratais do phostanna mar mhúinteoirí don samhraidh seo. Tuilleadh eolais faoi dátaí, cáilíochtaí agus rátaí pá a fháil ó eolas@spleodar.com.

Coláiste na Mumhan, Béal-Átha'n Ghaorthaidh, Co. Chorcaí. Idirlíon: togealbain@eircom.net. Folúntais do Mhúinteoirí Gaeilge le linn cúrsaí Samhraidh 2008. Gach eolas ó Tadhg Ó Gealbáin. Uimh teil: 026-47071, 086-3338688.

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Dublin North West Branch



Paula Bigley and Mary Ohle pictured at ASTI Education Conference.

Who's who:

| | |
|-------------------------|----------------------|
| Chairperson: | Gerard Curtin |
| Vice Chairperson: | Colm J O'Gara |
| Secretary: | Maria McGee |
| Treasurer: | Mary Ohle |
| Equality Officer: | Bernadine O'Sullivan |
| Organiser: | Paula Bigley |
| Standing Committee Rep: | Christy Maginn |

Branch size: 629 members.

Giving teachers a voice

At the moment, the Benchmarking Report and teachers' pay and conditions are among the issues often discussed at branch meetings. The length of the salary scale is a concern for younger teachers. Initially, new members are relieved to have secured a job, but changes in the working conditions of young teachers, particularly in the area of pensions and contributions, is an issue that is coming under more and more scrutiny at meetings. We would like to see lobbying on this issue at a national level, as part of benchmarking negotiations.



Christy Maginn.



Bernadine O'Sullivan.

Discipline in schools is never too far from the agenda as it impacts on the working conditions of so many of our members. There is concern that the National Behavioural Support Service (NBSS) has not yet been rolled out on a national basis. Branch members are at a loss to understand this, and there is a feeling among members that the issue needs to be tackled, and that a more focused policy on discipline in schools is necessary.

Meetings

Meetings are held once a month, except during December, and as often as is necessary after that. They are held at eight o'clock in the Halfway House on the Navan Road and alternate between Tuesday and Wednesday nights. We usually get a good turnout.

Activities

We organise a social function each year, usually in September, for school stewards and branch officers, which proves very enjoyable for all involved. The branch also runs a retirement function every two years and this has proven to be very popular with our retired teachers. We plan to hold this function again this year, probably during May.

Branch history

We are very fortunate to have two former presidents among our membership, namely Louis O'Flaherty and Bernadine O'Sullivan. Both continue to play a very active role both at branch level and at national level. Louis is president of the RSTA and continues to make a huge contribution to that organisation. Bernadine is involved in the Teaching Council and is also highly involved in issues relating to public sector pensions. Christy Maginn is a member of Standing Committee and is involved in the Teaching Council.

If your branch would like to feature in ASTIR, please email astir@asti.ie.



Noticeboard

Union of Secondary Students AGM

The Union of Secondary Students (USS) is holding its Annual General Meeting on Wednesday, March 19, in the Department of Education, Marlborough Street, Dublin 1. The union is inviting all second-level students who want to have a say in their education to attend. The AGM will include debates on issues of concern to students, elections to the USS Board and presentations from guest speakers. Teachers are also invited to attend and are asked to encourage students to attend. Information packs have been sent to all schools. See www.uss.ie for full details.

Recent publication

Curriculum Matters in Ireland by Anton Trant examines curriculum innovation in Ireland over the past 40 years, including the role played by teachers' unions in the assessment of pilot projects. Drawing on his own experiences as a teacher, Trant looks at the essential elements of curriculum, and the teacher's central role in interpreting and communicating these.

Would you like to write a textbook?

The Educational Company is seeking proposals in all subject areas. If you are interested in submitting a proposal, please send your details to Michele Staunton/Robert Healy, Commissioning Editors, The Educational Company, Ballymount Road, Walkinstown, Dublin 12, or Email: mstaunton@edco.ie and/or rhealy@edco.ie. For further information on submitting a proposal, visit www.edco.ie/help/publishing.asp.

LCA social education resource

Teachers of social education may be interested in a new resource pack offered by the Financial Regulator. The pack is designed to support the account options unit of social education and to help students to do their own research into services offered by different financial institutions. Developed with the support of the SLSS, the resource also includes information for students to support the teaching of other units in module 6 of social education. Copies of the pack are available by phoning 01-4104916/01-4104816, or by emailing education@financialregulator.ie.

International student resource

The Community Links School Integration Project has developed resources for teachers working with international students, including information on 27 countries, information on working with migrant children in the classroom, and letter templates translated into 10 languages. These resources are available for download at www.irs.ie.

BOI Millennium Scholars Trust

The Bank of Ireland Millennium Scholars Trust is now accepting applications for its creative/performing arts category 2008. Scholarships are awarded to individuals who, because of economic circumstance or other barriers such as disability, are prevented from reaching their full potential. The closing date for receipt of applications for third level has now passed but applications in the creative/performing arts category will be taken until April 1, and can be downloaded from www.bankofireland.com or www.ncril.ie.

Student driving course

Former rally driver Rosemary Smith runs a Think-Awareness Driving School, which offers driving courses for Transition Year and second-level students. Young drivers are taught to drive in a safe and controlled environment. No provisional licence or previous experience is required. For further information, Tel: 01-2956570, Email: rsdriving@eircom.net, or visit www.rosemarysmithdriving.com.

Special needs education conference

The Department of Special Education in Mary Immaculate College is holding its sixth annual one-day conference on Thursday April 24, 2008. The conference, entitled 'Effective Teaching and Learning in Special Education', will focus on practical strategies for teachers working with students with special educational needs and their parents. The speakers will be Professor William Heward (Ohio State University) and Professor Jill Dardig (Ohio Dominican University). For further details contact Sheila O'Callaghan on 061-204563 or Email: sheila.ocallaghan@mic.ul.ie.

IFI education programme

The Irish Film Institute (IFI) has released its education programme for spring/summer 2008. As part of this, the IFI hold screenings of films in Irish, French, German and Spanish alongside Leaving Cert English titles, new Irish films and documentaries. More information can be found on www.ifi.ie or by phoning 01-6795744 or emailing schools@irishfilm.ie.

Poetry on the radio

Former teacher Seamus Hosey is currently producing a poetry programme for RTÉ Radio 1. The programme, which may be of interest to teachers and students of English or Irish, is aired each Saturday and offers readings as well as review and discussion of poetry.

Listowel Writers Week

Listowel Writers Week runs from May 28 to June 1. Courses include creative writing, poetry, popular fiction, and writing for theatre. The programme also includes a number of literary competitions, some of which are open to second-level students. More information can be found at www.writersweek.ie, or by phoning 068-21074.

Profile of a home school community liaison co-ordinator



MICHAEL MOYNIHAN is the home school community liaison co-ordinator at North Monastery CBS, Cork City. He provides an overview of the work he is involved in there.

Having spent 34 years at the coalface in North Monastery CBS in Cork, teaching Irish, history and Latin, and convinced that there is a strong correlation between parental involvement in their children's education and success in school, I decided to apply for the position of home school community liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator when it became vacant six years ago. When I was appointed, with great trepidation I wondered: "Oh my God, what have I done"? I felt alone, guilty for walking out of the classroom, and jobless – that is, until I went to my week-long inspirational in-service in Marino College. The 'party line' was given and gradually it all began to make sense. I was not to be alone; I would be working closely with my esteemed colleagues in the 'family cluster', aided and abetted by other city and county co-ordinators. Guilt would not feature, as a challenging mission lay ahead. As co-ordinators, all of our initiatives were to be focused on adults – especially on parents and teachers – not on children, but they would impinge indirectly on children's lives. These initiatives are concerned with promoting parents' education (especially that of the most marginalised), development, growth and involvement through organising courses and classes, which varied from leisure time activities to curricular activities to personal development courses, including parenting, leadership skills and involvement in formal learning. Thus, in a word, parents can become a 'resource' – for their own children, to us as co-ordinators, and also as support persons in the community.

The local committee

HSCL co-ordinators are responsible for setting up and maintaining a local committee. The purpose of the local committee is to identify school-related issues at community level that impinge on learning, and to seek to address these issues by working collaboratively with other interest groups. Examples of such issues are school attendance, substance abuse, anti-bullying, transfer programmes, homework support, and health and environmental issues. Issues identified at local community level often become part of the policy-making process between parents, teachers, pupils and community personnel. The strength of the local committee is indeed partnership in action.

Networking

Apart from local committee, HSCL co-ordinators liaise with various voluntary and statutory bodies and groups within the community, and encourage a cohesive delivery of service in relation to parents, teachers and the community, all in the interest of the pupils. The HSCL scheme's philosophy recognises that the school on its own cannot effect meaningful change but that it can, working collaboratively with other interest groups, alleviate the problems associated with educational disadvantage. We must remember that pupils are not only members of families and schools, they

are also part of community groups, churches, teams, clubs and gangs. An integrated approach means recognising all the influences at work, and aiming to bring coherence to the multiple messages young people receive.

Home visitation

My favourite aspect of HSCL is home visitation, for which we must have a systematic approach. Home visitation is a purposeful outreach dimension of the HSCL to parents. It is both a symbolic and a real expression of interest in families, many of whom have been alienated from the educational system in the past. During visits we:

- seek to establish trust and a rapport with parents;
- support parents in the education of their children;
- offer information about the services available in the community;
- endeavour to show the welcoming, hopeful and human face of the school;
- seek out potential parent leaders who are willing to participate in the HSCL scheme's activities, e.g., maths for fun, family literacy, etc.;
- aim to help parents express their fears around approaching school; and,
- seek to break down negative attitudes among parents towards schools and schooling.

Ever sensitive to the needs of the parents/guardians, we aim to be non-threatening and friendly. Encouragement is the key word in home visitation. There is a deep awareness that we are there for the good of the family and we offer support and gently encourage parents into the school.

"But how is it for you"?

Every Monday morning I produce a plan for the week, but it rarely pans out. I juggle my time between attending meetings, making phone calls, doing home visits, having informal chats with parents, liaising with my principal, school colleagues and school completion programme personnel (with whom we work closely in our attempts to prevent early school leaving), and of course being constantly briefed by our invaluable school secretary, who keeps me on my toes.

If you are toying with the idea of joining the HSCL team, do not be put off. While the role is challenging, it is refreshing and rewarding. If you have an understanding of disadvantage (which will be with us for the foreseeable future), if you wish to support parents as primary educators of their children, if your people skills mean that you can be the friendly and human face of the school and, above all, if you can empathise with the marginalised, then go for it. Join the HSCL scheme and be an agent of change.



ASTIR CROSSWORD NO. 0802

€200 prize for the first fully correct answer drawn from the entries.

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If you wish to keep your copy of *ASTIR* intact you may send a photocopy of the crossword. One entry only per member.

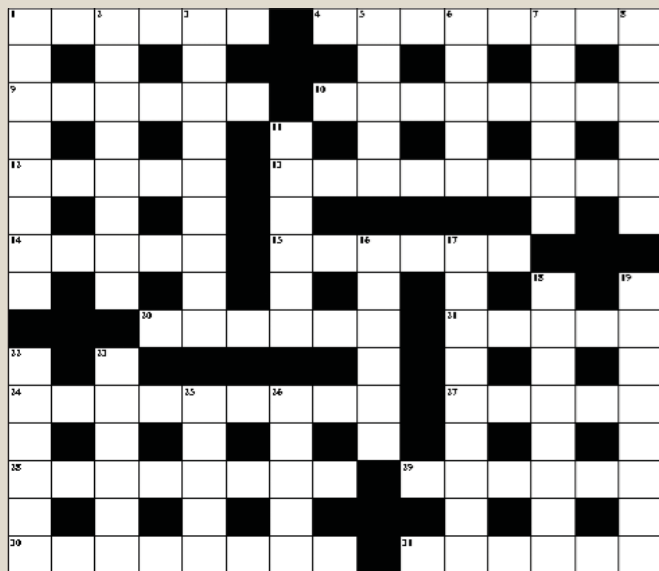
Name

School

Address

ASTI Branch

Entries to: **Astir Crossword No. 0802, Think Media,
The Malthouse, 537 NCR, Dublin 1.**
To arrive by: **Friday, April 4, 2008.**



CLUES ACROSS

- 1 Absorb or take in liquid (6)
- 4 A leaflet "... at Work – ASTI Advice" published in September 2005 (8)
- 9 Jaguar family lookalike? (6)
- 10 Mercs are hardly an example of one making a short, sharp cry (8)
- 12 Released and alleviated (5)
- 13 Man Booker Prize 2007, "The ..." (9)
- 14 Become gaga trying to get the last letter (5)
- 15 Logic-based number puzzle (6)
- 20 Did act obsessively (6)
- 21 Nine across might sleep in one of these (5)
- 24 Usually linked with series, mathematically speaking (9)
- 27 Confuse a dead learner (5)
- 28 'tis plain that the aircraft is in a steep spiral (8)
- 29 Can't it be entire or untouched? (6)
- 30 "Hold infinity in the palm of your hand ... in an hour" (Blake) (8)
- 31 Calypso and Daphne are examples (6)

CLUES DOWN

- 1 You, Olive, append a novel by Irish writer (1, 4, 3)
- 2 "But if not mine dear girl oh, Snowy ... Pearl" (8)
- 3 Most schools now have this high-speed communications network (9)
- 5 Overrun cutbacks are not diluted (5)
- 6 Could this Belgian city have the right to feudal service? (5)
- 7 "Whose woods/these are/I think/I know" is an example of an ... line of verse" (6)
- 8 O'Gara gears up where he has his car (6)
- 11 American tennis player, winner of eight Grand Slams and an Olympic gold medal (6)
- 16 Loathe to be tested (6)
- 17 Venue for ASTI Convention in March? (9)

- 18 Poem by John Montague prescribed for Leaving Cert 2008 (8)
- 19 There are very strict regulations on its use, repair and removal in Ireland (8)
- 22 Double SET for this bloodsucking insect (6)
- 23 You might call the owner of a country estate by this name (6)
- 25 This Act provides for the provision of education for students with special needs (5)
- 26 A trustee body for voluntary secondary schools (5)

Congratulations to the winner of Crossword No. 0801:

Crena Shevlin, St Raphaela's Secondary, Stillorgan, Co. Dublin.

Solution to ASTIR crossword No. 0801

| Across | | Down | |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1. Limped | 22. Avocado | 2. Inmates | 18. Viola |
| 5. Canape | 23. Docile | 3. PISA | 20. Eve |
| 10. Nemesis | 25. Sleuth | 4. Dishes | 21. LDS |
| 11. Gestapo | 28. DES | 5. Cognac | 23. Dvorak |
| 12. RSTA | 30. OECD | 6. NCSE | 24. Cocaine |
| 13. FETAC | 31. Torts | 7. Platoon | 26. Umbrage |
| 15. CORI | 32. NBSS | 8. Snared | 27. Hissed |
| 17. SEC | 35. Aniseed | 9. Soviet | 28. Doodle |
| 19. Desire | 36. Radiate | 14. Teacher | 29. Stared |
| 21. Linnets | 37. Pebble | 16. Orals | 33. NEWB |
| | 38. Drivel | | 34. SDPI |



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- Repayable over 12 months
- No administration fees

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(typical apr) - variable

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- No administration fees

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(typical apr) - variable

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- No administration fees

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