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ASTI
A century of service

ASTIR

Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland



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The ASTIR Editorial Board is interested in receiving feedback on ASTIR.

Members can email astirfeedback@asti.ie or text 087-9349956.



TEACHERS RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

When I wrote about teachers' workload and well-being in the March edition of *ASTIR*, little did I realise the tsunami that was about to impact on us in the form of the global Covid-19 pandemic. The world of post-primary education was turned on its head on March 12 with the announcement of school closures. In many cases, this came with no or at best minimal planning, huge lack of technological infrastructure (hardware, software, connectivity) for teachers, and in the vast majority of cases no professional training for teachers to prepare them for the incredible demands that are now part of their working lives. The ASTI survey on remote teaching and learning provides further evidence of the shortfall around ICT in our system.

Teachers have risen magnificently to the enormous challenge that was placed before them, but at a significant price. We have done this alongside our commitments to our loved and in some cases vulnerable family members, to home schooling, to elderly and frail parents, and to supporting family frontline workers or those who are out of work. We have shown ourselves to be true professionals, putting the needs of our students, particularly our exam years, to the fore. We are teaching our students and supporting their needs to the best of our ability under horrendous circumstances and thereby playing our part in the national effort at this time of global crisis.

Throughout this crisis, extensive consultation has taken place with our members through our national structures – Standing Committee, CEC, branch officers, school stewards – and through Head Office. Well over 3,500 members have given their views. This engagement has been hugely important, particularly after the recent announcements re the Junior and Leaving Certificate Examinations, which were taken on the advice of the National Public Health Expert Team. These consultations have informed Standing Committee in making its decisions on behalf of the membership and in formulating what is necessary to protect and support our members as they finalise work with third-year students and engage with the calculated grade process so that Leaving Certificate students can move on to the next phase of their lives. These are difficult times and difficult decisions. What is being undertaken is on the basis that no precedent is being set; it is a once-off enterprise due to the Covid-19 crisis.

The importance of the collective good over individualism has been demonstrated like never before by this crisis. As a trade union we have always believed this and operated to maximise the health, safety and welfare of our members, and to protect the evolution of the education system that we hold in high esteem. Teachers are advocates for their students and the ASTI advocates on behalf of second-level teachers. I call on all our members to encourage any colleagues who are not members of our union to join now; there has never been a greater need to be part of a collective in order to stay safe and mentally healthy. We are Stronger Together.



Deirdre Mac Donald

ASTI President

REOPENING SCHOOLS – AN ENORMOUS CHALLENGE!

The recently announced plan for reopening the country, commencing on May 18, envisages that schools will reopen in September. Given the social distancing and hygiene requirements, to name just two, it will be an enormous challenge.

From an ASTI perspective, the base point in our discussions with the Department of Education and Skills and other stakeholders for getting our schools up and running again will be the protocol that has been agreed by the Government, unions and employers for reopening workplaces.

Schools are workplaces in the first instance, but because they are central to the education of our students, the enormity of the task will be multiplied exponentially. It is welcome that the Health and Safety Authority will have a central role to play in the oversight and enforcement of the provisions of the Covid-19 *National Return to Work Safely Protocol* as the statutory body charged with ensuring that the safety, health and welfare of workers is protected in the workplace.

It is clear that significant caution in any consideration of reopening schools must be exercised. There is a very real risk of creating a spike in the transmission of the virus by a premature opening of schools. We will be guided by the advice of the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET) on these matters at all times. It has been argued in other jurisdictions that a critical tool in preventing a surge of infection is an established capacity to “test, trace and isolate”. It is also clear to all that schools can only reopen and operate safely if there are significant operational changes in place to ensure effective social distancing, strong hygiene routines linked to thorough cleansing practices, appropriate PPE available where required, and ongoing risk assessments to monitor operations. Workplaces and schools look set to change beyond all recognition. It may be the case that schools cannot reopen as normal and a phased return will be required. Priorities may have to be established around attendance, which could be part time for most pupils.

The ASTI recognises that children from poor and challenged backgrounds and vulnerable children will inevitably require significant additional support as we move slowly back towards normality. In light of all that has happened, the initial focus will have to be on the health, well-being, and emotional resilience of our students. Teachers have played their part in no small measure in the societal response to Covid-19. It will be important that the Department of Education and Skills consults and engages extensively with the ASTI and other stakeholders in this vital matter. The Department must demonstrate a commitment to the health and safety not only of pupils but of teachers also (recognising that many of them may well have suffered stress and trauma as well as their pupils), and listen to and respect their collective expertise as practitioners and professionals before arriving at decisions. It will be crucial that teachers and students are confident that they can return to school safely. They need to be satisfied that all measures are being taken to safeguard their health, safety and well-being, and that of their families, to whom they will return at the end of their day. This is an unprecedented public health emergency requiring unprecedented responses.



Kieran Christie

ASTI General Secretary

Remote teaching – am I insured?

Among the many questions received by ASTI Head Office during the Covid-19 school closure period is: “As an employee, am I covered by my school’s insurance/indemnity while working remotely?”

The ASTI has engaged with the management bodies for schools on the question of insurance arrangements in the context of teachers. All of the management bodies stated that they had had some engagement with relevant insurers in their sector. All have indicated that the typical policies extend to cover the home working of school employees. Teachers should follow best practice/guidelines as they would in normal operational settings, and that remains the rule in these changed circumstances.

In the case of community and comprehensive schools, these are indemnified by the State. The indemnity states that: “The State shall indemnify the Board and the teaching and non-teaching staff in respect of actions, claims or demands taken or made against them arising out of the discharge of their duties whether in respect of pupils or otherwise”.

This is one of the many FAQs covered on the Covid-19 section of the ASTI website. Other questions include:

- When will schools re-open?
- Is there any tax credit I can claim for additional expenses related to remote working?

And much more. See www.asti.ie.

New ASTI website – make sure you can log in

The ASTI’s new and improved website will be launching later this year. The new website will have enhanced functionality including allowing members to log in and update their details and communication preferences, save important articles, book events and more!

To make sure you can log in and access your account on the new website when it launches in late August/early September, please update your email address with the ASTI if necessary. This may especially apply to those with free Eircom email addresses that are no longer active, those who supplied a college email address when joining, which they no longer use, or those who did not supply any email address when joining the union.

Email membership@asti.ie with your correct contact details by mid July to make sure that you can log in and get the most from the new ASTI website.



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- M Ed in Educational Leadership and Management
- M Oid san Oideachas Lán-Ghaeilge agus Gaeltachta
- MA in Education and the Arts (META)
- MA in Education and Well-being of the Older Person
- MA in STEM Education
- MA in Music Education
- Graduate Diploma / M Ed in Adult and Further Education
- Graduate Diploma / M Ed in Information and Communication Technologies in Primary Education
- Graduate Diploma / M Ed in Special Education Needs
- Graduate Certificate / Diploma / M Ed in Professional Studies in Education
- Graduate Certificate/Graduate Diploma/M Ed in Middle Leadership and Mentoring in Primary and Post-Primary Settings
- Graduate Certificate in Autism Studies

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- Structured PhD in Applied Linguistics
- Structured PhD in Contemporary Irish Studies
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- MA in Modern English Literature
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PhD & MA BY RESEARCH AND THESIS IN THE FOLLOWING LIBERAL ARTS DEPARTMENTS

Drama and Theatre Studies; English Language & Literature; French Studies; Gaelic; German Studies; Geography; History; Mathematics and Computer Studies; Media & Communication Studies; Music; Philosophy; Psychology; Theology and Religious Studies.



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Dublin North West Branch retirement function



A Dublin North West Branch retirement function took place in the Gresham Hotel on March 5. Pictured are (from left): Front row: John Huggard (retiree, The King's Hospital School, Palmerstown), Helen O'Reilly, Paula Bigley (retiree, St Michael's Finglas), Ger Curtin (retiree, Beneavin College Finglas), Louis O'Flaherty, and Maire Collins. Second row: Eamon O'Ceallaigh, Adrienne Healy, Mary Ohle, Breda Lynch, Bernadine O'Sullivan, and Martin McMullan. Third row: Noel Bannon (retiree, St Michael's Finglas), Mairead Toolan, Jackie Forde, and Desmond O'Toole. Fourth row: Jerome Devitt, Eoghan Rooney, Niall Mahon, and Adrienne Webb. Fifth row: Michael Gaffey, Jim Ryan (retiree, Coolmine Community College), Padraig Murphy, Colin Ricard, and John Caffrey (retiree, St Declan's College Cabra). Sixth row: Andrew Deacon, Philip Synnott, Padraig O'Reilly, Ian McColgan, Senan Connell, and Diarmuid O Laighin.

ASTI calls on schools to release PPE



In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the ASTI has called on school management bodies to encourage second-level schools to donate any personal protective equipment (PPE) stored in their schools to local healthcare authorities.

ASTI General Secretary Kieran Christie wrote to the Joint Managerial Body (JMB), the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS), and Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) noting the extraordinary efforts being made to procure PPE for use by healthcare workers and concerns that there would be insufficient supplies of such equipment.

As visors, goggles, gloves and hand sanitisers are frequently used in the provision of a wide range of subjects in second-level schools, the ASTI requested that management bodies advise schools to make arrangements to release any such stock of PPE to their local healthcare authorities to assist in the national effort to slow the spread of Covid-19.

Industrial relations cases

- ▶ Do you have a case running with the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC)?
- ▶ Have you lodged a grievance?
- ▶ Are you worried that your case may get lost during the current crisis?

ASTI officials and support staff are operating remotely throughout the Covid-19 crisis and are following up on all that is necessary to bring your case to a conclusion. There will, of course, be delays, but the industrial relations machinery of the State continues to operate, albeit in a limited fashion. The WRC has published the following in relation to its operations: "Mindful of the latest Government announcements, the WRC has further postponed all adjudication hearings, conciliation meetings, face-to-face mediations, and cancellation of on-site inspections until after Tuesday 18th May 2020. However, in the interim, the WRC remains open for business and parties can submit complaints for adjudication using the online complaint form".

The Labour Court is, however, conducting a limited number of hearings using technology that would allow attendees to be remote from each other. The Court has decided that such hearings will now be offered to selected cases. Not every case will be suitable for hearing in a virtual courtroom, but many cases are. If the Court decides that a case is suitable for such a hearing, it will contact the parties to establish the viability in each case.

In addition, ASTI solicitors continue to operate and to progress cases.

If you have an ongoing issue and are seeking an update, or if you have a new issue, which you wish to seek advice on, please contact the ASTI in the normal fashion – Tel: 01-604 0160/1850 418 400, or email info@asti.ie.

ASTI supporting substitute teachers

Following representations from the ASTI and other teacher unions, the Department of Education and Skills has confirmed the following in relation to substitute teachers and Covid-19: if a substitute teacher has been contracted, either written or verbally, to cover an absence during the school closure period, they will be paid for the period for which they are contracted – for example to cover maternity leave or parental leave.

In relation to teachers who were not contracted to work with a specific employer but who would in the normal course of events have carried out substitution work on a casual basis during the closure period, it has been agreed to extend the Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment to such teachers on the following basis: a substitute teacher will be entitled to the payment if they were in employment immediately before the pandemic. If the teacher has evidence that they worked in March (e.g., payslip) then they are entitled to apply provided they are aged 65 or under and live in the Republic of Ireland. This also applies to student teachers who have been doing paid substitution work.

Where an individual fulfils these criteria, they should apply for the Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment through www.mywelfare.ie.

The ASTI had written to the Minister for Education seeking support for substitute teachers, who usually provide day-to-day cover, during school closures. The letter noted that many substitute teachers would be anxious about how they will support themselves and their families during school closures. In a joint letter with the TUI and INTO, the ASTI asked that substitute teachers be included in the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme, or that the Department of Education and Skills would put in place a similar scheme for them.

ASTI secures State Cert for 2020 Junior Cycle

The ASTI has secured State Certification for students for their participation in and completion of the Junior Cycle in 2020, and a guarantee of no autumn exams for these students.

On April 10, the Minister for Education and Skills, Joe McHugh TD, announced the postponement of the Leaving Certificate June exams and the cancellation of the Junior Certificate June exams. In place of Junior Certificate exams, the Minister announced his intention that while there would be no Junior Certificate issued, exam papers for this year's Junior Certificate exam candidates would be distributed to schools in autumn and schools would be asked to schedule them internally.

In response the ASTI called on the Minister to award a State Certificate to all of this year's candidates in recognition of their participation in and completion of the three years of Junior Cycle in June 2020.

ASTI President Deirdre Mac Donald said that the proposed autumn exams were unnecessary and would enjoy no credible status: "It should be sufficient that students will finish their courses within the constraints imposed by the current public health emergency restrictions. We believe that the well-being of these students is best served by the freedom to enjoy the summer of 2020 without the pressure of examinations hanging over

them. The ASTI believes teachers and students will have fulfilled their commitment to the Junior Certificate when the present school year ends on May 29".

The ASTI raised these concerns with the Department of Education and Skills Advisory Group for Contingency Planning for State Examinations. In addition, the ASTI sought clarity with regard to the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement in 2020. The ASTI made it clear that it would not ask members to invigilate and correct Junior Cycle exam papers if the papers were circulated to schools in September.

On April 29 the Minister issued guidelines for schools regarding assessment and reporting on students' learning at Junior Cycle for 2020 following recommendations from the Advisory Group for Contingency Planning for State Examinations 2020.

The ASTI welcomed the guidelines, which confirmed that students will receive a State Certificate from the Department of Education and Skills on completion of the Junior Cycle, and that all elements of the Junior Certificate are cancelled in 2020. It also makes clear for students that they will have completed their Junior Cycle at the end of May. For more information on State Exams see page 18.

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Ireland/UK unions warn against premature school openings

In May, the General Secretaries of 10 teacher trade unions across Ireland and the UK wrote to the Education Ministers in all five jurisdictions urging “significant caution in any consideration of reopening schools”.

The letter received much coverage in the UK and Irish media, including a piece by the BBC. The letter, sent by the British Irish Group of Teacher Unions (BIGTU) on behalf of almost one million teachers and education staff, warned of the “very real risk of creating a spike in the transmission of the virus by a premature opening of schools”.

It called for the establishment of sufficient capacity to “test, trace and isolate” the infection as a prerequisite for school reopening, alongside “significant operational changes [being] in place to ensure effective social distancing, strong hygiene routines linked to thorough cleansing practices, appropriate PPE [being] available where required, and ongoing risk assessments in place to monitor operations”.

The letter was sent to:

- ▶ Joe McHugh TD, Minister for Education and Skills, Dáil Éireann
- ▶ Peter Weir MLA, Minister for Education, Northern Ireland Assembly
- ▶ John Swinney MSP, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, Scottish Parliament
- ▶ Gavin Williamson MP, Secretary of State for Education, UK Parliament



- ▶ Kirsty Williams AM, Minister for Education, National Assembly of Wales

The full text of the letter is available at <https://www.ifut.ie/content/letter-and-addendum-minister-education-british-and-irish-group-teacher-unions-bigtu>.

ASTI membership applications



The ASTI is processing all membership applications received during the school closure period.

Requirement for proposer and seconder

If you are applying for membership, but are unable to fill out this section of the form, please send in your form without these signatures.

Arrangements are being put in place to process such applications. Please email a copy of your completed application form to membership@asti.ie for immediate processing, and if that is not possible post your application form directly to ASTI Head Office, Thomas MacDonagh House, Winetavern Street, Dublin 8.

Application forms for ASTI membership are available on the ASTI website.

Creating LGBT+ inclusive schools

The City of Dublin Education and Training Board and BeLonG To Youth Services have launched free online LGBT+ skills training for teachers, guidance counsellors, principals and school staff. The training programme will help educators to create an environment that is safe and welcoming for LGBT+ young people.

This interactive three-hour training includes videos, exercises and quizzes to equip educators to become better at listening to, understanding, responding to and supporting LGBT+ young people. As part of the training, participants will learn about terminology and language, LGBT+ mental health, managing your own attitude and bias, non-binary and transgender identities, coming out, and improving your practice.

Some 73% of LGBT+ students in Ireland revealed that they feel unsafe at school as part of the 2019 School Climate Survey. Research shows that between 6% and 10% of any group of young people may identify as LGBT+, so it is most likely that some of these individuals will benefit from the skills and knowledge gained by professionals who complete the training. In the School Climate Survey, LGBT+ youth talked about the extraordinary difference one supportive adult can make in their lives. This support means they are more likely to feel accepted by their peers and feel an increased sense of belonging, and less likely to miss school to avoid victimisation. Sign up for this training course today and be one of the supportive adults in the lives of your LGBT+ students.

This training is available from May 14 from www.traininghub.ie – select the course ‘Creating LGBT+ inclusive schools and youth services with BeLonG To’ and get started!

ICTU Women's Conference 2020

On March 5 and 6, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) Women's Conference on the theme 'Realising Our Rights – Women Organising for Change' was held in White's Hotel in Wexford. The ASTI was represented by a nine-strong delegation at what proved to be a lively, engaging and very successful conference.

Delegates debated a number of motions on issues relating to women and work. Topics included sexual violence and sexual harassment, reproductive rights, leave entitlements, the gender pay gap, and valuing women's work. The ASTI motion on reproductive leave was well received and passed unanimously. It read as follows: "This conference calls on the Irish Congress of Trade Unions to seek statutory leave for workers who are engaged in medical and/or related treatments in relation to reproduction and family formation".

The motion was proposed by Diarmaid de Paor, Deputy General Secretary, and seconded by Maura Greaney, Chairperson of the ASTI Equal Opportunities Committee.

There were several motions on sexual harassment and intimidation, one of which, from the Cork Trades Council, was proposed by ASTI Vice-President Ann Piggott and seconded by Sinead Moore, also from our Equal Opportunities Committee.

In her address to the conference, Patricia King, ICTU General Secretary, stated that "women's participation in public life is entirely necessary to advance gender equality", and she noted that "women in public life are increasingly subjected to harassment". She said "only 24.3% of women occupy senior decision-making roles worldwide; this is why trade unions must never stop campaigning for gender equality".

Other speakers included Geraldine Alexander of the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA), Alison Millar, Vice President of the ICTU, Naomi O'Connor of the Alliance4Choice in Northern Ireland, Rula Salameh, Education and Outreach Director Palestine at Just Vision, and Margaret Coughlan, Joint Chair of the ICTU Women's Committee.

At lunchtime on the first day delegates had a choice of fringe meetings to attend. These were:

- ▶ Work Life Balance – implementing the EU Directive (Marina Monaco, European Trade Union Confederation)
- ▶ A Just Transition (Nevin Economic Research Institute), and
- ▶ Women Leading the Resistance: Irish Palestine Solidarity Campaign (Rula Salameh).

Response to all three meetings was very positive.

The conference provided a stimulating two days for all delegates and an opportunity to meet with and learn from fellow trade unionists from the island of Ireland, and to discuss strategies and a common approach to furthering the rights of women workers in Ireland.



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Government graded on children's rights

The Children's Rights Alliance has published its 12th annual Report Card on progress by the Government towards meeting its commitments under the UN International Convention on the Rights of the Child. Teachers will instantly understand the marking scheme denoting progress – or lack thereof – across six human rights and social policy areas. Overall, the Government achieved a C+ grade, up from C last year: Budget 2020 included important measures to address child poverty. However, across other domains, Government achievement was lacklustre.

Comments:

- While the overall education grade has steadily improved over the last four years, progress remains slow. Cuts made during the recession have not been reversed and continue to undermine the work of schools. DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) is having a positive impact: the gap is narrowing in terms of retention and school completion. The completion rate of those entering DEIS schools in 2003 was 69.9% compared to 84.7% for the 2012 cohort. The completion rate in non-DEIS schools is 93.4%.
- The lack of progress on the commitment in the last Programme for Partnership Government to examine how to better support disadvantaged students in non-DEIS schools is criticised. Measures such as reduced pupil–teacher ratio to reduce class size and financial assistance to schools to reduce the costs of books, uniforms, etc., have not materialised.
- In 2016, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that Ireland adopt a human rights-based approach to inclusion. It recommended that the State “train and employ a sufficient number of specialised teachers and professionals” to meet children's needs. Notwithstanding the increased spending on special educational needs in 2019, huge inequities remain: special schools are oversubscribed and hundreds of children are on waiting lists for special classes in mainstream schools. Many children with special

Grading for Report Card 2020

	2017	2018	2019	2020
OVERALL GRADE	D+	C-	C	C+
Right to education	D+	C	C+	B-
Educational disadvantage	D	C	C	C+
Religious diversity in schools	D	C-	B-	B-
Disability and additional needs in education	C+	B-	B-	B-
Right to an adequate standard of living	C-	D+	D+	D+
Right to health	D+	C-	C	C+
Rights in the family environment and alternative care	D+	B-	B-	B-
Rights in early childhood	C	D+	C	C+
Right to equality	D	C-	C	C

Explanation of grades:

- A: Excellent, making a real difference to children's lives
- B: Good effort, positive results for children
- C: Satisfactory attempt, but children still left wanting
- D: Barely acceptable performance, little or no positive impact on children
- E: Unacceptable, taking steps in the wrong direction, no positive impact on children
- F: Fail, taking steps that undermine children's well-being

educational needs are being home schooled because of the lack of places and are missing out on the social and developmental experiences common to their peers. The report noted that the use of reduced timetables was symptomatic of an under-resourced school system.

Cornmarket news

Salary protection offer

The ASTI Salary Protection Scheme is an optional scheme for ASTI members available through Cornmarket. The Scheme gives teachers a replacement income if they get sick and cannot work. ASTI members who join the Scheme before June 30, 2020, will get six months' free salary protection*.

For further information, contact 01-420 6790 or visit www.cornmarket.ie/six-months-free.

* Offer available to eligible members of the ASTI. You must fulfil the eligibility criteria of the scheme and apply to join between May 4, 2020, and June 30, 2020. Premiums will commence six months after the date you are accepted into the scheme and cover commences. This cannot be claimed in conjunction with any other offer (e.g., Rewards/Free Period). Terms, conditions and exclusions apply.

Teachers' car insurance offer

Right now ASTI members can get €80* off the Teachers' Car Insurance Scheme when they join online at www.cornmarket.ie.

* Offer applies when you buy online and your policy starts between April 6, 2020, and June 30, 2020. Discounts are subject to a minimum premium of €311.23, inclusive of Government levy. Underwriter terms and conditions apply.



ASTI marks Workers' Memorial Day



The ASTI supported International Workers' Memorial Day, a day on which we remember those who have died – or have been injured or made ill – while doing their jobs. In 2020, the day took on even more significance as we deal with a pandemic that is having profound effects on us all.

The ASTI invited members to participate in the 'We Remember Them All' campaign, organised by the ICTU to mark Workers' Memorial Day. This campaign reminds us to remember those who have lost their lives to this pandemic, and to acknowledge and applaud all those workers who continue the fight to protect us, even as they put their own health at risk. ASTI members lit candles on April 28 to remember all workers who have died or become ill or injured while doing their jobs.

Speaking at a ceremony highlighting the importance of keeping all workers safe and healthy, President Michael D. Higgins said: "We must embed, through shared consensus, in the economy and society the wisdom that has been unearthed during the Covid-19 pandemic with regard to the value we place on frontline workers and those providing essential services across the economy. It would be an error if, through some form of collective amnesia, we



as a society were to forget the efforts of these workers and revert to the place we were too often before the crisis – a society that had often failed to value sufficiently these essential, valuable workers who have made such a contribution to the country during this dark chapter".

ASTI President Deirdre Mac Donald and General Secretary Kieran Christie lit candles in their homes on April 28 to remember all workers who have died or become ill or injured while at work.

ASTI working remotely to serve members

Social distancing guidelines implemented by the Government to control the spread of Covid-19 mean that the ASTI has had to change its way of working in order to continue to serve members.

Standing Committee

ASTI Standing Committee members from regions around the country logged in to the first ever online Standing Committee meetings in April. As Standing Committee looks after the business of the union when neither CEC nor Convention is in session, it was important that these meetings took place to allow the work of the ASTI to continue. As well as the usual monthly Standing Committee meetings, a number of special Standing Committee meetings took place to take decisions on the union's response to proposals about the running of the State Exams put forward by the Department of Education and Skills.



Standing Committee met via Zoom for the first time in early April.

Head Office staff

ASTI Head Office staff also transitioned to working remotely when Head Office closed in March. Staff were supplied with devices, which they can use to access the ASTI servers remotely in order to continue serving members. Regular departmental video meetings allow important projects, such as developing the new membership system, to continue. Remote working allows Head Office to respond to the many queries that have arisen as a result of the pandemic.

ASTI members elected to Teaching Council

Three ASTI-endorsed candidates were elected to the Teaching Council in March. Niall Duddy (Ireland North), Kathleen Burke (Ireland South) and Sean O'Neill (Ireland South) were elected to represent teachers in the voluntary secondary school sector. There are places for 11 post-primary teachers on the Council, seven of whom are elected and four of whom are teacher union nominees.

Over 16,000 teachers voted in the Teaching Council elections, which took

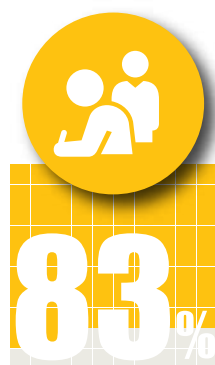
place from February 24 to March 11, 2020.

The Teaching Council is made up of 37 members, the majority of whom are serving teachers. Of 22 places reserved on the Council for registered teachers, six are nominated by the teacher unions (the ASTI, TUI and INTO nominate two teachers each) and the remaining 16 are elected by teachers. Seven teachers are elected by second-level teachers. ASTI nominees John Holian and Noelle Moran continue to represent the ASTI on the Teaching Council for its 2018-2022 term.

The Teaching Council, which was established in 2006, is the regulatory body for teachers and its objectives include upholding standards in the teaching profession and in the professional development of teachers, and promoting the status of the teaching profession.

SURVEY FINDS SIGNIFICANT ISSUES IN ACCESSING ICT

An ASTI survey has highlighted significant gaps in ICT provision in schools.



Students have problems accessing computers in the classroom



Teachers have problems accessing computers in the classroom

WHAT TEACHERS SAY ABOUT ICT



Adequate provision of computers for students



Access to **digital/video cameras** for students



Access to **mobile/multimedia video-editing station** for students

An ASTI survey carried out in the weeks prior to the nationwide Covid-19 school closures reveals significant issues in relation to teacher and student access to information and communications technology (ICT) equipment at school.

Almost 83% of teachers surveyed believed students' access to computers/laptops to be problematic, while 40% said the same about teachers' access to computers/laptops. Teachers also stated that delays in technical assistance and planning time prevent them from implementing ICT more frequently in their teaching.

While three in five teachers reported that the provision of 'core' ICT equipment – digital projector, whiteboard and computer – in their schools is adequate, this rating drops significantly in relation to computers for students, cameras and mobile multimedia stations.

Only 17% of teachers described provision of computers for their students as adequate. In terms of resources for creating and editing images and videos, 16% of respondents reported adequate provision of digital/video cameras and just 9% reported adequate provision of a mobile/multimedia video-editing

station. The impact of inadequate resourcing of ICT has been exacerbated by school closures, which have required teachers to work remotely.

The survey also found that the majority of teachers – seven in ten – use ICT in the classroom every day. Those who use it once a week or less cited delays in getting technical assistance when problems occur with ICT in the classroom and lack of time for planning how to integrate ICT into their teaching as the main reasons for low level of usage.

Teachers were also asked what measures could support more use of ICT in their classroom/teaching space. More ICT facilities in classrooms/teaching spaces, more time to plan for integration, technical assistance and smaller class sizes were listed as key measures to support greater use of ICT in classrooms.

The findings will be used by the ASTI as part of its lobbying activities for additional funding for ICT at second level – including supports and training for teachers. In the context of Covid-19, which has demonstrated the enormous negative impact of lack of access to IT, it is vital that schools are better placed to support teachers and students in the future.

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PROTECTING EDUCATION

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, ASTI Assistant General Secretary MOIRA LEYDON asks what are the global implications for education?



More than 4.4 billion people, or nearly 57% of the world's population, are under confinement measures in nearly 110 countries or territories. School closure was among the first measures taken by governments in response to the pandemic. This article looks at the global impact of the pandemic on education systems and presents some of the thinking already emerging at global and regional level on the future of schooling, teaching and learning.

Global impact of Covid-19 pandemic

UNESCO estimates that 1.54 billion students are affected by school closure – 73% of total global enrolment at primary and second level. The response from education systems has been to turn to technological solutions to continue to engage their students in learning. This has happened overnight, without planning at national or school level. All over the world, teachers are continuing to teach students online, with greater or lesser degrees of success and using a multiplicity of technologies. In China, within a month of the outbreak of the pandemic, Wuhan authorities had put 50 million learners online. Teachers' and schools' responses to sudden school closure and the shift to online teaching has been truly remarkable. Technology in all its forms, digital and other, is truly the lifeline for education in our new 'lockdown' world. Thousands of truly inspiring stories are emerging of teachers reaching out to their students and supporting them and their families in what are frequently very challenging circumstances. The UNESCO World Education Blog recently profiled Charlotte, a pre-school teacher in Marseille, France. Her words capture the feelings of millions of teachers worldwide:

"The onset of Covid-19 means that teachers like me are suddenly being asked to do completely different jobs. While we were in the classroom engaging with children before, now we're at home and trying to engage with their parents. I work in a very underprivileged school in Marseille. I now find that part of our work is almost humanitarian ... It is frustrating to me, as I am used to working with disadvantaged children, so I know the different

To learn **new concepts**, children need a **trained teacher** to guide them, and need to learn together as **a group**, acquiring **social skills** at the same time from their **peers**.

levels of support needed. I know that sending a link isn't enough. 'La continuité pédagogique', as is being asked of us by the Minister of National Education, is simply not possible for children I teach. No one can guarantee that learning will continue when it's being delegated to parents. Teaching is a profession, after all. To learn new concepts, children need a trained teacher to guide them, and need to learn together as a group, acquiring social skills at the same time from their peers".

www.gemreportunesco.wordpress.com/2020/04/16/charlotte-a-teacher-from-marseille-were-being-asked-to-do-a-completely-different-job-from-before/#more-12864

What are the experts saying?

Notwithstanding the necessity to resort to online learning, this 'turn to technology' is already being critiqued by leading global educational experts. The OECD's Director of Education, Dr Andreas Schleicher, summarised the global trend as follows:

"The Covid-19 crisis strikes at a point when most education systems are not ready for the world of digital learning opportunities. According to PISA, little more than two-thirds of 15-year-old students in OECD countries are enrolled in schools where digital devices have sufficient computing capacity, and even in a technologically advanced country such as Japan, just 40% of 15-year-old students are in schools with adequate software for learning. On average across OECD countries, just about half of 15-year-olds are in

schools with an effective online learning support platform, and two-thirds are in schools where principals consider that their teachers have the necessary technical and pedagogical skills to integrate digital devices in instruction”.

www.hundred.org/en/collections/quality-education-for-all-during-coronavirus

The OECD’s major concern is that despite the global education communities creating amazing solutions, these are not reaching all children, especially those in low-resourced settings or in homes that lack support and commitment. These concerns were shared by the Director-General of UNESCO, Audrey Azoulay, in her recent address to the UNESCO Futures of Education Commission:

“We now see that online distance learning cannot be the sole solution, as it tends to exacerbate already existing inequalities that are partly levelled in school settings. This will be of interest for this Commission whose task is rethinking the future of education, including appropriate articulation between distance and classroom learning”.

<https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-futures-education-commission-urges-planning-ahead-against-increased-inequalities>

Challenges

hundrED is a leading global not-for-profit education agency focusing on impactful innovations in education. It has produced a comprehensive ‘round-up’ of what’s happening following school closures, and has identified the most common problems currently being experienced (see panel).

Other experts have attributed these problems to the rapid shift to what they term emergency remote teaching (ERT). In contrast to teaching and learning experiences that are planned from the beginning and designed to be online, ERT is a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances. It involves the use of fully remote teaching solutions for instruction or education that would otherwise be delivered face to face. The primary objective in these circumstances is not to recreate a robust educational ecosystem, but rather to provide temporary access to instruction and instructional supports in a manner that is quick to set up and is reliably available during an emergency or crisis. When we understand ERT in this manner, we can start to divorce it from ‘online learning’.

https://er.educause.edu/articles/2020/3/the-difference-between-emergency-remote-teaching-and-online-learning#disqus_thread

Long-term impact of remote learning and school closures on education

The impact of ERT and school closures on students, teachers and schools is already being sketched out by global experts. One clear impact is the fact that, as in all other areas of social and economic life, inequalities are no longer hidden but are made starkly manifest. Charlotte in Marseille summarises this simply:

“I have had to try to deduce whether the families of the children I was teaching have enough money to eat or not, as many were benefitting from school meals or other forms of social aid that they can’t now access, as lots of the benefits centres are closed ... I have realised along the way that many of those parents are ashamed to tell me they need help. I’m their kid’s teacher after all, not their social worker. This is new for me, but it’s also new for them”.

Common problems following school closures

1. The learner is unable to focus on learning and has high levels of anxiety.
2. Learner loneliness is increasing, even though digital tools are offering ways to connect.
3. Parents are overwhelmed with the plethora of resources being shared without steps on how to use them.
4. Parents are planning daily activities but are not trying innovative educational practices at home.
5. Parents are struggling to balance work and home schooling.
6. Parents and teachers lack resources to discuss pandemics and uncertainties with their learners.
7. Students are worried about having an unnatural closure to the academic year.
8. Teachers are scrambling to go digital without much support and training.
9. There are difficulties in maintaining a positive student-teacher-parent relationship.
10. Collaborative play-based learning is challenging online.

https://hundred-cdn.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/report/file/10/hundred_yearbook_2020_digital.pdf

Andreas Schleicher states that the challenges that are in front of us go well beyond bridging school closures. Society must prepare schools to respond to ‘future shocks’, which are inevitable given the accelerating climate crisis, future pandemics and political instability. In the short term, societies can rapidly enhance digital learning opportunities for teachers and encourage teacher collaboration beyond borders. We can also use the momentum to reshape curricula and learning environments to the needs of the 21st century. Much of this is already happening. He strongly cautions against the known downsides of technology:

“Algorithms behind social media are sorting us into groups of like-minded individuals. They create virtual bubbles that amplify our views and leave us insulated from divergent perspectives; they homogenise opinions and polarise our societies. Tomorrow’s schools need to help learners to think for themselves and join others, with empathy, in work and citizenship”.

www.hundred.org/en/collections/quality-education-for-all-during-coronavirus

Schleicher believes that the most lasting impacts of the crisis will be on the teaching profession. For countries to come out of this period successfully, the focus must be on a culture where teachers are encouraged to be leaders, designers of innovative learning environments, co-creators, facilitators, and coaches for students learning remotely. He states that:

“Technology cannot just change methods of teaching and learning, it can also elevate the role of teachers from imparting received knowledge towards working as co-creators of knowledge, as coaches, as mentors and as evaluators. It can enable teachers and students to access specialised

materials well beyond textbooks, in multiple formats and in ways that can bridge time and space. Technology can support new ways of teaching that focus on learners as active participants. These are precisely the learning tools that are needed in the 21st century”.

<https://oecdeditoday.com/how-teachers-school-systems-respond-coronavirus-talis/>

Teachers are key

From the OECD’s perspective, teachers will be the key to better, more equitable education systems: “It is time that we show more gratitude also for our teachers who dedicate their lives to helping the next generation realise their dreams and shape our future”.

The global report from *hundred* finds that there is already a lot of evidence that teachers are actively collaborating with one another and at a local level. While the initial reaction may be to replicate the systems we are familiar with, there is no doubt that the ‘digital revolution’ has

happened in education. Isolated patches of innovation in areas such as personalised learning, building assessment into teaching, learner autonomy, parental engagement, and teacher agency, to mention but a few, are now mainstream. Equity in education will also be central to societal responses.

According to the UNESCO Futures of Education Commission, as humanity looks for ways to transform the world for the better after the worst health crisis in a century, we must rethink social policies, including education, and address long-standing issues of structural inequality, poverty and exclusion. An impending global recession is likely to have drastic consequences for the funding of education and other public services, as well as for individuals’ lives and livelihoods. During this time, global commitments to education must be maintained and resources directed to those who have been hardest hit socially, economically and educationally. The Commission urges that crises – in global health and education – be addressed through solidarity, empathy and appreciation for our common humanity.

WE STAND UNITED

Teacher unions have mobilised in every country to support their members, students and communities.

Across the world, with 73% of school-going children and almost 63 million teachers out of school, teacher unions have rapidly mobilised in response to the pandemic. As schools were the first public institutions to close, teachers were in the front line in terms of communities’ response to social distancing, quarantine and lockdown measures. Many unions used social media to reach their members to share public health advice. They created solidarity funds to provide teachers with basic educational resources to enable them to provide some form of continuity of learning for their students. In countries and regions where infrastructure and poverty prevent online learning, teachers have created educational content for television and radio programmes. They are sending textbooks and other learning materials to homes, providing food for families, and safe accommodation for children who attended residential schools and could not return to their families. Many unions in the poorest countries have created solidarity funds to buy food for their students’ families who are out of work and have no social protection.

Hardship

In many countries, teachers are not only badly paid, but there are also frequent delays in providing payment, causing serious hardship. Unions have used their solidarity funds to help teachers meet basic requirements. They have also been instrumental in getting some governments to expedite the salaries of teachers as frontline workers in communities where they play a vital community role in disseminating public health advice amid high levels of adult illiteracy.

Teacher unions are also in the front line in advocacy on behalf of marginalised children and communities. ‘Leaving no one behind’, the aim of the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals, is the key message. Very often this message is being brought to governments that are deeply hostile to trade unions, and in particular to teacher unions who are to the forefront in campaigns for social justice.

Education International

Education International, the global education union federation for 32.5 million teachers, is playing a leading role in these efforts. In mid April, it

launched its own solidarity fund to provide support to unions whose members are being dismissed or taken off government payrolls. It is also providing funding for affiliates to purchase ICT devices for their members. Education International has also commissioned research on how school closure is being targeted by for-profit corporations to provide digital and other learning supports to students. In many instances, this commercialisation of education is being facilitated by governments that want to devolve the costs of education to the private sector. The dangers of this development, already advanced in some states, to the concept of education as a human right and a common good are profound.

Education International is also engaged in advocacy with key international institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank on what governments need to do right now and how we rebuild social structures afterwards. A statement from its Executive Board was trenchant in its analysis of the pandemic:

“The drive for quick profits rather than productive investment has also contributed to social and environmental short-termism, including the erosion of commitment to public services and long-term planning. The response to this crisis is hampered by a legacy of neglect and underfunding of health and other public services, as well as the lasting impact of austerity programmes from the Great Recession that followed the financial crisis of 2008. Democracy, particularly in times when it may be ‘put aside’ for the crisis, should be vigorously defended by all democratic forces, including trade unions, especially organisations of teachers and other education personnel that play an important role in both schools and communities”.

It also warned governments not to ignore or overlook the dangers of digitalisation and artificial intelligence for schools and education, as well as for democracy, in surveillance, violations of privacy, including of students and families, and other ‘temporary’ practices.



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- Course takes place over four weekends from September to April on Friday evenings and Saturdays, with classes presented by leading experts in this field.
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LEAVING CERTIFICATE 2020

The ASTI has raised serious concerns with the Department of Education following the postponement of the 2020 Leaving Certificate examinations.

On May 8, the Minister for Education and Skills announced that all Leaving Certificate 2020 students will be offered the option of accepting calculated grades or of sitting the Leaving Certificate written examinations at a later date. The announcement follows public health advice and information regarding the implications for holding the exams in late July/early August. The ASTI is advising its members to engage with the calculated grades for Leaving Certificate students 2020 process in order that students can progress to the next stage of their lives.

However, the ASTI has a number of major concerns with the process, which it is calling on the Minister for Education and Skills to address as a matter of urgency. In addition, the ASTI has called on the Minister to honour his previous decision to award 100% for orals and certain practicals. The ASTI also wants this measure extended to all Leaving Cert practical/project work. Members will be updated via the ASTI website.

In April 2020 the Minister announced the cancellation of the Junior Certificate examinations. On April 29, the Minister issued Guidelines for Assessment and Reporting on Students' Learning at Junior Cycle. For more information about the Junior Cycle 2020, see page 7.

What is a calculated grade?

A calculated grade is a grade that can be provided to students following the combination of school information about a student's expected performance in an examination and national data available in relation to the performance of students in examinations over a period of time. A calculated grade results from the combination of two datasets:

- a school-based estimation of an overall percentage mark and ranking to be awarded to a student in a particular subject, and
- data available from the State Examinations Commission – this includes data on past performance of students in each school and nationally.

The combination of these datasets through a process of national standardisation can determine the grade to be awarded to each student in each subject, thereby resulting in a calculated grade.

Key steps

There are two main phases in the process of arriving at a calculated grade:

- a school-based phase, and
- a national standardisation phase.

In addition, and in the spirit of fairness to all Leaving Certificate students, the option of sitting the Leaving Certificate examinations when it becomes feasible to hold them remains open to all students.

The process of arriving at a calculated grade applies to:

- established Leaving Certificate subjects



- Leaving Certificate Applied subjects, tasks and vocational specialisms, and
- Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme Link Modules.

The role of the school

The role of the school is to provide marks and rankings that reflect:

- an estimation of the percentage mark in each subject that each candidate is likely to have achieved if they had sat the Leaving Certificate examination in 2020 under normal conditions, and
- a class ranking for each student in each subject, i.e., a list of all the candidates for a particular subject in a class in the order of their estimated level of achievement.

In providing the above estimated marks and rankings, there will be four main school-based steps:

- the teacher's estimation of student marks and rankings
- school alignment of marks for a subject through a subject alignment group comprising teachers who are teaching the subject to Leaving Certificate students this year
- oversight of the alignment process by the school principal, and
- transmission of the marks and rankings for national standardisation.

The teacher's estimation

In this step of the process, the teacher of each Leaving Certificate class will be asked to provide:

1. His/her estimate of the percentage mark for his/her subject that each candidate is most likely to have achieved, had he/she sat a Leaving Certificate examination in 2020 as normal.
2. A class rank order – that is, a list of all the candidates in a class for his/her particular class group in the subject in order of the predicted level of achievement of each candidate.

In coming to their judgements, teachers should draw on existing records

and available evidence. It is important that the judgements are objective, and they should only take account of information about student performance. This can include the following, where available:

- records of each student's performance over the course of study including, for example, classwork and homework
- performance on any class assessments, for example, house exams, Christmas exams, summer examinations and (with caveats) mock examinations taken over the course of study
- performance on any coursework component, even if this has not been fully completed
- previous results in the school in this subject
- the level of performance the teacher has observed in this year's students compared to those in previous years, and
- any other relevant information related to student performance.

The teacher's judgement will be based on evidence of learning and achievement such as that indicated above up until the point of school closures. Due caution should be exercised for work completed after this date. Teachers will not set additional assessments for the purposes of determining an estimated percentage mark.

More detailed information can be found on the ASTI website.

The ASTI response

The ASTI is advising members to engage with the calculated grades for

Leaving Certificate 2020 in order that students can progress to the next stage of their lives.

The ASTI has a longstanding policy of teachers not assessing their students for the purpose of State Certification. This ensures the integrity of the State Exams process, the value of which is infinitely superior to any other process. The process involving calculated grades is at variance with that position.

In the context of the current global pandemic, the ASTI recognises that for this year it is necessary to engage with the new process. The ASTI remains firmly of the view that the State Examinations, including the annual written exams, should be administered and assessed by the State Exams Commission. The ASTI has secured confirmation from the Department of Education and Skills that these measures are being implemented on an emergency basis and will not be regarded as a precedent or an agreement to operate this process in future years.

Teachers have always been advocates for their students and engaging with this process will prove challenging for many ASTI members.

The ASTI Standing Committee has considered in detail the published *Guide to Calculated Grades for Leaving Certificate Students 2020*. The ASTI has a number of major concerns with the process, which it is calling on the Minister for Education and Skills to address as a matter of urgency. The ASTI is also seeking legal advice on a number of issues relating to the positions of teachers, principals and deputies in the event of legal challenge to results.



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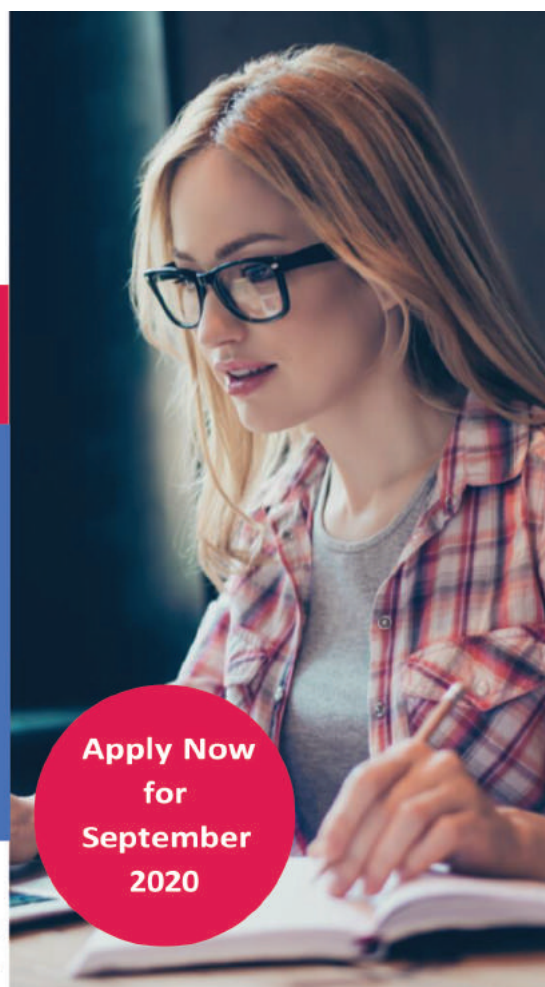
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TEACHERS IN THE SPOTLIGHT



ASTI representatives have been emphasising teachers' commitment to students during the Covid-19 crisis.

"What we want is to ensure as best possible, under these horrendous circumstances, that objectivity and protection for teachers is maintained. That is our job: we are a teachers' union. By that, we mean grades must be calculated using data that is on the school record, on the school system. Parents are aware of it, students are aware of it. So, it's hard data. I'm sure you're aware of the legal issues that are being talked about everywhere – well the teacher must be protected ... Of course, lobbying for grades is a concern and it is our job to protect our members, so the fact is that we will have to put in place a protocol around that. Canvassing of teachers for particular grades is just unacceptable. The integrity of the system depends on an impartial system being put in place, so a lobbying protocol will most certainly have to be put in place immediately."

Deirdre Mac Donald, *This Week*, RTÉ Radio 1, May 10

"We have grave concerns around practical work, project work and support for special needs students. Also, around teachers who for example may be living with two elderly parents who have compromised health and needs, or pregnant teachers. There are a myriad of health issues that need to be considered as well. So, we have to bring those up after a very extensive consultation, which was really worthwhile. I have to remind people of the amount of extra work teachers always give. Take, for example, extra-curricular activities – all of that is unpaid work. So teachers are never found short of giving that and this is just more of the giving that teachers do every day as part of their work."

Deirdre Mac Donald, ASTI President, on postponement of the Leaving Certificate, *News at 1*, RTÉ Radio 1, April 15

"It's not helpful to parents, students or teachers to be 'crystal ball gazing'. It's necessary to take things week by week, but important to stay calm. Structure your day as close as you can to the usual school timetable and where available use Skype, Moodle or Google Classroom with your teacher if possible. Try and do your work within that time. It's also important to get up, get your work done early, take a break, have your lunch, go for walks (at a social distance, washing your hands when you come back). These are all of the normal protocols for good health. Keep your room clean; it's good for education, physical and mental health."

Deirdre Mac Donald, ASTI President, gives advice to students on *The Pat Kenny Show*, Newstalk, March 20

"It behoves me in the context of a national and indeed an international crisis to make a political point but I'll make it anyway – we are 35th out of 35 OECD countries in terms of investment in education in terms of GDP and that leaves us with very variable facilities available to schools to operate in the context of the situation we find ourselves in now. But what I will say is that teachers will always step up to the mark and to the extent that things can be done, they will be done. There's no question about that."

Kieran Christie, ASTI General Secretary, *The Last Word with Matt Cooper*, TodayFM, March 12

"We also have concerns about equity and the disparity of provision that's been available to students since the closure of schools. We have concerns around special needs students and whether appropriate arrangements can be made to accommodate them. And we're also sceptical that practical exams can be held with appropriate social distancing."

Kieran Christie, *RTÉ News*, April 11

"We have huge concerns about equality as well. We have a divided society and what's happened over the last few weeks and months has exacerbated that because students who don't have the same access to technology, students for example who are operating out of a hotel room, are even further at a disadvantage now, and we want to try and see if measures can be put in place to help those students."

Diarmaid de Paor, ASTI Deputy General Secretary, discusses how the ASTI will support the Department to hold exams, *The Keith Finnegan Show*, Galway Bay FM, April 16

"There are so many issues around the re-opening of schools if you are trying to maintain any form of social distancing. If you are doing what we call the core subjects, English, Irish, maths and in other cases history, there are 25 plus and up to 30 students so they take up more space. We can't see in the immediate future that we're going to be able to open up schools and have full classes so how are we going to do that? Are we going to have some students in for part of the day? Who cleans the classrooms between that? All these issues. This is not me saying: 'Oh nothing can happen'. These are issues that have to be dealt with. They're primarily going to have to be dealt with by the Department. Maybe the management bodies and ourselves, we will have an input but we have said quite clearly that we will do our best. And teachers have been working extremely hard under very difficult circumstances. Our members are pulling out all the stops."

Diarmaid de Paor, ASTI Deputy General Secretary, *Kildare Today Programme*, Kfm Radio Kildare, April 21

"I can't see it being viable to try and run the likes of the engineering, the building construction, the Ag science practical. At this stage [giving them full marks for the practical] is the only fair option to give those students the same chance as all other students to achieve their maximum. Because if we persist with the practicals, they're going to be hugely disadvantaged when they go back in for that fortnight."

Peter Keaney, ASTI Standing Committee Region 11, *thejournal.ie*, April 22



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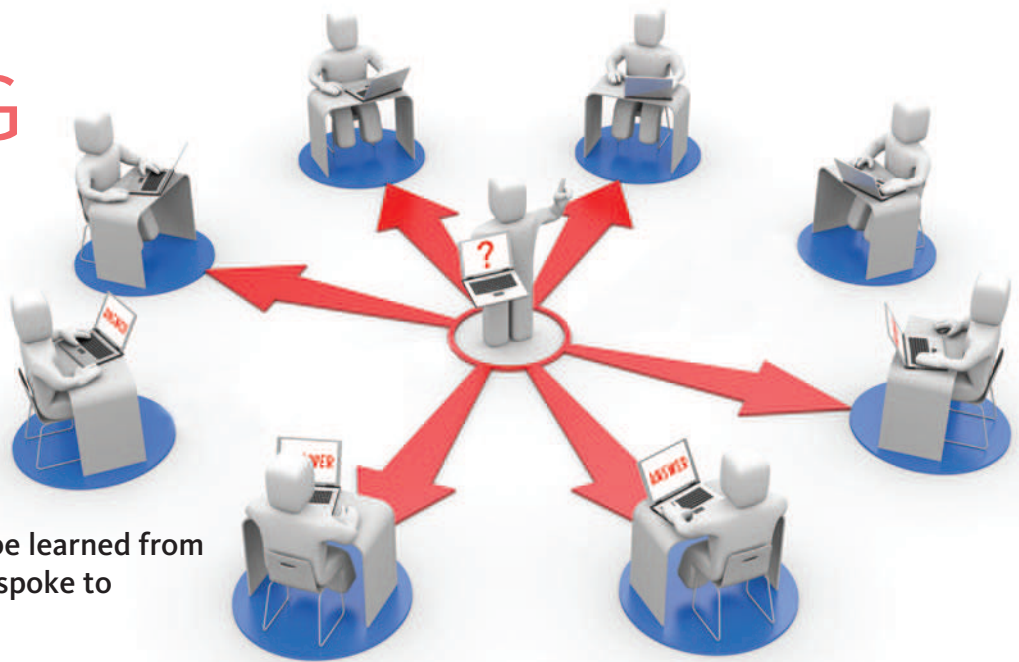
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LEARNING FROM A CRISIS



What are the lessons that can be learned from the Covid-19 pandemic? ASTIR spoke to teachers and other experts.

Education was one of the first sectors to be affected by the Covid-19 crisis, and since the schools closed in mid March, teachers, students and management bodies have found themselves in uncharted territory, and have risen to the challenge admirably, embracing remote teaching and learning, while dealing with issues such as lack of childcare, home schooling their own children, and all of the pressures that come with life during lockdown. At some point, however, the impact of this crisis will need to be assessed, and plans laid to deal with the fallout, and to prepare for the future. We spoke to a range of experts on how they've coped, and what lessons they feel need to be learned from Covid-19.



ASTI President, Deirdre Mac Donald has been hugely impressed with teachers' response to the crisis.

The ASTI President

Deirdre Mac Donald has been hugely impressed with teachers' response to the crisis: "Despite huge under investment in education (OECD Education at a Glance 35th place out of 35 countries) teachers have done amazing work to support their students under the most challenging of circumstances. Their workload has increased exponentially since remote teaching and learning started overnight in March. All of their enormous efforts to maintain standards and support students' well-being have continued while their personal and family circumstances may also have undergone radical change".

The ASTI has highlighted a number of particular issues: "Under resourcing in its many facets is a major issue, including ICT infrastructure. There is a lack of appropriate training/CPD; this should always be led by teachers' needs and interests rather than the top-down approach that exists at national and school level. Psychological support for students and schools is another area that needs serious attention and resourcing".

Workload is another ongoing issue: "Even in 'normal' times teaching is a very intensive occupation, with a heavy workload and additional demands around other aspects of school such as policy development and implementation of new initiatives. Unrealistic expectations of teachers are untenable. Teacher well-being/mental health was not being taken into consideration at national or school level. All of these issues cannot continue to be ignored as we move on from the current situation and onto the next set of challenges for teachers".

A commitment from Government to properly resource education, with a teachers' needs-led approach, is the key lesson that must be taken from this experience: "Teachers are amazing people – their unfailing commitment to their students needs to be given more recognition from those in the higher echelons of education organisations. Teachers are the professionals on the ground and their opinions and experiences are evidence based. There needs to be a far greater weighting given to the teacher's voice. They know best their own needs and those of their students. What's the cost of funding education, versus the cost of not funding education? Investment in education is the most cost-effective use of national resources, now and into the future".



English teacher Conor Murphy from Skibbereen Community School has been using Microsoft Teams.

Teacher well-being and true collaboration are also essential: “Teacher well-being cannot continue to be a box-ticking exercise and teachers must be represented on the Expert Group on Teachers’ Health (DES +). Collaboration is not just about talking about doing together, it is about actually doing together”.

The teachers

Conor Murphy teaches English in Skibbereen Community School. He’s been using Microsoft Teams to set assignments and give feedback to students. It hasn’t been plain sailing though: “I was using the family laptop but that didn’t last very long! I use my phone, and should be able to collect a Chromebook from my principal over the coming days. Because of these issues, and broadband issues, using any kind of live video conferencing, or even recording and sending video messages, is fraught with problems and frustrations”.

Doreen Finn teaches Spanish in Muckross Park College in Dublin. She now uses Google Classroom to teach: “I gave my classes the codes for their specific Classroom, and also the codes to access ebooks if they were without their textbooks. I’ve been using Google Classroom and Meets primarily, along with www.languagesonline.org.uk, a lifesaving languages website”.

Doreen says that she’s been pleasantly surprised by remote teaching: “I’ve streamlined better than I could have imagined, so what I’m putting into my Google Classrooms is a much more direct and clean way of teaching”.

There’s no substitute, however, for personal contact: “I’m very much a chalk-and-talk teacher, and I love the personal interaction of the classroom. I’m finding that Google Classroom is a much colder place”.

Conor agrees, and says these issues go beyond the purely academic: “The main challenges are the psychological ones: your own well-being as well as that of your students. You want to help them as best you can, reassure them that everything will be fine. This is where the technology is another screen between yourself and the student, without the physical cues that tell you whether or not you are helping”.

He also points out the very real difficulties many teachers and students face: “To do this properly every single student would need good broadband, a good laptop, a space to work and a home life that is secure enough that they

feel they are able to work in safety. I would need better broadband, a better phone/laptop, a microphone, a good camera, simple editing software, and the knowledge and skills to be able to use all of these things properly!”

Students have in general responded well, although Conor acknowledges that those who do not may be struggling for a variety of reasons: “One student doesn’t have broadband and goes to his neighbour’s house to check on the work being set. Others are working at home and don’t have the time for their school work. Others are in circumstances that make completing work at home difficult”.

Both teachers are clear that better equipment and better training are essential. According to Doreen: “Better IT is always going to be a battle cry



Spanish teacher Doreen Finn, who teaches in Muckross Park College in Dublin, is using Google Classroom.

for schools, because education is woefully underfunded. We all would like more of everything that allows us to do our job as well as we can, but I'm aware that that is very idealistic. For the students, they need access to proper equipment and good broadband".

Conor agrees, and also seeks to dispel the myth that young people are 'digital natives' who can navigate this world with ease: "There is a fiction that students know everything about the digital world. They don't. They may live in the world of the selfie but they cannot transfer those skills to taking a simple photograph of their copies. Nor can they send those photos properly. Similarly, if I had training I'm sure I would be finding this whole process easier".

For Doreen, if there's a lesson to be learned, it's that underfunding must be addressed: "After this situation is over and we return to our pre-Covid lives, hopefully we can remember how much we were able to achieve and attain, not just in the tangible sense, but in the myriad ways we were able to reach out and teach our students in circumstances that a year ago would have seemed unimaginable. If education isn't properly funded, then little is possible, and instead of opening up the future the past is stuck permanently on repeat".

For Conor, the lessons are also more fundamental: "This is a warning to those that say we should go down the route of more projects that can be completed at home. If we do that then the inequities in society in general will be heightened and reinforced by our education system. It also highlights some of the nonsense around teachers learning from students with regard to the digital world. We have to look to see what worked best, what can be adapted, and what can be discarded. We have to be able to blend some of these new practices into our classrooms but, in doing so, always be conscious of the students that we might be inadvertently distancing from the education system".

The teacher educator

Dr Melanie Ní Dhuinn is Assistant Professor in Teacher Education at the School of Education in Trinity College Dublin. She has been hugely impressed by the responses of both teachers and teacher educators during the crisis: "The teaching profession, which on occasion has been much maligned, often misunderstood and unfairly criticised, can be justifiably proud of its response to the crisis. Teacher educators have also coped very well. With little time for planning, they found themselves negotiating the challenge of reconceptualising content and reformulating assessments to online and remote activity, and working with students on placement in schools".

Melanie says that there has been huge progress in the use of technology in education and the reconceptualisation of pedagogy to online provision. However, she acknowledges that simply providing schools with technology is not enough without appropriate training and ongoing support. Also, if these methods are to be retained, it must be in the context of what she calls "a blended approach to teaching, learning and assessment", which reflects the enormous social value of the classroom: "I think on a human level as teachers and teacher educators we have been diverted from our usual focused and busy work plans to look a little differently at ourselves and at our students, and to value the human element of education. Schools have a very important function to socialise children and adolescents into society. Teachers have always been role models for students and now more than ever the formative aspect of schooling is critical in shaping a future society of citizens through leadership and good example of what really matters. There is ample evidence of schools emphasising the importance of well-

being, rest, relaxation, good nutrition and positive mental health. These are new approaches that have emerged as a result of the crisis, some of which can be carried forward after it".

Melanie sees many possibilities for research to help us learn from this crisis: "I see lots of opportunities for phenomenologists to interrogate the emergence and development of all the new phenomena that have come to light throughout the crisis. Key to some of this research will be generating data from the current experience and revisiting after the crisis. Dr Jennifer McMahon from the University of Limerick is leading a really interesting project called Co-space Ireland about how children and families are coping with the challenges of Covid-19: <https://www.i-teach.ie/co-space-study>. Teacher education programmes can learn from this study and the many more that will emerge from the crisis".

The counselling psychologist

John Duffy is Republic of Ireland Clinical Lead with Inspire Wellbeing, which provides counselling and support services to teachers under the Employee Assistance Service (EAS).

John says that the service has actually seen an overall reduction in teachers contacting its freephone helpline, although calls are beginning to increase. This might seem surprising, but he says it's to be expected: "Teachers may find it difficult to get time and space to make a private call. They may also presume that they need to see somebody face to face; however, all our services are now conducted by telephone or video. I think when this whole crisis hit, we were more concerned about our physical and practical needs, and the psychological and emotional needs got side tracked. I've no doubt that this has to have a psychological and emotional impact, and we will see that over the coming weeks and months".

John has some very helpful advice on getting through the crisis, saying that it's important to avoid catastrophic thinking: "While we need to be concerned, let's not panic. Continue to follow the public health advice, and avoid over-exposure to news – try to limit yourself to 15-20 minutes twice a day. Look at the facts and try not to listen to rumours; that's very important in terms of anxiety".

He says it's normal to feel sadness, stress, anxiety, even anger, but it's important to focus on what is within our control, like creating a structure and routine for your day, eating a healthy diet, exercising, and keeping in contact with family, friends and colleagues. He also counsels against bottling up our feelings, or falling back on negative coping strategies like overdependence on alcohol or food. For those who have difficulty making a telephone call at the moment, he says that the Inspire Support Hub is available at www.inspiresupporthub.org: "You can sign up to access a host of customised information on coping techniques and strategies, including online guided courses".

For John, the lessons to be learned from this crisis are around how we evaluate our lives and priorities: "Something I'm learning is that the freedom we have to move around is a gift, and not to be taken for granted. It's a time to take stock of what's important – family, friends, our health, our jobs – treasure it and be grateful for it".

He also says that while it's important to focus on the present, and on what we can control, this may be a time to think about what we might change in our lives once it's all over: "If there's something you want to change, or a new activity you want to take up, commit to doing it after Covid-19".

He says it's vital to remember that: "This is a marathon, not a sprint. We need to pace ourselves over the coming months and weeks, and ask for help if we need it".

INCLUSION IN A COVID-19 WORLD OF WORK

PAUL O'REILLY reports on a recent webinar that addressed inclusion of the needs of people with disabilities in workplace responses to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Facilitated by the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Global Business and Disability Network, stakeholders including governments, workers' and employers' organisations, and organisations of persons with disabilities, participated in a webinar on March 24 to share good practice on the inclusion of people with disabilities in the Covid-19 responses related to the world of work. The webinar was based around four presentations from different experts in the field, and was hosted by Federico Negro of the ILO. In his introduction, Federico highlighted the need to continue to combat prejudice and encourage inclusivity among workers with disabilities (WWDs).

Although the webinar had a particular focus on the issues of WWDs, there were some general pieces of advice and information that are relevant to all employees (and employers), including teacher professionals, who suddenly found themselves working from home this year, with little or no preparation, through nobody's fault!

Shutdown responses

The first speaker was Haibin Zhou of the ILO in China, who lives in Wuhan city. Haibin said that job losses have had an impact on the mental health of people with disabilities. During the Covid-19 shutdown of Wuhan, online courses on such things as soft skills were ramped up, awareness among the general population was raised, and niche jobs were sourced through online careers counselling.

Yves Vuelliet, Global Diversity Inclusion Leader at IBM, said that his company has always tried to facilitate work from home and this often ties in with the needs of certain individuals. At the same time, extra efforts are made to help people working remotely to feel included.

Jon Messenger, also of the ILO, made what I felt was a particularly interesting contribution, based on his extensive research in this area. He said that teleworking gets a boost in situations like this and in fact could be taken as an opportunity. Jon believes that teleworking is best if it's part time, as teleworking on a full-time basis can often lead to professional and social isolation, as well as poor mental health. He feels that managers are often resistant to teleworking as

they feel that it leads to a loss of control. In terms of preparation, he made the point that appropriate tools and training are crucial but that this doesn't happen overnight. He made a number of recommendations:

- clear expectations are important for teleworking to be successful
- teleworkers need time flexibility
- teleworkers need to learn how to set boundaries between work time and personal time, and
- teleworkers and managers need to trust each other.

Taking care

Bela Gor of the Business Disability Forum in the UK talked about the importance of good meeting etiquette in a remote forum and how all participants from all backgrounds should be made to feel included. She also touched on the duty of employers to encourage teleworkers to be mindful of their physical and mental health. Both in the present crisis and in general, teleworkers should be able to be flexible with their time but also maintain work/personal boundaries. Furthermore, people working from home need to discover what works best for them in terms of structuring their day. She summed up as follows:

- it's often a good idea to disable notifications on devices at home
- in the current context, but maybe even in general, rolling news programmes can be distressing so it might be best to switch them off
- going forward, teleworking is likely to take off, and
- software vendors need to make their platforms disability accessible if only for selfish reasons!

As Irish society grapples with the current crisis, the role of the labour movement in this country in protecting the interests of workers with disabilities has never been more important.

Paul O'Reilly is a guidance counsellor in Waterpark College in Waterford and ASTI Standing Committee representative, Region 8. He is an ASTI nominee on the ICTU Disability Committee.

PANDEMIC EXPOSES EDUCATION INEQUALITY

ASTI Assistant General Secretary MOIRA LEYDON says that Covid-19 poses a significant risk to progress on ending educational disadvantage.



The predominant theme in analysing the impact of the pandemic on societies across the world is that of inequality. Poverty and inequalities of life chances are no longer invisible, but are to the forefront of public debate. Precarious work, private versus public healthcare, adequacy of social protection, affordable housing, affordable childcare, and a living wage – these structural inequalities in Irish society are now openly discussed and reflected on.

Inequalities exposed

Education is no exception. Just over a month into the pandemic, the evidence is already mounting on the inequalities across the school-going population and even between schools. Inequalities are manifested in: differences in parents' capacity to support their children learning at home; differences in the quality of the home environment and its suitability for learning and study; differences in the capacity of schools to support their students to learn remotely; differences in availability of digital devices and access to broadband; and, differences among students in their resilience, motivation and skills to learn independently and online. Of course, huge inequalities exist in terms of resources, environment and family capacity for the thousands of children who are homeless and thousands more who are living in direct provision, or who are in care.

Teachers have been to the forefront in responding to the needs of disadvantaged students. At both primary and second level, schools have paired up with local community organisations to ensure that students continue to receive school meals. Students who don't have access to online learning have been collecting books and other materials from their schools. Home school liaison teachers are maintaining contact with vulnerable families and providing advice to parents on managing learning at home. Teachers are remaining in contact with their students by text, email and phone call. As ever, educators are there for their students and are deeply aware of how the lockdown is impacting on young people's social and emotional well-being.

Many schools in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) scheme are using the outreach network of the School Completion Programme, which, in addition to teachers involves a wide range of community actors, to

reach out to disadvantaged students, especially those taking the Leaving Certificate examination this year. Third-level access programmes have also been active in supporting students, for example by increasing the level of engagement in one-to-one mentoring, providing safe and quiet spaces for students to study, and making up shortages in learning resources.

Clearly there is a huge country-wide effort underway to enable disadvantaged students to sustain their learning to the end of the school year and to participate in the Leaving Certificate examination. The work of teachers has been central to this national response. However, the Department of Education and Skills and other policymakers must look beyond the current academic year and act on the lessons we are learning.

Bridging the digital divide

The most obvious lesson is that of a significant digital divide. The 2019 OECD PISA report found that, in Ireland, there is a significant digital divide for students in disadvantaged schools. These same students are less likely than their peers to have a quiet place to study, access to a computer for schoolwork, and school digital devices with sufficient capacity. The Department of Education and Skills must revisit its Digital Learning Strategy to make sure that every student has access to appropriate digital devices. This is absolutely imperative. The current pandemic will, in all probability, continue to impact on societies over the next number of years. There are, of course, other acknowledged 'shocks' to societies such as cyber attacks, natural disasters and political instability, which will require education systems to be more resilient. A revised strategy must also make provision for extensive upskilling of teachers to sustain their capacity to teach in the digital age.

The ASTI raised the issue of inequalities in the provision of and access to ICT equipment for students during the school closure period. In this regard, the Minister for Education and Skills has announced a €7 million Covid-19 ICT funding package for second-level schools to support the purchase of technology and devices, with exam classes to be prioritised. The ASTI continues to raise the concerns of ASTI members with the Department of Education and Skills.

Meeting students' needs

Closely linked to the digital divide and its impact on students' opportunities for learning at home is the quality of the home environment in terms of space and a quiet place to study. Most schools already provide after-school study facilities. However, these are in the main self-funded and require students to pay a fee. This is an immediate barrier for disadvantaged students. The capitation grant to schools must be increased to ensure that schools have adequate funding to provide free after-school study for disadvantaged students. Another obvious and stark lesson is the extent of food poverty in families. The recently introduced School Meals Scheme must become available to all schools. The evidence on educational disadvantage is unequivocal in terms of the dispersion of educationally disadvantaged students: the majority of these students are not in DEIS schools. Indeed, as has already been recommended in reviews of the DEIS programme, the Department needs to move away from a rigid demarcation process between DEIS and non-DEIS schools, and provide additional supports to the latter. This policy focus will become critical in the months ahead given the prognosis for economic activity and levels of unemployment.

Home school liaison teachers are absolutely central in terms of connecting families with their children's learning and the wider holistic work of the school. This service was significantly reduced in the austerity budgets and has not been restored. A strong case can be made not just for restoration of this service, but for making it available in all schools. One of the most basic

lessons we have learned from this crisis is the importance of the school in families' lives. Policymakers should be strategic and invest in building stronger home-school relationships to address not just inequalities in education but also to deepen social cohesion.

Students with special educational needs are at particular risk of educational disadvantage, as has been evidenced in the national longitudinal research, Growing Up in Ireland. Distance education is particularly challenging for many such students, some of whom require a multi-agency range of supports. Policymakers need to be particularly aware of the supports that will be needed by these students in the coming months until schools re-open.

Changing the discourse

The political discourse around the formation of a new government is strongly in favour of a renewed social contract and a focus on the quality of people's lives. The draft document prepared in mid April by Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil is unfortunately entirely vague on how we extend that renewed social contract into the education of our children. While it acknowledges the need for renewed investment in education, and in the importance of the equality of opportunity and enablement that well-funded education offers, it does not contain specifics. If ever there was a time when we know what schools need, it is now. Similarly, it also prioritises the mental health of young people. This will be critical as there is already evidence of the strain and anxiety in response to the pandemic currently being experienced by children and young people.

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POSITIVE HEALTH AND COPING WITH COVID-19

Prof. CIARAN O'BOYLE, right, Director of the RCSI Centre for Positive Psychology and Health, has some excellent advice for getting through the current crisis.

There is currently a great deal of attention being paid to the challenges that face frontline healthcare workers, and rightly so. We are extremely grateful for the contribution that they make and the risks they take to care for us. In many ways, teachers are also frontline workers who, while not being directly exposed to the virus, are exposed to dealing with its educational and psychological fallout for a large and vulnerable section of society. The world of education has changed dramatically: facing screens is very different from facing classrooms; IT skills must be developed under time pressure; we worry about students who aren't engaging; the daily commute is gone and an opportunity to create separation between work and non-work life lost; and, many teachers find themselves teaching their students online while simultaneously trying to home school their own children. This new world of education is characterised by challenge, frustration, uncertainty, loss of normal resources and infrastructure, and a frontline understanding of the enormous anxiety that interruption in education causes for students and families.

Social media is awash, not only with information and misinformation about the virus, but also with resources for helping us to cope with its impact. The scale, diversity and ubiquity of information can feel overwhelming and the pressure to cope, to create and be productive only adds to the sense of overload. Here, I want to focus on a small number of concepts that are central to framing a positive coping response and maintaining positive physical and psychological health.

1. The nature of health

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". This means that our health is multidimensional and that to improve it we must pay attention not only to our physical well-being, but also to our mental and social well-being. Also, it means that we as individuals are best placed to manage and improve our own health. The pillars of self-management are well known — physical activity, diet, sleep, managing substance use and managing stress.

2. Choosing our responses

There is much about the current situation that we cannot control and this, together with the uncertainty it creates, is a recipe for stress and anxiety. This is particularly true in education where teachers, school workers, young people and their families must continue to function in a high-stakes sector



despite uncertainty. In his famous book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, the Austrian psychiatrist Viktor Frankl, a survivor of the Holocaust, distinguished between liberty and freedom. His key insight as a prisoner in the concentration camps was that whereas his liberty could be denied him, he was free to choose his response to what was happening. In choosing our own responses it is important to focus on what we can control rather than ruminating on that over which we have no influence.

3. Finding happiness by serving others

In his book *Authentic Happiness*, the psychologist Martin Seligman draws on the work of Aristotle to distinguish between hedonistic happiness and what is called eudaimonia. The former, which involves the pursuit of pleasure, is often short lived and is rarely fulfilling. Eudaimonia, on the other hand, defines happiness and the good life in terms of the pursuit of virtue, achieving one's full potential, doing what is morally worth doing and serving the common good. As educators, our work provides us with the opportunity to pursue eudaimonia, finding meaning and fulfilment in fostering the development of others. The Dalai Lama was once asked by a western researcher whether he used meditation to reduce stress. At first, he shook his head and wouldn't answer — "stress", he said, was not a word in the Buddhist tradition. When then asked why he meditates, he answered with one word: "love". And love, it turns out, tunes down the brain's stress response while activating its reward systems. A growing body of research shows that compassionate interaction with others is important for our own well-being. By doing good and helping others, as teachers do by definition, we can reduce our stress and make the world a better place, even in this most difficult of times.

4. Staying connected

One of the peculiar features of the current situation is that our natural inclination to move towards, to help and to comfort others is thwarted by the critical requirement to maintain social distance. John Donne's proposition that no man is an island has been turned on its head — now, in order to save lives, we must all become islands. Currently, hundreds of millions of us throughout the world are learning a new way of existing, one that challenges our inherently social nature. Staying connected while distanced is particularly important. Decades of research have shown that loneliness has a significant negative impact, not only on our mental health, but also on our physical health. When lonely, our immune systems don't function as well: we respond more negatively to stressful events; we are more likely to suffer from depression and to lose sleep; and, evidence shows that

Useful resources

- The Andrew Weil Centre for Integrative Medicine at the University of Arizona has some very good evidence-based resources for cultivating health and well-being – <https://integrativemedicine.arizona.edu>.
- The HSE's extensive website includes useful advice on maintaining positive mental health – <https://www2.hse.ie/coronavirus/>.
- The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland is providing resources on psychological well-being – <https://www.rcsi.com/dublin/coronavirus/information-for-the-public>.

our lifespan can be shortened. The WHO definition of health outlined above includes social well-being, and it emphasises the importance of using whatever means are available to us to avoid becoming unduly isolated.

5. Cultivating a mindset of fortitude

As we go about our daily lives, we are continually exposed to enormous quantities of information. In order to manage this, we need a simplified system, a set of lenses through which we filter information about the world and about ourselves. These lenses are called mindsets and there is increasing evidence that the mindsets we adopt have profound effects on our physiology, our behaviour and even on our lifespans. Research shows that what we believe will happen has a surprisingly strong effect on what actually

happens. Therefore, in the current climate, cultivating a mindset of fortitude is a potent antidote to stress and anxiety.

"This is the island; here you will die" was how Nelson Mandela was greeted on his arrival at Robben Island prison where he was to spend 27 years of his life, often in conditions of isolation, ill health and extreme hardship. The film *Invictus* not only charted the story of Mandela's urging of the South African rugby team to win the 1995 world cup, but also introduced a worldwide audience to William Ernest Henley's Victorian poem of the same name, written in 1875 (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/51642/invictus>). The poem was written in response to an infection. From the age of 12, Henley suffered from bone tuberculosis, which required the amputation of his left leg when he was 16. At the age of 24 his right foot became diseased and was saved from amputation by multiple painful surgeries. It was during his three-year stay in hospital that Henley wrote his famous poem on fortitude, the poem Mandela recited regularly to fellow inmates on Robben Island. The poem, which brilliantly captures the mindset of maintaining fortitude in the face of adversity, and is as relevant today as it was in 1875, finishes with the following lines:

"It matters not how strait¹ the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul."

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ZOOM HAS BECOME A LIBERATOR

The RSTA continues to represent members during the Covid-19 pandemic.

RSTA members are conforming to the current restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic. Most, but not all, come within the 'cocooning' category, and members with underlying health conditions are subject to long-term seclusion to avoid infection. Following the restrictions, the RSTA suspended all activities and asked branch officers to maintain virtual contact with members locally, especially those who are living alone. Technology has become a liberator during the lockdown. Those who had been digitally challenged are now 'Zooming' families and grandchildren globally. This supports the saying that "it is never too late to learn". The Annual National Conference scheduled for May 6, 2020, in Killarney, is also postponed.

Trips abroad

The Midland group arrived back from Cyprus in early March prior to the travel restrictions. They were fortunate to visit the Turkish North prior to the closure of the Greek border to hold back the Syrian refugees, when the Turkish crossing was opened. Other branches have had to postpone their travel plans indefinitely.

Northern Ireland

This year the RSTA President and representatives of the Dublin Branch travelled to Belfast to attend the AGM of the Retired Members' Association and to meet the incoming executive. This contact over the years, initiated by the Dublin Branch members and their northern counterparts, has been beneficial for both retired groups. Carmel Heneghan represented the RSTA at the North-South Retired Workers' Seminar in Dublin prior to the lockdown.



Pictured at the RSTA coffee morning in February are (from left): Terry Dolan (Dublin), Henry Collins (Waterford), Paula Hewisson (Waterford), and Kieran Dollard (Waterford).

ASTI pensions sub-committee

Denis O'Boyle and Ger O'Donoghue of the ASTI pensions sub-committee attended the March meeting of the RSTA National Committee – both are RSTA members and ASTI representatives on the Retired Workers' Committee of the ICTU. Since pensions are of mutual interest to the RSTA and ASTI, it is important that these contacts continue as pay negotiations are imminent.

Communication with branches

The National Committee will issue a brief e-newsletter for members shortly. Other measures will follow to assist members while emergency restrictions continue. This pandemic may be difficult but, with positive creativity, members will rise to the challenge standing shoulder to shoulder with each other.

RSTA membership application/renewal

Name:

Address:

Home phone:

Mobile:

Email:

RSTA branch:

Annual subscription: €24
Annual renewal date: September 1

Payment options: Bank standing order (recommended by RSTA) or cheque (payable to RSTA)

Return to: Mrs Muriel McNicholas, Cordarragh, Kiltimagh, Claremorris, Co. Mayo.

Contact: murielmcnicholas@gmail.com or 085-118 1330

The personal information requested here is required to administer your membership of the RSTA. It is used by the RSTA in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). See the RSTA Data Protection and Privacy Policy on the RSTA website – www.rsta.ie.

Standing order set-up form

Please complete in **BLOCK CAPITALS** using black or blue pen.

To: The Manager (Bank name and full address)

I hereby authorise and request you to DEBIT my account:

Account name/s:

IBAN BIC

And to credit the account of:

RETIRED SECONDARY TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

IBAN: IE55 AIBK 9323 6112 7290 80 (**BIC:** AIBKIE2D)

with the amount of **€24** (twenty four euro)

Start Date: ____/____/20____ **Frequency:** Annually until further notice

Reference: (To identify member's subscription on RSTA bank statement):

Member name and RSTA branch

Signature: Date: ____/____/20____

NEW CLIMATE CHANGE RESOURCES

Climate Science, an NGO providing educational material on climate change, has launched a new app, Instagram account and website with resources for schools for teaching about climate change. Climate Science is hoping to empower and engage more young people in the climate change movement, as well as inspiring them to go out into the world to make a difference. Climate Science content is illustrated and presented in a readable format for ages 10+. All writers have relevant degrees; content is peer reviewed and claims are linked to scientific papers, which students and teachers can easily view for further reading and trust.



Visit www.climate-science.com for more information.

Prevention and early intervention

The Prevention and Early Intervention Network (PEIN) is a national network of individuals and organisations working or interested in prevention and early intervention (PEI). Its purpose is to:

- ▶ share, develop and disseminate learning in PEI practices and approaches
- ▶ support the work of members/member organisations, and
- ▶ influence policy and practice, nationally, internationally and locally.

Some of the reasons to join PEIN include:

- ▶ being part of a national voice that is led by its members and works collectively to achieve real change for children and families

- ▶ informing PEIN research, and shaping PEIN policy, submissions, reports and agendas, and
- ▶ opportunities to participate in study visits, networking and learning spaces.

Sign up to PEIN today to learn, share, challenge and collaborate in a supportive environment, which seeks to promote effective approaches and provide a collective voice for the sector.

For more information go to www.pein.ie, or contact Lyndsey Anderson, PEIN Coordinator, 17 Bunratty Drive, Northside Partnership, Coolock, Dublin 17, D17 WP30, Tel: 087-762 6831, email: lyndsey@pein.ie.

Young Social Innovators

Young Social Innovators (YSI) is asking young people to come up with ideas for how to tackle the challenges from coronavirus in their community.



Young people are encouraged to look around their home, family or community and see what has changed because of coronavirus. What is working? What is not working? What is bothering them? What can they do to help?

Teenagers can take part on their own, with friends or family, or with classmates. YSI will help all young people who sign up to develop their idea. They will receive a resource pack and weekly emails with tips on how to help develop their idea. Everyone who submits an idea will be placed in a weekly draw for a €50 online voucher. Ideas must be submitted by May 31. YSI will display the ideas on their website and social media. Everyone who enters will be given a certificate recognising their contribution at this time of crisis.

The ideas with the highest potential for impact will have the opportunity to pitch to a panel of leaders from across business, NGOs and Government.

For more information, see www.youngsocialinnovators.ie.

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS SOUGHT

Primary and secondary teachers with a disability or chronic illness who are currently employed are invited to take part in a research study on the provision of supports in their workplace.

Ethical approval for the research has been obtained, and confidentiality and anonymity will be respected.

Further information may be obtained from
maryritanolan@gmail.com

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ASTIR CROSSWORD NO. 2003

The winner will receive €200One entry only per member.

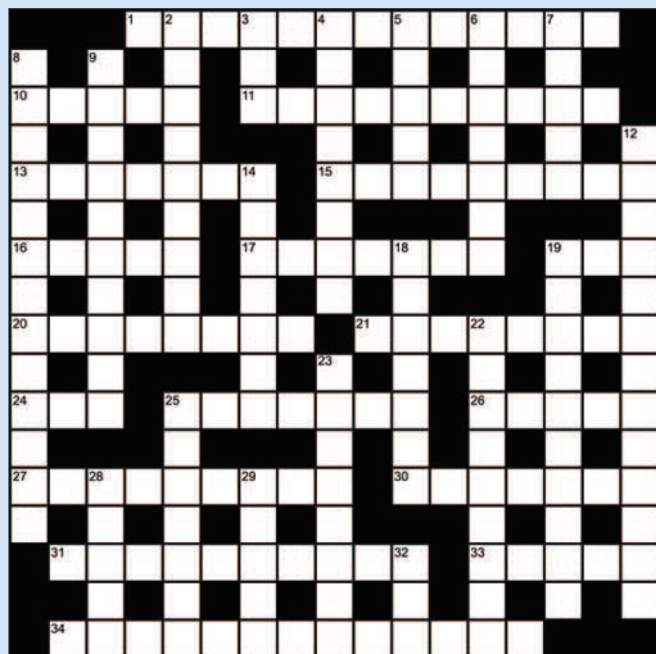
Name

School

Address

ASTI Branch

Entries to: Print-outs or photos of completed crosswords, or handwritten answers, can be posted to ASTIR Crossword No. 2003, Think Media, The Malthouse, 537 NCR, Dublin 1, or emailed to astir@asti.ie to arrive by Friday, June 26, 2020.



ACROSS

1. Coins beloved of R.L. Stevenson's parrot (6,2,5)
10. Comedian and television host DeGeneres (5)
11. Theoretical force believed to be the reason the universe is expanding (4,6)
13. Goes on and on and on.... (7)
15. Autonomous community of northeastern Spain (9)
16. Fidelity not fit for return on investment (5)
17. Remunerate excessively (7)
19. One way of saying it in Palermo (3)
20. Latin phrase and hymn often sung by Christians (5,3)
21. The writing is on the wall for street art (8)
24. Unconventional terrorist bomb (1,1,1)
25. Nickname of jazz musician Louis Armstrong (7)
26. Ugly or cruel old woman (5)
27. Sissy Spacek played the role of his daughter in the 1980 film (4,5)
30. Loss of sense of smell (7)
31. Scientists who study animals (10)
33. Multinational corporation in telephone directory (5)
34. Buck's request for payment in cash (3,6,4)

DOWN

2. Union ends with disparaging remarks (9)
3. Cats and dogs initially create plans (3)
4. Toothed wheel engaging with chain (8)
5. Flying armada (5)
6. In a perfect world (7)
7. Stand over sports field (5)
8. Persistent symptom of chronic scabies? (5,4,4)
9. Beaten severely with bonded glue (10)
12. Whiplash caused by domestic pet? (3,1,4,5)
14. Monsoon estimated to be most punctual (7)
18. Shaded walkway from Peru to Angola (7)
19. A condition in which everything is regular and unvarying (10)
22. In mathematics, the product of an integer and all the integers below it (9)
23. Arctic char is main source of personality (8)
25. Tasted a small amount from Ed's palm (7)
28. Halo needs no company (5)
29. Hawthorne, Benn or Farage (5)
32. Outcry from Crosby causes sharp intake of breath (3)

Did you miss?

ASTI survey 12
Global response to Covid-19 14

Réiteach do Chrosfhocal
ASTIR 2002

TRASNA

1. Portach
5. Moliere
9. Toirbhirt
10. Ar gor
11. Brontë
12. Niagara
14. El Al
15. Spéirbhean
19. Ringo Starr
20. Broc
21. Scéalaí
24. Hallaí
27. Óstán
28. Doicheall
29. Lallans
30. Ionchur

SÍOS

1. Puth
2. Reifreann
3. Ar bun
4. Hoiméapat
5. Matán
6. Leataobh
7. Eagla
8. Éireannach
13. Ceárdscoil
16. Iarchéimí
17. Eirí amach
18. Sollúnta
22. Eitil
23. Indus
25. Lohan
26. Clár

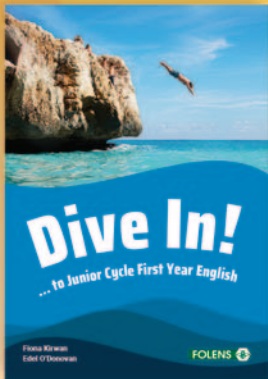
COMHGHAIRDEAS

Comhghairdeas le buaiteoir
Chrosfhocal 2002:
Triona Uí Mhurchú
Coláiste Chroí Mhuire, An Spidéal,
Co. na Gaillimhe.
Galway West Branch

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Junior Cycle

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IRISH

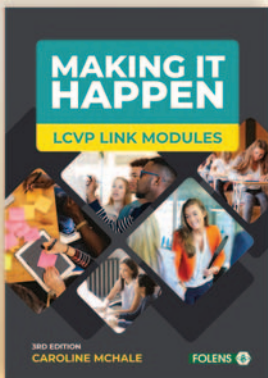


FRENCH



GERMAN

Leaving Certificate



LCVP



PE



BUSINESS



HOME EC



SPANISH



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