

astir

Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland

Science, maths, reading



International focus on Irish education

Workplace stress

Retirement options

Creating active citizens

Smile



* Vhi DeCare Dental pays up to **€1,500** of charges annually for less than **€16** a month for an adult and less than **€7** a month for a child![†]

Recoup up to €1,500 every year!

Visiting the dentist regularly is an absolute must if you want to keep your smile and oral health in top form. But doing so can be costly.

Vhi DeCare Dental will now cover your dental charges up to €1,500 for less than €16 a month[†] – and you'll enjoy an even lower premium if you benefit from PRSI.

Not only are you covered for regular charges such as cleanings, fillings, root canals etc., but you're also protected against unforeseen dental expenses and emergencies that can really add up.

As a Vhi Healthcare member, you qualify for a 10% discount on the regular cost of Vhi DeCare Dental.

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Vhi DeCare Dental pays for the following:

- 100% of your recommended yearly exams and cleanings*
- 70% of costs for fillings, space maintainers, sealants, extractions and treatment of gum disease – 3 month waiting period
- 50% of costs for crowns, root canal treatment and many other major dental services – 12 month waiting period
- 25% of costs for dentures
- One emergency dental care session worldwide per year

*Vhi DeCare Dental PRSI Plan will cover your second exam (if required) as your first exam will be covered by PRSI.

You should note the following annual maximums per person: Crowns – €500. All other dental services – €1,000. There is an annual excess of €100 for crowns, dentures and root canal treatments.

Covered by PRSI? You can still benefit

Vhi DeCare Dental picks up where PRSI leaves off – if you qualify for dental benefit under PRSI and use a PRSI dentist, your plan includes 100% coverage for one exam/cleaning while PRSI covers the other. It also offers coverage as per the benefits above for dental treatments after PRSI payments, where applicable.

Your savings quickly add up

The following example is based on an adult who is a Vhi Healthcare member. The cost is even lower for participants eligible for PRSI dental treatment benefit and also for children.

Your Annual Premium Cost	Without Vhi DeCare Dental, You Would Pay	With Vhi DeCare Dental, You Pay Only	You Save!
€187.60	Two exams and cleanings – €174	€0	€174
	Two fillings – €200	€60	€140
	One crown – €917	€458.50	€358.50

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

Two easy ways to join

By phone:

CallSave 1850 200 492

(8.00am to 8.00pm, Monday – Friday,
9.00am to 2.00pm, Saturday)

By web:

Log onto our website

www.vhi.ie/dental and fill out our online application form.

This advertisement is issued as a guide only and does not form part of a contract. A copy of the rules of membership will be issued on registration or may be had in advance, on request. The Voluntary Health Insurance Board (trading as Vhi Healthcare) is a Multi-Agency Intermediary regulated by the Financial Regulator.

[†]Terms and conditions apply.

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Just a few Cuid



CUID, meaning “share”, is an appropriate name for ASTI Credit Union’s new deposit account. We were delighted to see the huge uptake in the SSIA scheme and would like to encourage members to continue with the saving habit developed in the last five years. There are similar products available in banks, but this is our own special product, designed for credit union members.

HERE IS HOW IT WORKS

When you open a **CUID** (Credit Union Incentive Deposit) account you agree to save a regular, variable amount of between €10 and €250 every month for 24 months. Interest is credited to your account at 2% per annum and, at the end of the two year term, the interest earned receives a 100% bonus!

That’s right — the amount of interest is doubled and the deposit will have earned 4% per annum. At the end of the two years you can withdraw your money, regardless of whether you have a loan, or you can just continue to save as normal.

The **CUID** account is designed to encourage members to save regularly every month, with a view to doubling their interest over a relatively short term of just two years.

TERMS & CONDITIONS

- Interest is fixed at 2% per annum credited monthly
- Interest earned at end of the two year term will be doubled
- Payments into your **CUID** account must be made monthly by internal transfer from your share account. (This can be fed through salary deduction or direct debit, just as we did with SSIA’s)
- Any withdrawals will automatically terminate the account and no interest bonus will be paid
- Failure to save in any month will automatically terminate the account and no interest bonus will be paid
- One account open to all members over 16 years of age
- All interest is subject to DIRT (Deposit Interest Retention Tax)
- Your CUID account is a deposit account and does not qualify for life savings insurance
- Your CUID account may not be used as security against a loan

THE SOONER YOU START,
THE SOONER YOU FINISH

START
THE CLOCK
TICKING...



Second-level under the spotlight

At the beginning of this New Year, 2008, I wish, on behalf of ASTI, to extend to all members, friends and educational partners our heartfelt thanks for your commitment to Irish education.

As 2007 drew to a close, Irish second-level schools came under the spotlight from two very different surveys.

The first, meticulously researched, was the OECD PISA report, highlighted in this issue. Irish reading literacy among 15- and 16-year-olds continues to be significantly above the OECD average. In this first major PISA study on science, Irish students more than held their own compared to the other 56 countries, as they did in mathematics. These are good, solid performances for an education system that is in the bottom quartile, when it comes to receiving government funding, in OECD comparisons. The second survey to come into the spotlight is of a different kind. It is based on populist analysis of second-level schools and the view that 'success' is measured solely by the percentage of students going on to third level. It comes as no surprise to teachers that when schools that accept all abilities and special needs are compared with the streamed grind schools, there is no difference in the educational outcome. Money can't buy success, though one might be misled into believing so. Minimum resources, however, are essential to ensure good education outcomes across all society's children and young adolescents. They are lacking in Ireland today, according to OECD analysis.

The facts are our schools and teachers have achieved remarkable results with open access and all ability levels. Again, OECD analysis bears this out. A society that reflects on this achievement will hold it as a cherished goal for itself. The country at the top of the OECD – Finland – supports the fact that when there is open access into a school for all abilities and needs, one can get the highest of results. It points to the fact that the systematic use of grind institutions, which has become an unthinking fact of life for students and many parents, is not a good outcome for any education system, or society, in the long run. It also creates a mindset not open to difference in all its manifestations, closed to balance and thus less considerate of others.

This March sees our Annual Convention in Killarney, when we gather as

an Association to map out our plans and responses for the future. It is an opportunity for strengthening our sense of collegiality and getting support from each other through new friendships and renewing familiar ones. New delegates will be most welcome.

Your workplace: is it under, on, or over quota? How many students were registered in October 2006? This determines the number of whole-time permanent teachers for 2007-2008. How many staff left last summer and how were these vacancies filled? How many concessionary and learning support hours? In a transparent workplace all such information is known. You may believe this irrelevant to you. Not so. For a career break or job-share, it matters.

Is one full-time permanent position being filled by two or more part-time people, thus preventing one person having full pay? If that is happening, you are seeing the casualisation of teaching in action. Stop, think and act now.

As you read this, we expect the benchmarking report will have been published, which we will address in detail in our next issue.




Patricia Wroe
ASTI President

Increase in BOI Millennium Scholarships

The Bank of Ireland Millennium Scholars Trust has announced additional scholarships for 2008. Established in 2000, with an allocation of €12.5 million, the Trust offers a progression path to students who have the ability and motivation to progress to third-level education, but who face a significant obstacle to that goal.

The Trust is administered by the National College of Ireland and helps students who face economic, social or other barriers. The Trust helps over 60 students annually to advance to third level.

Scholarships of between €3,200 and €6,300 per annum are available, the amount depending on individual circumstances. Awards are also made to students studying in the creative or performing arts. A nominating body must propose each candidate; nominating bodies are organisations, schools, groups or institutions that are registered with the Trust. Nominating bodies must have close contact with candidates and be in a position to provide a personal reference and to co-ordinate their application.

Applications to register as a nominating body can be made at any time, and are considered by the Trust at various intervals throughout the year. Application forms are available from the Trust offices, Tel: 01-4498500, or can be downloaded at www.bankofireland.com or www.ncirl.ie.



Two students awarded BOI Millennium Scholarships in 2007: David Farrell (left), who is studying acting at the Gaiety School of Acting, and Ivars Burtnieks, who was nominated by CBS Secondary School, Kilkenny, and who studies film and television at DLIADT.

Retirement presentation to Denis O'Boyle



Mr Alan Wall (right), Principal Officer of the Teacher Education Section, Department of Education and Science, making a presentation to Denis O'Boyle on his recent retirement, in recognition of his 10 years service to teachers as Director of Mayo Education Centre. Mr Wall paid tribute to Denis at a special presentation ceremony for his dedication, professionalism, vision and leadership qualities. Denis is a member of the West Mayo ASTI Branch, having taught physical education in St Colman's College, Claremorris, Co. Mayo. He held the position of ASTI convenor and second representative for physical education and represented ASTI on the NCCA Senior and Junior Cycle Physical Education Course Committee and the NCCA Board of Studies Arts and Humanities. He is a former member of the ASTI Education Committee.

Education for All report

The ASTI is part of the Irish Coalition for the Global Campaign for Education for All, which promotes education as a basic human right, and mobilises public pressure on governments and the international community to fulfil their promises to provide free, compulsory public basic education for all people, in particular for children, women and all disadvantaged or deprived sections of society. The sixth edition of the 'UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report' was released shortly before Christmas, and presents some very positive findings on the progress of the Education for All campaign. Speaking about the findings, UNESCO Assistant Director General for Education, Nicholas Burnett, said: "Good national policies and higher domestic spending, supported by external aid, are clearly making a difference to the lives of millions of children". Some positive findings were that the number of children starting primary school has increased sharply over the last eight years, and spending on education and aid has also risen. Gender parity in education was achieved in 63% of countries at primary level and 37% at second level in 2005.

Despite encouraging progress, more remains to be achieved. Poor quality, the high cost of schooling and persistent high levels of adult illiteracy continue to undermine the chances of achieving the Global Campaign's aim of education for all by 2015 and external financing for basic education remains far short of that required annually to reach Education for All objectives in low-income countries. A CSPE resource pack has been published by the Irish Coalition for the Global Campaign for Education for All and is available from ASTI Head Office, Tel: 01-6040160 or email: eorourke@asti.ie.

Schools need special needs co-ordinators

The ASTI has been calling for special needs co-ordinator posts for second-level schools since the enactment of the Education for Persons with Special Education Needs (EPSEN) Act in 2004.

Second-level teachers currently face the challenge of mainstreaming students with special educational needs in classes of up to 30 students. In addition, the impending introduction of individual education plans (IEPs) means that schools face further resource difficulties.

In 2006, the National Council for Special Needs Education (NCSE) recommended to the Minister for Education and Science that second-level schools be allocated co-ordinators for special needs. Since this advice was issued, the ASTI has continued to press the Minister and the Department of Education and Science on the matter.

Responding to a parliamentary question from Fine Gael Spokesperson for Education Brian Hayes in November 2007, the Minister indicated that the Department of Education and Science is examining the advice of the NCSE in relation to the implementation of the EPSEN Act, including the advice regarding special needs co-ordinators, and is currently working on proposals.

A special needs co-ordinator would carry out a number of important duties such as:

- co-ordinating the school's provision for students with special education needs;
- co-ordinating individual education plans;
- liaising with teaching staff and providing advice to teachers in relation to teaching and learning strategies, the curriculum, and teaching and learning resources; and,
- liaising with parents and external professionals and agencies.

Pilot parliamentary education programme

A new parliamentary education programme is being piloted in a number of schools around the country. The half-day programme was devised by the Houses of the Oireachtas in consultation with educationalists, and will be refined during the pilot process based on feedback from the schools in which it is being piloted. It is intended that it will be rolled out in all schools from September 2008, as part of the civic, social and political education (CSPE) curriculum.

The programme will include information on government, legislation, the role of the Dáil and Seanad, and the national budgetary process.

The aim is to help young people improve their knowledge of institutions whose members they have an opportunity to elect.

Recent research commissioned by the Houses of the Oireachtas showed that 60% of people do not regard the work of the Oireachtas as important, while one-fifth could not even try to describe what the Oireachtas does. The programme aims to give a practical understanding and insight into the Houses of the Oireachtas and to promote active citizens.

Carlow Branch table quiz

The Carlow Branch recently organised and sponsored a table quiz for senior pupils from schools in its area. Over 30 teams from seven schools participated, and students and teachers very much enjoyed the event. Carlow CBS were the overall winners, Knockbeg College came second and Ard Scoil na Tríonoide, Athy, took third place. Imelda Keogh, Treasurer of the Carlow Branch, presented the prizes, and David Kenny of Tullow Community School was quizmaster.

Stillorgan Branch function



Pictured at a recent Stillorgan Branch function: Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin, making a presentation to Joan O'Callaghan, St Raphaela's Secondary School, Stillorgan. Minister Hanafin is a former Stillorgan Branch member.



Sally Maguire, Standing Committee Region 14, and Rosabelle Crampton, St Raphaela's Secondary School, Stillorgan.

Young Social Innovators



Students from Bandon Grammar School pictured at the 2007 Cork Speak Out.

Last year over 5,000 post-primary students took part in the Young Social Innovators (YSI) programme, and 97% of the participating schools are taking part again this year.

The scheme invites young people aged between 15 and 18 years to identify and tackle social issues, with the backing of supports such as teaching materials, classroom supports and in-service workshops.

Students work in teams, study the chosen problem, and conduct research and meetings with the people concerned and relevant organisations in order to identify ways to improve or solve the issue. They communicate their projects to other schools and youth groups through regional Speak Out events and a large number of projects are chosen to appear at an annual showcase in May. One of the strongest elements of the programme is the focus on learning through action, and another vital aspect is the stake that students have in their own project.

Teachers' skills are crucial to providing leadership and motivation to the students, and their subject specialisations can enrich the programme, as they can contribute their own skills and experience. YSI Speak Out 2008 begins in Griffith College, Dublin, on January 29, and continues throughout the country until the middle of March 2008. To find out more about the YSI programme and events, visit www.youngsocialinnovators.ie.

Water conservation in schools

As part of their 'Conserve Water in Schools' campaign, Dublin City Council has provided all schools in Dublin City with water bulls to collect rainwater for use in school gardens. Also distributed were 'hippo bags' to be put in toilet cisterns, which will automatically reduce the amount of water used in each flush. A resource pack was provided as part of the campaign and schools outside Dublin can get involved by downloading the schools pack from www.dublincity.ie. The pack gives details of how to audit the use of water and to devise a plan of action to encourage water conservation and curtail wastage. The aim is to target young people to take action and to encourage good behaviour and practices at an early age.

ASTI Awards



Kate Lennon, ASTI Award winner (centre) with Patricia Wroe, ASTI President (left) and Gary Granville, Head of Education, NCAD (right).

Kate Lennon was this year's NCAD prizewinner in the ASTI Awards, and was awarded a first-class honours degree in November of last year, achieving first place in teaching practice. Art teaching was something Kate wanted to pursue throughout secondary school as she had a passion for helping people to learn and saw art as a very expressive medium. She is particularly interested in holistic art and therapy through art. Currently teaching in Marino VEC in Dublin as part of a National Behavioural Support Service (NBSS) pilot project, Kate is using art therapy in her teaching of the Junior Cert syllabus. As part of this, she does a lot of one-to-one teaching and behaviour work, including working with emotions through art.

Each year the ASTI awards prizes to high achievers in Higher Diploma in Education graduating classes from UCC, NUI Galway, NUI Maynooth, TCD and UCD, and to the graduating classes in Home Economics Education in St Angela's College, Sligo, and Art and Design Education in NCAD.

Other winners will appear in forthcoming editions of ASTIR.

Big Ballot results

Between November 5 and 9, 2007, almost 70,000 children and young people at schools and training colleges around Ireland participated in the Ombudsman for Children's 'Big Ballot'. They voted on five key issues of importance to them, which they would like the Ombudsman for Children to work on over the coming years.

Results announced in late November show that nationally, the issue children have identified as being of most concern is 'Family and Care', which received 31.5% of the vote. 'Play and Recreation' was the second most prioritised issue (24%) followed by 'Having a Voice' (16.5%), 'Health, Wealth and Material Well-Being' (16%), and 'Education' (12%). Further information on the development and aims of the project, and greater detail on the poll results is available on the OCO website - www.oco.ie.

ECO-UNESCO is 21



Minister of State in charge of drugs, Pat Carey, and ECO-UNESCO's National Director, Elaine Nevin, at the launch of ECO-UNESCO's environmental programme for drugs prevention.

ECO-UNESCO, Ireland's environmental education and youth organisation, celebrated its 21st anniversary in November of last year. ECO-UNESCO has developed and delivered numerous environmental programmes aimed at young people and teachers, and produced a series of educational resources exploring environmental issues. Recently ECO-UNESCO launched a drugs prevention programme for young people, including a training programme for teachers and leaders working with young people, a resource pack and a peer education programme aimed at young people aged between 15 and 18 years. For further information contact ECO-UNESCO on 01-6625491 or email: info@ecounesco.ie.

New Leaving Cert timetable

The new Leaving Certificate timetable configuration represents an improvement that is in line with what was suggested by the ASTI. However, the new timetable, which comes into effect this June, must be reviewed and further improved in a timely manner. The ASTI has long been concerned by the level of stress placed on students during the first few days of the Leaving Certificate exams because of the frontloading of subjects involving lengthy essay writing such as English, Irish and history. The new timetable means students will face less writing in the first few days of the exams.

The following are the first seven days of the revised timetable:

- Day 1: Wednesday June 4, 2008: English paper 1 and home economics (social and sc.)
- Day 2: Thursday June 5, 2008: English paper 2 and chemistry
- Day 3: Friday June 6, 2008: maths paper 1 and geography
- Day 4: Monday June 9, 2008: maths paper 2 and Irish paper 1/aural
- Day 5: Tuesday June 10, 2008: Irish paper 2 and business
- Day 6: Wednesday June 11, 2008: French and history
- Day 7: Thursday June 12, 2008: biology and art (history and appreciation)

Teaching Council Conference



Pictured at the Teaching Council Conference (from left): Pat Burke, Assistant Secretary, DES; Tom Collins, NUI Maynooth; Garret FitzGerald, NUI; Joan Ward, Chairperson; and Aine Lawlor, Director, Teaching Council.

A number of ASTI members were among 300 delegates who attended the first national conference of the Teaching Council last October. With a line-up of speakers including Dr Garret FitzGerald, John Bowman, Prof. Tom Collins, Dr John Coolahan and Prof. Michael Totterdall, the theme of the conference was 'Teaching in a Changing Society – Embracing the Challenge'. Speaking at the conference, Aine Lawlor, Director of the Teaching Council, said the conference served a dual purpose in highlighting the complexity of the teacher's role and the range of responses teachers offer to the challenges they address on a daily basis. Presentations were made on issues such as diversity and multiculturalism; teaching in the digital age; preparing and supporting young people through life's challenges; and, developing students through differentiated teaching and learning.

If you attended this year's conference and wish to give feedback, evaluation forms are available on the Teaching Council's website, www.teachingcouncil.ie.

Supporting teachers around the world

The ASTI has donated €1,000 towards the appointment of a tutor in the teacher training college in Pemba Islands, Zanzibar. This money has also gone towards setting up a science lending laboratory in the college. Most schools in the area do not have science laboratory equipment, so the library has 30 boxes, each containing one experiment, which can be borrowed by teachers and used as demonstration tools in schools.



Standardised school year

Arrangements for the standardisation of the school years 2008/2009, 2009/2010 and 2010/2011 have been agreed at the Teachers' Conciliation Council.

The following dates apply to second-level schools for the 2007/2008 and 2008/2009 school years. The Circular containing full details of arrangements for the 2009/2010 and 2010/2011 school years is available on the ASTI website www.asti.ie.

February 2008 mid-term break

February 11 – February 15, 2008 inclusive.

Easter 2008

All schools will close on March 14, 2008, which will be the final day of the school term. All schools will re-open on March 31, 2008.

October 2008 mid-term break

October 27 – October 31, 2008 inclusive.

Christmas 2008

All schools will close on December 23, which will be the final day of the school term. All schools will re-open on January 7, 2009.

February 2009 mid-term break

February 16 – February 20, 2009 inclusive.

Easter 2009

All schools will close on April 3, 2009, which will be the final day of the school term. All schools will re-open on April 20, 2009.

New community national schools

The Minister for Education, Mary Hanafin, has announced that the first community national schools are to open in two Dublin locations. As part of a pilot programme, two new schools, in the Phoenix Park and Pibblestown in Dublin, will open under the patronage of Co. Dublin VEC. A further school, Scoil Choilm in Diswellstown, Dublin, which opened under the temporary patronage of the Catholic Church in September 2007, is to transition to the new community national school model after a two-year period.

The model was developed following consultation with all of the main education partners and church groups. As in the primary school system generally, the schools will operate under the management of an independent board of management. The VEC will be represented on the board of management as patron, and will provide practical management supports to the school. Arrangements will also be in place to enable the VEC to meet its general financial accountability responsibilities. The Minister indicated that she would now bring proposals to Government to provide the necessary amending legislation to underpin the VEC role in the primary sector.

In a separate move, Educate Together, which runs 44 primary schools, has announced its intention to extend its ethos to second level.

RSTA Christmas coffee morning



Pictured at the RSTA coffee morning held in ASTI Head Office in December are Mairead Brady and Margaret Butler, Mater Christi, Finglas.



Pictured at the RSTA coffee morning held in ASTI Head Office in December are Jack Martin, St Vincent's, Glasnevin, and Christopher Kelly, St John's, Tuam.

New procedures for entry to medicine

From 2009, application for entry to medical education will be open to all students who achieve a threshold level of 480 points in the Leaving Certificate exam and meet matriculation requirements. Applicants must undertake an admissions test that complements the Leaving Certificate examination by assessing a range of general and personal skills and competencies. Weighted credit will be given for performance in the Leaving Certificate up to 550 points, with one point added for each five points after 550 points. This will mean that the maximum number of points that can be added to the candidate's overall score is 560. So, for example, if a student achieves 565 points in their Leaving Cert, they will get 553 points towards their overall score (550 points plus three additional points in recognition of the 15 points achieved above 550). If a student achieves the maximum of six A1s (600 points), the maximum points counted for undergraduate medical entry purposes will be 560.

Admissions test

In the autumn/winter of 2008, Leaving Cert students who want to apply to medicine in 2009 will sit the admissions test. The result of the admissions test will be combined with the points achieved in the Leaving Cert to determine the place the candidate achieves. There will be a weighting of 2:1 for Leaving Cert points: admissions test.

RSTA events from around the country

RSTA Christmas coffee morning



Pictured at the RSTA coffee morning on December 18 are Nuala Carroll, Louis O'Flaherty, RSTA President, and Marie Doyle.

The RSTA wishes to thank ASTI President Patricia Wroe, and the officers of the ASTI, for a most enjoyable coffee morning on December 18, 2007. This event has become a 'must' on the RSTA calendar.

Trip to New York

Louis O'Flaherty, RSTA President, intends to organise a trip to New York in May 2008. Details were given in the Christmas newsletter, so this is a reminder that all enquiries must go to Louis O'Flaherty, 43 Lorcan Drive, Santry, Dublin 9, or to louiso@iol.ie.

Website

You can access the RSTA website by logging on to www.rsta-ireland.com. A limited number of back issues of newsletters are available on the site.

Branches

The branches are busy organising events in their local areas. These events are open to all members of the RSTA. Reports on past talks and outings are very welcome and make for enjoyable reading.

ASTI Gay and Lesbian Network

Who? The ASTI Gay and Lesbian Network is a group of gay and lesbian members of the ASTI who meet regularly in ASTI Head Office.

Why? To identify what the ASTI needs to do to promote equal treatment for all teachers.

What? Regular meetings to:

- gather experiences: and,
- identify policies, procedures and agreements needed to reflect members' truly equal status and entitlement to equal treatment as employees, union members and citizens.

How to contact us: Tel: 087-6297727; email: gayandlesbiannetwork@asti.ie.



The role of the deputy principal

ASTI General Secretary JOHN WHITE looks at this important member of the school community.

All the literature on effective schools stresses the vital role of principal as the educational leader of the school. In this context, the importance of the deputy principal, who acts as principal in the absence of the principal and who assists the principal in the fulfilment of their role, can be seen.

The deputy principal occupies a position of key importance in the administration and development of a school and should be fully involved in decisions about the school's well-being and organisation. The principal and deputy principal should work to their own strengths and talents in the context of their complementarity in the senior management, and should form a cohesive team with the aim of providing the best possible education for all pupils.

Schools are unique institutions. They are almost entirely staffed by professionally qualified teaching staff. They should, therefore, operate on a collegial rather than hierarchical basis in terms of their organisational or management style. Collegiality is essential to the effective operation of the school. Opportunities for real participation in the decision-making processes of the school should be provided to the staff and through such a process of empowerment, the teaching staff will develop a greater sense of engagement with the work of the school and the learning environment will benefit accordingly. In this regard, the embedding of the school development and planning process in schools is a positive development in terms of creating a learning culture in schools. Furthermore, the OECD Report, *Teaching Matters 2005*, highlighted the importance of leadership practices that "build a climate of collegiality and quality improvement within schools". The deputy principal clearly has a central role in facilitating this sense of engagement and collegiality. Of course, the ASTI believes this collegiality would be enhanced if post-holders were given a reduction in their teaching hours.

In contributing to the effective operation of the school, deputy principals should be highly visible to pupils and available for consultation with staff. They should be authoritative figures in ensuring, with the help of all their colleagues, that the school is a harmonious, ordered environment where learning can be optimised. It is, of course, the case that the work of deputy principals and principals as educational leaders of the school community is inhibited by the fact that their work is submerged in administrative and managerial duties and in that regard the ASTI has made representations to the Department of Education and Science seeking a reduction in the bureaucratic requirements placed on schools.

The deputy principal may have specific designated professional responsibilities as delegated. These responsibilities might include:

- developing the education aims and objectives of the school and devising strategies to achieve them;

- developing the school curriculum and assessment policies;
- preparing the school plan for approval by the board of management;
- promoting an appropriate curriculum and methods of instruction, which recognise the diverse aptitudes and needs of students;
- promoting ongoing staff development and in-service;
- developing effective communication systems with pupils, staff, parents and the wider community;
- advising the board of management on staff requirements;
- monitoring and evaluating the school's professional performance – as part of the school development and planning process;
- conducting the ordinary activities of correspondence, making reports and returns of information as required by the Department of Education and Science and the board of management, and ensuring that arrangements are made for dealing with such administrative matters during vacation periods;
- student discipline in the school; and,
- ensuring that parents are informed regularly of their children's progress at the school.

The ASTI has declared that it is inappropriate for deputy principals to assume or be assigned duties in relation to teacher discipline or liaising with union representatives.

The ASTI has a Principals' and Deputy Principals' Advisory Committee, which looks after the trade union interests of deputy principals. This Committee is serviced by the Deputy General Secretary, Diarmaid de Paor. Deputy principals who wish to obtain professional advice on their contracts or on their relations with their employer should seek advice from the ASTI.



*John White,
ASTI General Secretary.*

Profile of a learning support teacher

BRIGID FITZGERALD spoke to Liz Crummey, a learning support teacher at St Raphaela's Secondary School, Dublin.



Learning support teacher Liz Crummey.

How did you become a learning support teacher?

Learning support is a fairly new phenomenon in secondary schools so it is often a role that you devise yourself in the school. I had been teaching English and geography in St Raphaela's Secondary School for about 20 years and about five years ago I noticed that there was a great need for learning support in the school. I always had an interest in the area and an affinity with the students who were having difficulty in the mainstream system, so I decided to go for the training. I did a Diploma in Learning Support in The Church of Ireland College of Education. It was funded by the Department of Education and Science and ran over a year in block release periods. Two years ago, as part of continuing professional development, I did a 10-week module in St Patrick's College, Drumcondra.

What would a typical working week be like for you?

There are several different models of learning support. Some students are withdrawn from class to work in small groups or on a one-to-one basis. I also use team teaching, which is very successful. I circulate within a regular class to offer support to students. If you see a student having difficulty in the class, it's easier and more productive to assist and intervene at that early stage.

I devise my own timetable and I have to structure in withdrawals. I also have four special needs assistants (SNAs) under my charge so I also devise timetables for them. I deal with outside services like St Michael's House, the psychological services and the special educational needs advisor, who is affiliated to the school and decides on resources.

Are there any aspects of your work that you particularly enjoy?

Learning support is a very important part of daily school life. It is rewarding because you know that with the effort and time, and the one-to-one or small group work you put in, it is possible to make progress.

Exam results days are particularly gratifying as students are generally delighted. With facilities in place, you know that students can do well. One advantage of whole school evaluations is that learning support has become intrinsically involved in all subject areas and has gained a higher profile with all teachers.

What are some of the challenges that you face in your job?

In our school, and this would be common to a lot of secondary schools, we don't have Leaving Cert Applied. For students who struggle at Junior Cert, the leap to Leaving Cert is enormous. All the reasonable accommodation and assistance students get up to Junior Cert is successful but everything changes at Leaving Cert level and there is a huge gulf.

The lack of resources and time is a big challenge, as is the fact that often you don't have educational psychologist reports for students so you are working in the dark.

What would help to overcome these challenges?

Continuity from junior to senior cycle and more assessments would be a huge help. Another help would be more training for general subject teachers, most of whom have had no training in the area of learning support. They are expected to contribute to individual education plans (IEPs) with no knowledge even of the terminology. This is frustrating, especially with teachers who are really willing.

The Irish Learning Support Association (ILSA) is holding a seminar with the theme 'Learning and Assessment' on Friday March 7, 2008, in The Bush Hotel, Carrick-on-Shannon. To book a place, log on to www.ilsa.ie. The closing date for bookings is February 7, 2008.

PISA analysis

The PISA 2006 study contains conclusive evidence that Irish second-level education is high quality and is highly equitable. MOIRA LEYDON reports.

A major international study, issued in December 2007, shows that Irish 15-year-old students are among the top performers when it comes to reading literacy, are significantly above average in science, and are in line with the average across the OECD in maths. Over 4,500 Irish 15-year-olds in 165 second-level schools took part in PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), one of the largest surveys of its kind ever carried out. PISA is a longitudinal study of 57 countries, which looks at students' knowledge, competencies and attitudes across three domains – science, maths and literacy. It is implemented on a three-yearly cycle focusing on one domain each time. The aim is to assess the extent to which 15-year-old students near the end of compulsory education possess the key knowledge and skills to enable their full participation in society. PISA 2006 focuses primarily on students' understanding of scientific concepts and their ability to apply these to real life situations.

The results of PISA – like other OECD comparative surveys – are highly important for policy makers and governments. They are of particular significance for Ireland, as one of the most globalised economies in the world. Maintaining economic competitiveness and employment levels requires a well-educated population now and into the future. The PISA studies demonstrate that Irish students score consistently above the OECD average in reading literacy (5th among OECD countries); and in science literacy (14th among OECD countries), and at the average for mathematical literacy (16th among OECD countries) (see Table on page 16).

PISA 2006 reports that while home background – especially parents' socio-economic status – is the major influence on students' achievement levels, in Ireland, Finland and Estonia high and consistent standards of education delivered across the entire schools system means that the socio-economic effect is diluted and equity improved. The report states that parents in these countries "can rely on high and consistent performance standards across schools in the entire education system".

Key findings in PISA 2006

Scientific literacy

Irish students' average score of 508.3 on the combined science literacy scale is significantly above the OECD average of 500. Scientific literacy includes context (situations involving science/technology), competencies, knowledge about science and attitude to/interest in science.

As well as the overall scientific literacy score, Irish students performed well above the OECD average score on identifying scientific issues and using scientific evidence. Their score on explaining phenomena scientifically was also above the OECD average but not significantly so.

In the study, students' scores were grouped into six proficiency levels, ranging from least advanced (level 1) to most advanced (level 6). The percentage of Irish students at levels 5 and 6 is very similar to the OECD average of 9%. Ireland has fewer students below level 2, which is considered as the baseline proficiency level, with 16% compared to the OECD average of 19%. Overall, the proficiency scales suggest that Ireland's generally good performance in science is due to the fact that fewer students score at the lower levels of the proficiency scale rather than a high proportion of high-achieving students. This trend is underlined when comparing the results of PISA 2000 and 2003, which show that the mean science score for Irish students has remained consistently above the OECD average.

In general, the overall science score is the same for boys and girls, although differences do appear in some areas; boys outperform girls by over 16 points in identifying scientific evidence and by 9 points on knowledge about science. It is noteworthy that gender differences in scientific literacy were smaller for all countries than those in mathematics literacy and much smaller than those in reading literacy.

Science literacy and Junior Certificate science

In the report on Irish students' performance in PISA, the Educational Research Centre looked at PISA results and Junior Certificate examination performance. It found that there was a strong correlation between achievement in the PISA study and examination grades; students who performed well on one were likely to perform well on the other. Marks for the written examination papers and coursework A and B were examined to determine similarity to the PISA framework. This revealed a concentration on one science competency to the relative neglect of the other two. At both higher and ordinary level, roughly two-thirds of the marks were allocated to explaining phenomena scientifically, with the remaining marks evenly divided between using scientific evidence and identifying scientific issues. Irish students performed particularly well in PISA on identifying scientific issues despite the low emphasis it received in the 2006 Junior Certificate examination.

Students' attitudes to science

PISA 2006 asked questions in relation to students' general and personal attitudes to science, their interest in and enjoyment of science, their self-concept of their own ability in science, and their likely engagement with science in the future. Irish students had the highest score in relation to awareness of environmental issues for all OECD countries. In relation to the

general value of science, Irish students' scores were identical to other OECD countries and there were also identical levels of agreement on the contribution of science and technology to the natural and the constructed world, and to improving economic and social conditions. On the other hand, Irish students had lower levels of agreement than their OECD counterparts in relation to the belief that "advances in science usually bring social benefits".

PISA 2006 found that most students in all countries expressed confidence in being able to do scientific tasks. The correlation between Irish students' sense of "self-efficacy" in science and their actual achievement is stronger than in other OECD countries. Interestingly, on each of the three indices of self-efficacy, boys in Ireland and in other OECD countries scored significantly higher than girls. Across the ten indices used to measure students' attitudes to science, those most positively correlated with science achievement are enjoyment of science and self-concept in science. In contrast to a pattern of generally positive engagement with science, Irish students were below the OECD average in terms of reading science articles or watching TV programmes about science.

Factors linked to achievement

Raising students' achievement levels while limiting the influence of socio-economic status and other social disadvantages is a core aim of education policy in Ireland and across the developed world. This policy objective is sometimes negatively expressed as the 'equity versus quality' challenge. In Ireland, a small but vocal minority argue that quality is not compatible with equity and denigrate the model of public education, which has served Ireland so well in recent decades. PISA 2006 provides conclusive evidence that, notwithstanding the socio-economic background of the individual student, our second-level schools are ensuring that consistently high standards are maintained.

Student background characteristics such as their parents' occupational status and level of education, the number of books in the home, and quality of student-parent interaction, continue to strongly correlate with levels of achievement. There is a very clear positive relationship between the number of books in the home and achievement, and a very clear negative relationship between the number of TVs in the home and achievement. Students who had a part-time job also had lower than average scores.

An influential characteristic of schools in relation to levels of students' achievement is the average socio-economic background of the student population. Students attending schools where the average socio-economic

background is high tend to perform better than those students attending schools where the average socio-economic status is low. In other words, "the effects of the average economic, social and cultural status of the student population – in terms of performance variation across students – far outweighs the effects of the individual student's socio-economic background". This conclusion has very practical implications in terms of ensuring that all schools adhere to open enrolment policies representative of the entire community. A further conclusion from PISA is that within-school variation can have an impact on students' achievement levels, with students who are streamed early and/or across all subjects having lower achievement levels. The most recent ESRI research on students' experiences in the Junior Cycle – 'Gearing Up For The Exam' – underlines the concerns arising from this school practice.

Investment in education is the key

In general, PISA 2006 indicates that the amount of money a country spends on education is related to achievement. Countries with higher national incomes – measured by GDP per capita – tend to perform better in science, and up to 28% of the national variations in scores can be predicted on the basis of their GDP per capita. In this regard, Ireland's strong performance is more or less in line with our GDP per capita rating. However, as noted in PISA, a country may be wealthy but invest relatively little in education. Ireland is at the bottom of the OECD tables for expenditure on education. The relationship between expenditure and achievement is, therefore, complex, and while achievement tends to increase with investment, other factors are critical. While PISA 2006 does not specify it, the quality of the teaching force is obviously paramount.

See overleaf for table of full PISA results.



*Moira Leydon,
Assistant General Secretary,
Education and Research.*

Mean country scores for each domain in PISA 2006.

Science			Reading			Mathematics		
	Mean	IRL		Mean	IRL		Mean	IRL
Finland	563.3	▲	Korea	556.0	▲	Chinese-Taipei	549.4	▲
Hong Kong – Ch.	542.2	▲	Finland	546.9	▲	Finland	548.4	▲
Canada	534.5	▲	Hong Kong – Ch.	536.1	▲	Hong Kong-Ch.	547.5	▲
Chinese Taipei	532.5	▲	Canada	527.0	▲	Korea	547.5	▲
Estonia	531.4	▲	New Zealand	521.0	0	Netherlands	530.7	▲
Japan	531.4	▲	Ireland	517.3		Switzerland	529.7	▲
New Zealand	530.4	▲	Australia	512.9	0	Canada	527.0	▲
Australia	526.9	▲	Liechtenstein	510.4	0	Macao-China	525.0	▲
Netherlands	524.9	▲	Poland	507.6	▼	Liechtenstein	525.0	▲
Liechtenstein	522.2	▲	Sweden	507.3	▼	Japan	523.1	▲
Korea	522.1	▲	Netherlands	506.7	▼	New Zealand	522.0	▲
Slovenia	518.8	▲	Belgium	500.9	▼	Belgium	520.3	▲
Germany	515.6	0	Estonia	500.7	▼	Australia	519.9	▲
United Kingdom	514.8	0	Switzerland	499.3	▼	Estonia	514.6	▲
Czech Republic	512.9	0	Japan	498.0	▼	Denmark	513.0	▲
Switzerland	511.5	0	Chinese-Taipei	496.2	▼	Czech Republic	509.9	0
Macao-China	510.8	0	United Kingdom	495.1	▼	Iceland	505.5	0
Austria	510.8	0	Germany	494.9	▼	Austria	505.5	0
Belgium	510.4	0	Denmark	494.5	▼	Slovenia	504.5	0
Ireland	508.3		Slovenia	494.4	▼	Germany	503.8	0
Hungary	503.9	0	Macao-China	492.3	▼	Sweden	502.4	0
Sweden	503.3	0	OECD Mean	491.8	▼	Ireland	501.5	
OECD Mean	500.0	▼	Austria	490.2	▼	OECD Mean	497.7	0
Poland	497.8	▼	France	487.7	▼	France	495.5	0
Denmark	495.9	▼	Iceland	484.4	▼	United Kingdom	495.4	0
France	495.2	▼	Norway	484.3	▼	Poland	495.4	0
Croatia	493.2	▼	Czech Republic	482.7	▼	Slovak Republic	492.1	▼
Iceland	490.8	▼	Hungary	482.4	▼	Hungary	490.9	▼
Latvia	489.5	▼	Latvia	479.5	▼	Luxembourg	490.9	▼
United States	488.9	▼	Luxembourg	479.4	▼	Norway	489.8	▼
Slovak Republic	488.4	▼	Croatia	477.4	▼	Lithuania	486.4	▼
Spain	488.4	▼	Portugal	472.3	▼	Latvia	486.2	▼
Lithuania	488.0	▼	Lithuania	470.1	▼	Spain	480.0	▼
Norway	486.5	▼	Italy	468.5	▼	Azerbaijan	476.0	▼
Luxembourg	486.3	▼	Slovak Republic	466.3	▼	Russian Fed.	475.7	▼
Russian Fed.	479.5	▼	Spain	460.8	▼	United States	474.4	▼
Italy	475.4	▼	Greece	459.7	▼	Croatia	467.2	▼
Portugal	474.3	▼	Turkey	447.1	▼	Portugal	466.2	▼
Greece	473.4	▼	Chile	442.1	▼	Italy	461.7	▼
Israel	453.9	▼	Russian Fed.	439.9	▼	Greece	459.2	▼
Chile	438.2	▼	Israel	438.7	▼	Israel	441.9	▼
Serbia	435.6	▼	Thailand	416.8	▼	Serbia	435.4	▼
Bulgaria	434.1	▼	Uruguay	412.5	▼	Uruguay	426.8	▼
Uruguay	428.1	▼	Mexico	410.5	▼	Turkey	423.9	▼
Turkey	423.8	▼	Bulgaria	401.9	▼	Thailand	417.1	▼
Jordan	422.0	▼	Serbia	401.0	▼	Romania	414.8	▼
Thailand	421.0	▼	Jordan	400.6	▼	Bulgaria	413.4	▼
Romania	418.4	▼	Romania	395.9	▼	Chile	411.4	▼
Montenegro	411.8	▼	Indonesia	392.9	▼	Mexico	405.7	▼
Mexico	409.7	▼	Brazil	392.9	▼	Montenegro	399.3	▼
Indonesia	393.5	▼	Montenegro	392.0	▼	Indonesia	391.0	▼
Argentina	391.2	▼	Colombia	385.3	▼	Jordan	384.0	▼
Brazil	390.3	▼	Tunisia	380.3	▼	Argentina	381.3	▼
Colombia	388.0	▼	Argentina	373.3	▼	Colombia	370.0	▼
Tunisia	385.5	▼	Azerbaijan	352.9	▼	Brazil	369.5	▼
Azerbaijan	382.3	▼	Qatar	312.2	▼	Tunisia	365.5	▼
Qatar	349.3	▼	Kyrgyzstan	284.7	▼	Qatar	318.0	▼
Kyrgyzstan	322.0	▼				Kyrgyzstan	310.6	▼

▲ Significantly above OECD average

● At/near OECD average

▼ Significantly below OECD average

▲ Significantly higher than Ireland

0 Not significantly different to Ireland

▼ Significantly lower than Ireland

Teachers and workplace stress

Continuing the series on health and safety issues for teachers, BRIGID FITZGERALD looks at workplace stress.



An ASTI health and safety survey carried out in 2004 identified stress/anxiety as the most common cause of occupational illness in schools. This was consistent with the 2000 survey findings and similar to recent Health and Safety Authority (HSA) figures. Not every teacher suffers debilitating stress, but teaching is a particularly stressful occupation, a fact that has been recognised internationally in the literature and by the courts. Recently, there has been a growing awareness of the implications of occupational stress and the HSA has developed tools for the measurement of workplace stress and has increased its attention on stress as a workplace health hazard. Employers are also showing greater interest in the area and are more aware that it should be dealt with in the context of good general health and safety practice.

What causes occupational stress?

Occupational stress is brought about by a combination of personal, organisational and social factors including role, leadership and relationships. Teaching has a number of specific stressors such as dealing with disruptive student behaviour, the pressures of school inspections, providing cover for colleagues, and large workload. Although the school day may appear to be shorter than most office jobs,

this is largely class contact time and teachers put in many more hours, preparing classes, marking assignments and organising extracurricular activities. Teachers have little time between lessons to prepare, plan or recover. According to Richard Wynne of the Education Research Centre, the isolated nature of the job can lead to poor communication and this, together with inconsistency of policy – particularly regarding discipline – and a lack of resources, are major causes of teacher stress. Changes to the curricula and the introduction of new educational programmes can lead to increasing demands. Any major change in the way a job is performed carries the potential to cause stress and teaching work cannot be put off due to circumstances or overload. Development and change is often necessary and welcome but it needs to be in conjunction with the necessary training and support. Teachers have the added responsibility of ensuring that their students work to the best of their potential. According to Moira Leydon, Assistant General Secretary: Education and Research: "A teacher's work has a lot to do with communication and relationships, and although this is a positive feature, the more emotion invested, the more stress potential, especially when negative outcomes occur". Teaching is a particularly intensive activity; in fact, it involves constant pressing demands and interaction with adolescents at different stages of development.

Students who show a lack of interest and low motivation can negatively affect a teacher's own motivation and professional confidence. Additionally, student behaviour and indiscipline in schools can compound an already stressful situation, particularly in instances of bullying or harassment. In relation to student relationships and behaviour, teachers often take on additional roles, many of which they receive no extra training for.

Effects

The immediate effects of stress are anxiety and depression, and prolonged occupational stress can lead to mental and physical ill health. Last year's ASTI stress survey showed that outcomes of stress on individual teachers include feeling tired and lacking in energy, feeling de-motivated, feeling under strain and losing confidence as a teacher. At school level, effects include colleagues feeling under pressure, feeling de-motivated, low morale and colleagues taking time off. A stressful work environment does not just affect teachers and management; stress and burnout can significantly impair the quality of teachers' relationships with students and the quality of their teaching.

The need for action

Some 11% of all retiring teachers retire on grounds of ill health, with 50% of disability retirements attributed to stress/depression/anxiety. Pat King, ASTI Assistant General Secretary: Industrial Relations says: "Early retirement, as well as the growing evidence of litigation concerning occupational stress, should be of concern to school managements and the Department of Education and Science (DES), and it is incumbent on employers to undertake stress prevention activities within the workplace. Not only will this provide the only effective defence in a situation where litigation arises but it will also curtail the loss of experienced teachers". Legally, management has a duty to minimise the risk of stress and to deal with its occurrence, and the school's safety statement must identify stress as a hazard and set out details of how it will be reduced and how teachers will be trained to deal with it.

Prevention and management

Occupational stress can be managed through a mixture of primary, secondary and tertiary intervention. The first step involves prevention, usually in conjunction with organisation-wide change. Secondary intervention involves stress management and includes aspects such as training for the job, and in aspects of health and safety generally. Tertiary intervention focuses on minimisation of effects and involves the provision of counselling and assistance.

What can I do?

Stress is an ongoing problem, not an individual weakness. If you are suffering from work-related stress, your employer has a legal duty to tackle it. There is no stigma attached to asking for help.

- If specific aspects of your job are causing you stress, you can talk to your principal, a colleague or the school steward.
- The Employee Assistance Service (EAS) is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. You can call 1800-411057 or email eas@vhi.ie.
- Look out for stress prevention or stress management courses. The ASTI runs an in-service professional development programme. Notices of courses appear in ASTIR and Nuacht, and information is available on the ASTI website.

According to Pat King: "Good practice in stress prevention focuses on employers and employees working together to identify and tackle key causes of stress. Employees should have a level of control over their work and support from management. Conflict should be minimised and a teacher's role should be clearly defined. Consistent and fair management actions are also important. Workload demands should be achievable and work patterns and environments suitable". A survey on stress carried out by the ASTI last year showed that 74% of the respondents prioritised small classes to reduce stress. The ASTI is currently engaged in a campaign for a change in the teacher appointment ratio and a consequent reduction in class size. Commonly, the only training on stress coping mechanisms teachers receive is during their teacher training. The ASTI would like to see the introduction of a DES-funded stress prevention in-service programme, with courses including recognising the symptoms of stress, reducing the risk of ill health and practical ways of reducing stress. According to Pat King: "It is important that teachers have support from each other as well as from management, and they should be vigilant about the emergence of stress symptoms in colleagues and ensure that schools have efficient systems to prevent bullying and harassment".

Pilot programme

The Work Research Centre, in conjunction with the teachers' unions, ran a pilot stress prevention programme in 1999. The great achievement of this project was that it showed that the issue of stress could be addressed successfully through analysis and training. It was recommended that the pilot programme be extended into a nationwide programme and appropriately resourced to enable it to continue its work for the future. As yet there are no plans to launch a national stress prevention programme. Richard Wynne believes: "There is no coherent approach as to how stress should be dealt with by the DES or school managements. There is a real lack of direction from the top".

Strategies for the future

The DES, in consultation with the teachers' unions and management groups, is putting in place an occupational health strategy as a support resource for teachers. An occupational health management service is due to begin operation in early 2008 and will incorporate pre-employment health assessments, sickness absence management, medical assessments of fitness for work, and ill health retirement. As part of the health strategy, the Employee Assistance Service for teachers has been put in place. The service incorporates confidential counselling on issues such as health, relationships, bereavement and stress. Teaching alone in front of adolescents can be a lot of pressure and an important part of stress prevention and coping with stress is talking to somebody.

Moira Leydon believes: "The ultimate aim of the health management system should be to maintain the health and welfare of staff. A fundamental aspect of that, stress and burnout, is not being specifically addressed." According to the DES, stress prevention and management are matters that will come within the scope of the occupational health strategy as it develops, but currently there are no clear proposals in place. Notably, stress rehabilitation and recovery is not a priority, as the emphasis of the system is on prevention rather than cure.

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



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Report from the ASTI Education Conference 2007

ASTIR reports on the workshops on senior cycle reform that took place at this year's Education Conference.



From left: Robert Kirkpatrick, Senior Inspector in the Department of Education and Science; John White, ASTI General Secretary; Patricia Wroe, ASTI President; and, Tom Collins, NUI Maynooth and Keynote Speaker at the ASTI Education Conference, 2007.



Attendees pictured during conference proceedings.



Approximately 150 delegates attended the Conference.



Participants in an Education Conference workshop.

The three key challenges facing second-level teachers also impact on schools' capacity for education reform, according to Tom Collins, Professor of Education at NUI, Maynooth. Speaking at the 2007 ASTI Education Conference, which took place last November, Prof. Collins said that the key challenges facing second-level teachers are special needs education, the diverse student cohort, and discipline. "Teachers have not received adequate training or support in relation to the mainstreaming of students with special needs," he said.

"Diversity in schools in terms of academic ability has emerged because the pattern of universal second-level education was established relatively recently." On the issue of student behaviour, Prof. Collins said: "I think discipline is emerging as a particular challenge largely because teachers are working with a centralised syllabus. The centralised syllabus structure means that there isn't enough scope to meet some children's needs and energise them, so the syllabus does not engage them."

Robert Kirkpatrick, Senior Inspector from the Department of Education and Science, said reform is necessary if we want a higher participation rate, and to increase educational outcomes for disadvantaged students and those with special educational needs. However, he said the reform programme must take account of the capacity of the system. Approximately 150 delegates attended workshops on topics relating to the current review of the senior cycle being undertaken by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). The following are reports from these workshops.

Key skills

The NCCA has developed a key skills framework, which is the basis for the ongoing senior cycle review. Majella Dempsey of the NCCA outlined the five key skills: information processing; critical and creative thinking; communicating; working with others; and, being personally effective.

The NCCA Key Skills Project, which works with 30 teachers from 11 schools, has examined the relevance of the five skills to the current English, Irish, Spanish, maths and biology syllabuses. This has revealed that the five skills are relevant, and are being taught across the five subjects, but to differing degrees. The teachers involved in the Key Skills Project have found that having an understanding of the key skills allows for more learner-centred teaching.

Workshop delegates felt that there would have to be a radical overhaul of the curriculum and a change in the public mindset before embedding the five key skills could become part of everyday teaching. One delegate commented that parents' expectations would make such a change very difficult.

Delegates at the workshop also expressed the view that while the NCCA's role is to develop plans for educational reform, it has no role in sanctioning the necessary resources and supports needed for such reform. *Based on a presentation by Maire Ni Chiarba, Education Committee.*

Short courses

John Halbert from the NCCA set out the context in which the senior cycle short courses are being developed. He described short courses as being 50% of a "normal full course" and taking up 90 hours of annual class time. Short courses will allow for the delivery of a more flexible curriculum at senior cycle, and will place increased emphasis on students becoming better learners rather than gaining specific knowledge. A pilot short course in enterprise is being developed, which will cover business knowledge, and also encourage students to develop as enterprising individuals.

Issues were raised about the feasibility of implementing short courses, given current resources and time pressures. Learning outcomes were discussed, with one delegate asking: "If students don't learn anything new in terms of knowledge, then what's it all for?"

On the issue of assessment, John Halbert said that the proposal is that short courses will be assessed on completion and certified as part of a more flexible senior cycle programme.

One delegate urged members to become involved in the debate on senior cycle review: "I think the more feedback we give to the NCCA from the grassroots level, the better."

Based on a presentation by Sean Fallon, Education Committee.

Transition units

In-service, time and resources dominated the discussion during the workshop on transition units. Peter Johnson from the NCCA explained that transition units are 45-hour courses, the content of which will be developed/adapted by individual schools, with sample units available as a guide. The units are modelled on units from the Transition Year Programme and may be classroom-based and/or consist of field trips, research projects and other features. There will be no final exam for transition units, but students will receive certification for completed units. Five schools are currently piloting transition units.

Some delegates felt that 45 hours of annual class time per unit was limiting. Others feared that transition units could lead to a hierarchy, with traditional Leaving Certificate subjects perceived as having a higher status. The need for quality in-service – particularly in the area of teaching and learning approaches – was discussed. Delegates also stated that while education review is necessary, the remit for allocating resources necessary for the implementation of reform lies with the Government – namely the Ministers for Education and Science and Finance. *Based on a presentation by Noel Buckley, Education Committee.*

Senior Cycle Schools' Network

John Hammond from the NCCA explained that the Schools' Network was formed in 2006 to investigate the practical implications of developments in curriculum and assessment at senior cycle. Twenty schools are involved in various pilot projects in relation to transition units, key skills and flexible learning profiles.

Eight schools and 35 teachers are participating in the flexible learning profiles initiative. The aim is to reach out to students who have disengaged and are vulnerable to dropping out, and to provide them with learning choices that 'connect' with them, focussing on their individual needs.

Flexible options being examined include students being able to choose elements of different senior cycle programmes. For example, a student might choose elements of the traditional Leaving Certificate, some transition units, elements of the Leaving Certificate Applied and elements of FETAC courses.

The flexible learning profiles initiative requires a more flexible approach to school organisation in areas such as technology, and the use of the school building. Delegates expressed concern about current resources in schools, in particular that some schools do not have the technology that is envisaged in the flexible learning profiles pilot. Delegates also felt that teachers face a huge challenge in terms of changing their approach to teaching, given pressures such as time and resources. One delegate asked: "Where is the money going to come from for all this?"

The role that teachers can play in shaping curriculum development was noted. Teachers were urged by one delegate to "check out the NCCA website, get clued in to the consultation process, and get involved". *Based on a presentation by Pat Deery, Education Committee.*

Update documents on the NCCA Senior Cycle Review are available at www.ncca.ie.

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

The Zambia Immersion Programme

BRIGID FITZGERALD looks at the involvement of St Ciaran's Community School, Kells, in a remarkable overseas development project.



The Zambia Immersion Programme seeks to raise awareness of development issues in a positive and challenging way.

St Ciaran's Community School, Kells, has participated in the Zambia Immersion Programme for the past six years. The programme, which seeks to raise awareness of development issues in a positive and challenging way, has been a remarkable success within the school, impacting on students and teachers there in many positive and practical ways.

Origins

The success of the programme has its origins in the careful planning involved in its initial implementation. A group of teachers in the school had an interest in development education, some having worked in Africa in the past, and were aware of the immersion programme set up by the Christian Brothers in 1999. It was important to everyone involved that this would be a meaningful and

constructive educational project. A number of teachers undertook an initial research visit to Zambia, and there was much serious thought and discussion about how the project would be undertaken and the issues that needed to be addressed.

To date, three groups of teachers, students and parent representatives from St Ciaran's Community School have travelled to Mazabuka in Central Zambia to immerse in and integrate with the community, and to bring about a measure of positive and practical change there. The aims for the students and teachers are to gain a greater understanding of development issues, to become more aware of the effects of poverty and injustice, and to experience the Zambian culture. The group act as ambassadors for the school and the community, and try to bring an understanding of Irish life to those they meet. This February, a group of parents and teachers plan to make the trip.



The programme's solar-powered well provides clean water for more than 40,000 homes.



Two Irish students with a hand-powered water pump provided as part of the programme.



A group of teachers from St Ciaran's Community School with a minibus provided to the community as part of the programme.



Students and teachers from St Ciaran's Community School pictured with Bill Nolan, Irish Ambassador to Zambia.

Student commitment

These trips are not school tours; students must take ownership of the project through all stages. They must demonstrate a genuine interest in and commitment to the programme, complete a project on development and attend an interview if they wish to become part of the travel group. They fundraise through individual and group campaigns, and publicise the work of the programme through the media, by speaking in the community and by making presentations to sixth class students in their former primary schools. Prior to the trip the students participate in personal development and group work. They attend weekend training and lunchtime meetings, at which they raise and discuss relevant issues.

Achievements

Kay O'Brien, Deputy Principal of St Ciaran's Community School, says that the Zambia Immersion Programme has really been taken to the heart of the community in Kells and the surrounding areas, with teachers, parents and families all getting involved. So far the programme has raised over €250,000, which goes towards funding the visits and to providing funds for amenities and projects in Zambia. To date, the programme has provided a solar powered well, which provides clean water for more than 40,000 homes; provided hand pumps for five other communities; equipped a school with 10 notebook computers and a parish centre with IT equipment; provided sports jerseys and equipment;

brought medical resources for Mazabuka Hospital; helped to establish a HIV/AIDS outreach programme; provided a minibus; financed a school food supplement programme; and, provided funding for teacher training and for a community social worker. They have also provided school extensions in conjunction with Irish Aid. During the last visit the students painted the outpatient department of the local hospital with members of the local community. This was a challenging job that provided a great sense of achievement. The resources provided and projects undertaken by the programme are decided in consultation with the community in Mazabuka and with the Mercy Sisters and Christian Brothers there.

Over the years, many teachers have been involved in the programme and four or five travel as part of the group during each trip. During the trip the group visit community schools set up by the Christian Brothers and Mercy Sisters in Zambia. They talk to children there about life in Ireland, discuss relevant social issues within both communities, hold concerts, and play music and football matches – the Irish students so far failing to win a single match! One point of the trip is to make students aware of the impact and extent of poverty and ill health in the developing world. As well as integrating into communities living in terrible conditions, with poor sanitation, makeshift houses and malnutrition, the group also make visits to HIV clinics, sugar and coffee plantations and factories.

Long-term benefits

The personal benefits to the students who travel are profound. They gain leadership qualities and maturity. Kay O'Brien says: "Students are confronted with many challenging things during the trip, but they rise to these challenges in an amazing way. The personal development of the students has an impact on the school as a whole because it creates a core group of very mature sixth year students, who are trustworthy and with whom teachers have developed strong relationships". The programme also has benefits for the whole school in terms of the integration of international students, and in the curriculum, particularly with subjects like CSPE and geography.

There is also a political dimension to the programme. The students visit the Dáil and have met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dermot Ahern, and the Irish Ambassador to Zambia, Bill Nolan. According to teacher Jim O'Brien, who is also involved in the project, the programme "makes students much more aware of issues in the developing world and how lucky they are in comparison to the people there". The Immersion Programme has now made links with the Irish Aid Linking and Immersion scheme, which aims to raise awareness among young people about Irish Aid's work and where aid money is going. The hope is that if students are made aware of development issues at a young age, they may be in a position to make a positive impact in later life. Indeed, the Kells experience shows that this can happen; one student who was involved in a previous trip to Mazabuka is now training to be a teacher

and returned to join last year's visit. Another former participant is studying medicine and has since worked in Kenya.

The Irish Aid Schools Linking and Immersion Scheme is running a pilot programme this school year with the purpose of determining appropriate levels of funding and support activities. The success of the programme in Kells shows that integration and linking can be achieved in a meaningful and constructive way. While it does require huge commitment, if teachers, parents, and students work together in a considered way, a lot can be achieved and there are benefits for all involved.

The ASTI has made donations in support of the Zambia Immersion Programme in St Ciaran's Community School, Kells.



*Brigid Fitzgerald
Administrative Officer for
ASTIR magazine.*

TEACHERS - VISIT ZAMBIA WITH BÓTHAR



Bóthar, the Development Aid Agency, is putting in place a Study Tour to Zambia specifically for post-primary teachers. The trip takes place from 21st - 30th March 2008. See first hand how Bóthar projects work in Africa. Cost of trip is €2,500 per person. All flights, accommodation, transport and meals in-country included in cost. Places are limited to 16 participants, so book early to avoid disappointment.

For further information and an application form, contact: Mary Goldrick at the Bóthar Fundraising Office, Tubbercurry, Co. Sligo. Telephone 071 9120100 or email mary@bothar.ie

The Equal Opportunities Committee

MAIRE MULCAHY describes the work of this important committee.



Equal Opportunities Committee members pictured at a recent meeting. Back row (from left): Edel McInerney, West Limerick Branch; Anne O'Sullivan, Fermoy Branch and CEC member; Jim Duffy, West Mayo Branch; Mary Ohle, Dublin North West Branch; Elaine Devlin, Dundalk Branch; and, Anne Loughnane, Carbery Branch. Front row (from left): Maire Mulcahy, ASTI Assistant General Secretary; Jane Clare, Disability Champion Officer, ICTU; Carmel Heneghan, West Mayo Branch; and, Eilis Casey, Limerick South Branch.

The current ASTI Equal Opportunities Committee came into being following election at ASTI Annual Convention 2007 and will continue until 2009.

Employment Equality Act

The Committee celebrated a major achievement in 2007 with the adoption of a motion at the Biennial Conference of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions calling for the repeal of a section of the Employment Equality Act. The ASTI proposed the motion at the Biennial Conference following a request to ASTI Convention 2007 from the Equal Opportunities Committee.

The motion referred to Section 37.1 of the Employment Equality Act, 1998, which gives schools under the control of a religious order the right to give more favourable treatment to an employee or prospective employee in order to maintain the religious ethos of the school, and to take action to prevent an employee or prospective employee from undermining that ethos. The Equal Opportunities Committee considers this to be an unnecessary and excessive protection of denominational interests. The motion adopted by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions calls for the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform to engage in a consultative process designed to effect the repeal of Section 37.1.

Gay and Lesbian Network

Another key achievement for the Equal Opportunities Committee during 2007 was the establishment of the ASTI Gay and Lesbian Network. The network has met on four occasions during the year and has identified a work programme that includes:

1. Publicising and strengthening the network
 - A special email address – gayandlesbiannetwork@asti.ie – and phone number – 087-6297727 – have been set up to enable easy access to Head Office.
 - A draft poster has been drawn up.
 - All school stewards will receive details of the network.
2. Draft agreements with management organisations/parents
 - Draft agreements are being developed, which will recognise all teachers' right to equal treatment, irrespective of sexual orientation.
3. Draft agreement with Department of Education and Science
 - This will be developed to propose equal treatment in relation to pension rights, *force majeure* and other leave.
4. A pamphlet setting out the rights of gay and lesbian teachers is being developed.
5. The Network wishes to generate awareness about the difficulties encountered by gay and lesbian teachers and students through the publications of the ASTI.
6. It is intended that meetings will be held outside Dublin.
7. The network intends to collaborate with kindred organisations.

Work of Equal Opportunities Committee

The Committee is guided by its three-fold objective:

- promotion of equal opportunities for teachers;
- promotion of equal opportunities for students; and,
- promotion of equal opportunities for members.

Over the past year, the Committee has undertaken a range of activities designed to promote equal opportunities, including:

- training for branch honorary equality officers;
- monitoring appointments to promotional posts in schools;
- investigating claims by members under the Employment Equality Act;
- establishing the ASTI Gay and Lesbian Network for Teachers;
- advising ASTI Standing Committee in relation to a number of issues, including parental leave arrangements for teachers, and improving participation by female ASTI members in their union; and,
- making recommendations/submissions to external agencies on a range of equality issues.



*Maire Mulcahy,
Assistant General Secretary,
Industrial Relations.*

Doing your literature review

GERRY MacRUAIRC continues his discussion of postgraduate research with a look at a crucial part of preparing your thesis.



The work that is carried out in the completion of a literature review will have a significant impact on the shape and quality of the final thesis product. The following outlines an approach to this task. This approach is not put forward as the only way, or indeed as the best way. How you engage in this work will depend on a number of factors. You will probably draw heavily on strategies you have found helpful in the past when you engaged in academic writing. Notwithstanding this, it is hoped that this article will assist you in some way as you approach the task of writing a literature review.

Purpose of a literature review

Essentially the literature review should provide you with a framework of theories and concepts that will challenge, extend and develop your own ideas and opinions. This in turn will provide you with the context for the analysis of your own research findings. By engaging in reading in a particular area you are seeking to develop your conceptual understandings of the key issues that relate to your chosen topic. Each field of enquiry is underpinned by a particular set of concepts and framed within a specific discourse. Coming to terms with a particular discourse, i.e., to the body of language and associated concepts that frames and delimits your chosen field of enquiry, is crucial. If, for example, you are building up a literature review on a particular aspect of educational disadvantage, the task for you in the literature review is to become familiar with discourse in relation to social class, cultural difference, middle class bias in education, and the role schools play in the reproduction of patterns of inequality. When your academic tutor is assessing this review, he/she will be looking for the depth and breadth of your understanding and the degree of insight you bring to your writing. The literature review will also enable you to identify

current policy, research and practice in a particular field. This will provide a rationale for your particular angle or line of enquiry, and enable you to identify key questions that can be addressed by your own research activity.

Defining the scope of the review

This is where the information age really kicks in. In the case of most topics, there is a significant body of literature out there to be consulted. It is vital, therefore, that you have a clear question/angle in order to provide a focus for your reading. The clearer you are at this point, the more efficiently you will spend your time. In order to ensure that you demonstrate a depth and breadth of understanding of your chosen field, it is necessary to read broadly at first. Working with a few core writers and/or general textbooks on a particular topic is a prerequisite to developing your thinking. A student, for example, who is interested in examining the emotional dimension to school leadership, should start with broad readings on school leadership generally and how the discourse of leadership has evolved over time. Some of this work can be carried out prior to beginning a thesis by choosing course modules/lectures carefully so as to build up your own knowledge in a particular area. There is a danger here that you will allocate too much time to reading at this level, so it is necessary to be very disciplined and to accept the fact that in-depth understanding develops over time and that forcing this process into a short timeframe will serve to frustrate rather than illuminate. You need to move to more focused reading, which directly addresses your specific line of enquiry, as quickly as possible. At this point, journal articles will probably be the most important and helpful sources you use. The currency of journal writing in academic circles has increased dramatically over the past number of years. Writing

for journals, in preference to writing in any other format (including books), is the most beneficial to academics and the academic career pathway. Consequently, journals are where it's at in terms of the most up-to-date material written by the most prestigious writers. Most university libraries have an extensive list of on-line journals. UCD has recently increased the range of journals available online and many of these are available off campus. The trekking back and forth to the library that characterised university life in the past is almost at an end. By typing the key words related to your topic into the online library databases, you will have the most up-to-date perspectives at your fingertips. However, it is worth adding a word of warning about online sources. Not all come with the same seal of approval. International peer-reviewed journal articles are your most reliable source. It is necessary to check this before you rely too heavily on the material consulted. As is the case with hard copy journals, the evidence of peer review is found if you check the first pages of the journal, where you should find details relating to the editorial board and the number and status of its members.

Tips and hints

When the literature review is finished you will probably have figured out most of the tips you should have followed and the pitfalls you could have avoided. Outlined below are a number of lessons I have learned, many by painful personal experience.

Firstly, it is vital that you set up and maintain a recording system of what you have read so as to ensure that you have all the details you need for your bibliography. To this end you should photocopy the cover page and publication details of every book you read. In the case of edited books, add a photocopy of the table of contents. With journal articles, all the necessary information is on the title page of the article so keeping a hard copy of this is advisable.

Secondly, be careful how you record key quotations. If you can record key quotes electronically as you come across them, with author, date and page number, it really can ensure accuracy and save time in the final stages. There is nothing more frustrating than trying to find the page number of a key quotation in an edited book that you can't seem to find in the library two days before the thesis is due in!

Finally, it's 'belt and braces' when it comes to electronically saving your material. Despite revealing my own paranoia in relation to this on a yearly basis with masters students in UCD, someone or 'some-two' invariably get caught. Back up on a number of media. Be careful about over-reliance on one type of media, especially memory sticks, as they can be notoriously sensitive. A good idea is to email drafts to yourself regularly and, to be sure to be sure (here comes the paranoia), email it to a friend and, just in case all else fails, press print!



Dr Gerry MacRuaric

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

Profile



Caitríona McGrath teaches Gaelige and geography in Carrigaline Community School, Cork. She graduated with a Masters in Education in 2003 and is currently completing research for a PhD on the interaction of school and community.

Where did you source information on available courses?

I wanted a challenge and to develop my knowledge but it was important to me that the course I chose would fit in with my lifestyle. I enquired into a few masters courses and talked to other teachers. I met a friend at ASTI Convention who had completed the course in Hull University. It was part taught and part research and ran over three years. The lectures were held on Wednesdays, when my school is on a half day, so it was ideal.

Is it difficult to manage your time while studying and working?

I work in a large, busy school and between that and study it can be demanding, but it is also enjoyable. It's about maintaining a balance, where work and study can complement each other. You have to have a disciplined work schedule. I enjoy doing research and find it interesting. That doesn't mean I won't be relieved to have it finished! My research work complements my teaching work and I am on the ASTI Education Committee, so that keeps me up to date on educational developments and feeds into my research. I find research sharpens and opens the mind and prepares you for the more inclusive, interactive classroom of today.

Do you have any advice for completing a literature review?

The first task in writing a review is choosing a research topic that is of interest to you and your readers. Sources of literature have expanded exponentially with the advent of the Internet and you need to focus on what is of value to you and rank your sources in order of the relevance of the information. When reading for your literature review, you should be conscious of your own beliefs and potential bias. Generally speaking you should read with an open mind rather than to prove a point. At all times, keep your own voice. Also remember: revise, revise, revise – the first attempt is a draft and there will be a few!

Creating active citizens

MICHAEL STOKES looks at the CSPE course, and discusses plans to extend it to the senior cycle.



Civic, social and political education (CSPE) was introduced into the Junior Certificate curriculum for all students in 1997, replacing civics, which was introduced in 1966. Ten years later 'The Report of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship' (2007) noted the key role education plays in supporting the development of active citizenship. The Taskforce recommends the introduction of a citizenship programme as an examination subject at senior cycle.

CSPE comprises a core content as well as interdisciplinary or cross-curricular dimensions. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) envisages that on completion of their compulsory schooling, students' understanding and experience of civic, social and political education will have been constructed from a single subject, from other subjects and from aspects of whole-school life; in other words, that their learning should mirror the integrated occurrence of civic, social and political phenomena in society and life.

CSPE encourages students to apply positive attitudes, imagination and empathy in learning about other people and cultures.

Aims

CSPE is important in the curriculum as it aims to:

- make students aware of the civic, social and political dimensions of their lives and the importance of active, participative citizens to the life of the state and all people;

- encourage and develop the practical skills that enable students to engage in active, participating, social interaction and to adopt responsible roles as individuals, family members, citizens, workers, consumers, and members of various communities within a democratic society;
- develop the autonomous potential of students as socially literate, independent and self-confident young people;
- encourage students to apply positive attitudes, imagination and empathy in learning about and encountering other people and cultures;
- enable students to develop their critical and moral faculties in agreement with a system of values based in human rights and social responsibilities; and,
- develop knowledge and understanding of processes taking place at all levels of society, which lead to social, political and economic decision-making.

Reacting to social change

The last 40 years since the introduction of post-primary education have transformed Irish society. Recent economic progress has strengthened our sense of national self-confidence and vitality. However, drug abuse, crime and violence have increased, while sense of community has become diluted and engagement in the political process has declined. Lifestyles have changed enormously and traditional standards have loosened. As a result, young people can experience isolation and lack of direction. CSPE is vital because it gives young people the opportunity to engage with and to explore individual and societal values.



Senior cycle

In 2005 the NCCA presented proposals for the future development of senior cycle education in Ireland. Arising from these proposals and from the Minister for Education's response to them, the process of developing a new subject in 'social and political education' is in place. In April 2006, An Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, appointed a Taskforce on Active Citizenship. He noted that active participation in society "is being devolved to fewer and fewer people. In the process, we all risk being impoverished, especially those who opt out and leave the responsibility to others ... We need to identify practical steps to encourage more of our people to become involved and to stay involved in the life of their community". There is also a focus on citizenship education in the EU Lisbon Agenda and in the work of the Council of Europe.

CSPE is vital because it gives young people the opportunity to engage with and explore individual and societal values.

Dr Roland Tormey, lecturer in education at the University of Limerick, produced a background paper for the new senior cycle subject in September 2006. The subject is now at draft syllabus stage. It is to be called 'politics and society', and it is hoped that it may be piloted in 2009.

An International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) is currently being conducted in 38 countries worldwide. It is being implemented in Ireland by the Department of Education and Science and the Education Research Centre. Currently in the field trial stage, ICCS is an international comparative study of civics and citizenship education in post-primary schools. It is taking place within the wider context of growing concern about active citizenship and education at international, EU and national levels. The purpose of ICCS is to investigate the ways in which young people are being prepared to undertake their roles as citizens. Information will be collected through questionnaires and test booklets, and will reflect students' knowledge of, and views about, civic and citizenship issues. Teachers and principals will also be asked to participate. ICCS builds on previous international studies of civic education, particularly CIVED, which was conducted in 1999.



Michael Stokes is the ASTI convenor on the NCCA course committee for CSPE. He teaches at Castlecomer Community School, Co. Kilkenny.

Retirement options

The ASTI's industrial relations team answers your questions on retirement.



I am a permanent second-level teacher, who has been out on sick leave, on and off, since September. I suffer from stress and can no longer cope in the classroom. I am 57 years of age. I have completed 34 years of pensionable service. I am seriously considering taking retirement and would like to know what my options are?

In relation to your query, a number of options may be available to you:

Retirement on grounds of ill health

If you have taken extensive amounts of sick leave, i.e., nearing the end of the 365-day limit, and your consultant confirms unequivocally that you will not be medically fit to return to classroom teaching, then you may be eligible for retirement on grounds of ill health. In order to retire on grounds of ill health you will be asked to meet with an occupational physician appointed by the Chief Medical Officer and he/she must corroborate your own doctor's opinion that you are medically unfit to return to the classroom. If you are granted retirement on grounds of ill health, your actual pensionable service may be increased by an amount of added service up to six-and-two-thirds years.

Optional retirement at age 55

A teacher who has reached the age of 55 and has 35 years of pensionable service may apply to retire on pension. In calculating the 35 years, a teacher with a pre-service training period of three years is credited with one year for the purpose of calculating the required 35 years, and a teacher with four years or more of pre-service training is credited with two years of time (but not in pension payment) for these years for the purpose of calculating the required 35 years, e.g., a teacher aged 55 with a three-year degree and a one-year H.Dip Ed can retire with a pension of

33/80 of salary, having completed 33 years of actual pensionable service. A lump sum of 99/80 of salary would also be paid on retirement.

Strand 1 voluntary early retirement

Permanent teachers, including those with contracts of indefinite duration, who have not less than 15 years wholtime or actual pensionable service, can apply for Strand 1 early retirement. To avail of this retirement option you must be consistently experiencing professional difficulties in your teaching role, verifiable by your board of management. A teacher must have the support of his/her school when applying for this option. If you are granted Strand 1 early retirement, your actual pensionable service may be enhanced by the grant of added years at the rate of 25% of actual pensionable service. The grant of added years will not exceed five years or potential service to compulsory retirement age, whichever is the lesser amount. The aggregate of actual pensionable service and the added years will not exceed 35 years. Departmental regulations prohibit you from taking up another teaching position if you are granted this Strand. The closing date for applications from teachers wishing to retire under Strand 1 at the end of the 2007/08 school year is January 17, 2008.

Strand 2 voluntary early retirement

Permanent teachers, including those with contracts of indefinite duration, who are 55 years of age or more and have a minimum of 20 years wholtime or actual pensionable service, are eligible to apply for early retirement under Strand 2. If you apply for this option, the management of your school is required to verify that your retirement would provide the opportunity to enhance the education service provided by the school by facilitating change, such as the introduction of new skills and curriculum review. If you are granted this option for retirement, your actual pensionable service may be enhanced by the

grant of a maximum of two added years. With the additional added years your total service will not exceed potential service to compulsory retirement age. The aggregate of actual service and added years will not exceed 35 years. Departmental regulations prohibit you from taking up another teaching position if you are granted this Strand. The closing date for applications from teachers wishing to retire under Strand 2 at the end of the 2007/'08 school year is January 17, 2008.

Strand 3 voluntary early retirement

Strand 3 voluntary early retirement is open to permanent teachers, including those with contracts of indefinite duration, who have at least five years pensionable service, and who are teaching in posts that are surplus to requirement and from which they may not be redeployed readily, and which will not be filled should they leave the post. Applications will not be accepted by the Department of Education and Science unless supported by your board of management. You should speak to your school principal to see if you would fall into this category. Your actual pensionable service may be enhanced by the grant of added years at a rate of 35% of actual pensionable service subject to the amount of added years, not exceeding whichever is the lesser of the following amounts: (a) seven years; or, (b) potential service to compulsory retirement age; or, (c) the difference between actual pensionable service and 40 years. Alternatively, in addition to the normal pension and lump sum, you could opt to take a severance gratuity at the rate of three weeks pay per year of potential service to age 65, subject to a ceiling of 27 weeks pay. Departmental regulations prohibit all but intermittent, part-time future employment as a teacher if you are granted this Strand. The closing date for applications from teachers wishing to retire under Strand 3 at the end of the 2007/'08 school year is February 14, 2008.

Cost-neutral retirement option

In April 2005, the Department issued circular letter 10/2005, which allows teachers to retire with pension at age 50 (if in service before April 1, 2005) or at age 55 (if they enter service on or after April 1, 2004). This option is defined by the Department as "cost neutral", i.e., a penalty/adjustment is applied to the pension and lump sum, which is based on the age of the retiring teacher. Requests for the actual cost to you of purchasing additional years, and the resultant benefits, should be directed to the Department of Education and Science.

For further information, please see the ASTI information leaflet 'Retirement Options for Second Level Teachers' and the relevant Department circulars, which are available on the ASTI website www.asti.ie and the Department website www.education.ie. Enquires about your own personal financial entitlements should be directed to the Department of Education and Science, Pension Section (Secondary), Athlone, Co. Westmeath, or they can be contacted by phone on 0906-483994.

The European Schools



**Are you interested in working in Europe?
Would you like to avail of the opportunity
to teach in a European School?**

The European Schools are a system of nursery, primary and secondary schools which serve the needs of children whose parents are officials of the EU Commission, European Parliament and other official European Institutions. The schools are located in Brussels (four schools), Luxembourg (two schools), Bergen (Netherlands), Alicante (Spain), Culham (United Kingdom), Frankfurt, Karlsruhe and Munich (Germany), Mol (Belgium) and Varese (Italy). Further details may be found on the website of the European Schools, www.eurisc.org

Each year the Department of Education & Science arranges for the secondment of teachers from Ireland to fill positions in the European Schools under the terms of Circular 0009/07 which is available on the Department's website www.education.ie. Advertisements for positions commencing 1 September 2008 will appear in the national press and on the Department's website in early February 2008.

If you would like to receive information on vacancies at that time, please e-mail your details to eileen_mcguire@education.gov.ie or write to Eileen McGuire, International Section, Department of Education and Science, Marlborough Street, Dublin 1.



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From school steward to principal

Continuing the series on teachers who play an active role in the union, ASTIR talks to Seamus O'Connor.



ASTI member Seamus O'Connor was appointed principal of Castlecomer Community School, Kilkenny, in 2005. But it was as an ASTI school steward that he first began to develop the skills that would serve him in his role as a principal. "I began teaching in the school (then Presentation Convent Castlecomer) in 1985.

A year later I became school steward – a role I served in for several years. As a school steward you have to learn to get on with people, to have good communication skills and to establish a good rapport with your colleagues. These skills stand to you in your job too.

"Representing teachers as a school steward helps you to gain the respect of those teachers. When there is respect from colleagues it's easier to win the respect of others in the school community. I have found that this has helped me as a principal in working with teachers, parents, students and the wider community.

"I served in a number of branch officer roles during the 1990s. I was elected to the CEC on two occasions – first in the '90s and then from 2000 to 2003. I attended ASTI Annual Convention on a number of occasions and, even though there were some tense times where contentious issues were being debated, I have many good memories. There were many colourful speakers, and while I didn't agree with them all, I envied their ability to speak so well. There were some difficult times when I was on CEC too, but I always got a lot out of the ASTI. I have always found the ASTI great for keeping up to date on issues in the education world. It broadens your horizons on education and teaching issues.

"I would encourage ASTI members to keep an eye on what is going on through ASTIR, the ASTI professional development programme and conferences. The ASTI has a good in-service programme. There is so much happening in education and it can be daunting. Take the area of special needs and IEPs – there is so much for teachers to take on board and it's useful to know what information you should know.

"The debates on education issues within the ASTI have had a strong influence on me as a teacher and school principal. I have always believed that education should be a holistic activity that serves students of all kinds of ability. As a school we endeavour to offer a Christian, caring and holistic education to all pupils living in North Kilkenny.

"Some people say 'what will the union do for me?'. My answer is 'you are the union. Get involved – get along to a course or a conference – and you will have a positive experience!'"

TY Coordinators, European Studies Teachers - have you ordered your free Europa Diaries yet?



The deadline for ordering online is 25 January 2008.

The Europa Diary: It's Your Choice, and its accompanying Teacher's Guide are provided free of charge by the European Commission in all Member States.

The Europa Diary is a unique and interactive resource that promotes citizenship education in schools. It covers areas such as consumer rights, environmental responsibility, career planning, European and world studies. It aims to help students make independent and informed choices and become more resourceful European citizens. The content is reviewed for relevance to students in Ireland and is provided in both Irish and English.

All post-primary schools are informed about the Europa Diary and given a unique order number that allows teachers to order free diaries for all the TY students in their school. Schools will receive the diaries before the end of the 2007-2008 school year so that they can be distributed to students in September 2008.

You can order online at www.generation-europe.org



If you don't have an order number, contact Léargas at diary@leargas.ie or (01) 873 1411. You may also order from Léargas, by fax or post. Stocks are limited, however, and orders will be processed on a first-come, first-served basis.

You can find more information at www.leargas.ie/diary

West Mayo Branch

Who's who

Antoinette Casey	Secretary
Muriel McNicholas	Treasurer
Christina Heneghan	Chairperson
James Duffy	Equality Officer
Caroline Berkeley	Vice Chairperson
Edward Moran	Organiser

Branch size

564 members

Meetings

Meetings are normally held in the Mayo Education Centre. They are held monthly, except during the Christmas and Easter holiday periods. The main focus of interest and attraction at our meetings is the 'current topic', which we began to include as a regular feature on the monthly agenda several years ago. Members are encouraged to indicate in advance if they wish a particular issue or topic to be included in this slot. However, it invariably turns out that there is a 'hot topic', which is readily agreed on the night as needing pressing (or urgent!) attention. This can account for an hour or more of lively discussion.

In like vein, originally we had another reserved slot on the agenda, an information or updating item regarding the 'Rules and Constitution' and/or the 'Members' Handbook'. However, we found that it was not possible to accommodate two such reserved slots and the 'current topic' item prevailed, despite the real need for the information/updating slot.

Links

Michael Freeley, ASTI Immediate Past President, is West Mayo's current most significant link to the national scene. Michael served with distinction in the offices of Vice-President and President during a period when a steady hand was needed in the years subsequent to the turbulent period of our pay campaign. He was the second member from our branch to serve in these august offices, Willie Ruane having done so over a decade before.

Committee members

West Mayo has a long record of representation on the constitution-based national committees such as the Education Committee, which Christina Heneghan currently chairs. Jim Duffy is a member of the Equality Committee, while Denis O'Boyle has served several terms on the Education Committee and was PE convenor for many years. Richard Berkeley is the current ASTI convenor for guidance. West Mayo has consistently had a representative on Standing Committee since it was re-constituted nigh on 20 years ago, Ed Moran being the most recent following Michael Freeley's five-year tenure.

Longstanding members

As in most branches there is a core group of members who, through their consistency in attending meetings and their availability to hold



West Mayo Branch Officers (from left): Caroline Berkeley, Vice Chair; Antoinette Casey, Secretary; Jim Duffy, Equality Officer; Muriel McNicholas, Treasurer; and, Christina Heneghan, Chairperson.



Michael Freeley, ASTI Immediate Past President and member of the West Mayo Branch.

the various branch offices, have accumulated a store of knowledge and information, which supports and facilitates the smooth running of the branch. In this regard, Caroline Berkeley warrants particular mention as serving Chairperson during the critical years of our pay campaign when we had frequent large attendance. During this time an attendance at meetings of 70-80 members was not uncommon and 180 was the top attendance figure. Madeline Cunnane and Muriel McNicholas have, as Secretary and Treasurer, respectively, provided a familiarity that makes branch meetings pleasant occasions. Ed Moran, Standing Committee, would also feature in this line-up as an attendance veteran of well over 30 years standing. Of course, there are the very many other faces that come to mind of those who have retired over recent years and slipped imperceptibly into the background of current branch awareness but who, over so many years, gave so generously of their time and talents. Some 27 RSTA members attended a Christmas dinner held in Claremorris on December 1, reflecting ongoing vigour and interest.

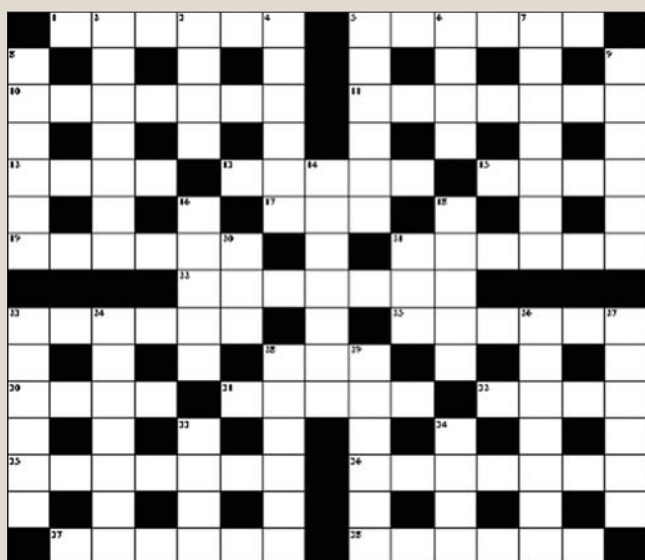
If your branch would like to feature in ASTIR, please email astir@asti.ie.



ASTIR CROSSWORD NO. 0801

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

Sponsored by ASTI Credit Union



The winner will receive €200

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

Name

School

Address

ASTI Branch

Entries to: **Astir Crossword No. 0801, Think Media,
The Malthouse, 537 NCR, Dublin 1.**
To arrive by: **Wednesday, January 30, 2008.**

CLUES ACROSS

- 1 Having a dimple could mean that one walked unsteadily (6)
- 5 You could find a pecan on this appetiser (6)
- 10 Could be your retribution (7)
- 11 Go a step with the secret state police (7)
- 12 Louis O'Flaherty is its current President (1.1.1.1.)
- 13 The national awarding body for further education and training in Ireland (1.1.1.1.1.)
- 15 It represents over 80 religious congregations in Ireland (1.1.1.1.)
- 17 This body is responsible for second-level examinations in Ireland (1.1.1.1.)
- 19 "Is it not strange that should so many years outlive performance" (Shakespeare) (6)
- 21 Dublin netted at least one finch (6)
- 22 Used as a base for Mexican dip known as guacamole (7)
- 23 What we might like our students to be! (6)
- 25 Hustle the detective (6)
- 28 Its mission is to provide high-quality education (1.1.1.1.)
- 30 This organisation helps governments tackle economic, social and governance challenges (1.1.1.1.)
- 31 Civil as opposed to criminal wrongs (5)
- 32 Established in response to the report of the Task Force on Student Behaviour in Second-Level Schools (1.1.1.1.)
- 35 Gives the distinctive flavour to an Italian Sambuca liqueur (7)
- 36 An irate Da could shine brightly (7)
- 37 "Better a diamond with a flaw than a ... without." (Confucius) (6)
- 38 The learner talks nonsense in the car! (6)

CLUES DOWN

- 2 You'll find them in a prison, for example (7)
- 3 30 across carries out this survey every three years in the principal industrialised countries (1.1.1.1.)
- 4 27 down could be converted to food prepared in a particular way (6)
- 5 This drink, distilled from white wine, gets its name from a town in France (6)
- 6 Formally established in 2005 under the EPSEN Act (1.1.1.1.)

- 7 A military unit containing about 30 to 50 soldiers (7)
- 8 Trapped the unwary (6)
- 9 This vote is for a council in the former USSR (6)
- 14 Has the care of young people in schools (7)
- 16 April is the start date for these in the Leaving Cert (5)
- 18 You could hear it between the violin and the cello (5)
- 20 Palindromic first female (3)
- 21 An initiative by 28 across to develop leadership capacity in our schools (1.1.1.)
- 23 Czech composer famous for his New World Symphony (6)
- 24 Oceanic powerfully addictive stimulant (7)
- 26 Rub a gem the wrong way in a fit of pique (7)
- 27 4 down could make a sharp sound (6)
- 28 Do any of your students do this while you are trying to teach them? (6)
- 29 Ed looked fixedly at the star (6)
- 33 Set up in 2002 to ensure that every child attends school (1.1.1.1.)
- 34 Established in 1999 to promote a culture of collaboration and development in schools (1.1.1.1.)

Congratulations to the winner of Crossword No. 0705:

Paul Holland, Presentation College, Presentation Road, Galway.

Solution to ASTIR crossword No. 0705

Across		Down	
1. Centenary	21. Recital	2. Exact	17. Ombudsman
9. Gemini	24. Unseat	3. Tonsil	19. Missiles
10. Daunting	26. Apnea	4. Noises	20. Untie
11. Serene	30. Lift	5. Ragwort	22. Chef
12. Attire	31. Office	6. Recede	23. Catarrh
14. OECD	32. Soiree	7. Lifeboat	25. Alerts
15. Laser	33. Rampages	8. Firedrill	27. Normal
16. Renoir	34. Averts	11. Scree	28. Affair
18. McManus	35. Childrens	13. Rain	29. Screen



Educate4free.com

www.educate4free.com is a new teacher-to-teacher website, which has been set up to allow teachers to share teaching resources they have created. All resources are given and taken for free.

NEWB conference

The National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) is holding a national conference on school attendance on February 26, 2008. Bringing together educators, researchers and policy makers, the conference will explore issues around school attendance and participation, as well as what schools can do practically, and the support needed, to develop workable attendance practices. The course will be held in the Law Society, Blackhall Place, Dublin 7. Register your interest at www.newb.ie.

Engineering week of wonder



Engineered!
A WEEK OF WONDER
11-15 February, 2008

Engineers Ireland and Discover Science and Engineering are holding 'Engineered! A Week of Wonder' during the February mid-term (February 11-15). Hands-on activities allowing students to discover engineering will take place across the country. Free events include robot building, electronic workshops and engineering facility tours. In addition, regional treasure hunts will be held in Cork, Limerick, Galway, Athlone and Dublin. For further information and dates, visit www.weekofwonder.ie.

Get real

Team Education Theatre Company will run an interactive web-based drama programme for young people aged 15-18 years from September to November 2008. Students will be encouraged to explore their own understanding of the issues of Internet safety and literacy regarding personal involvement in online environments. More information is available on www.teamtheatre.ie.

Draíocht

Draíocht has launched its December-February programme including information on secondary school workshops and projects that explore literature, painting and drama. For information on children's and youth arts activities, telephone Anne O'Gorman on 01-8098029 or email: anne@draiocht.ie.

Teaching Council research bursaries

The Teaching Council has launched two new research bursary schemes in respect of research to be carried out in the 2008/2009 academic year. One scheme is open to all registered teachers and awards bursaries of up to €5,000. The other scheme is for research carried out by persons other than registered teachers, where the focus is on teaching, learning and assessment.

The deadline for receipt of applications is Monday April 7, 2008 at 12.00pm. Application forms and further details are available from Cliona McLoughlin at cliona.mcloughlin@teachingcouncil.ie or by phoning 1890-224224.

Dyslexia resource

Lost for Words, Dyslexia at Second Level and Beyond has recently been published. It includes information on topics such as provisions in Irish education, school support systems, possible teaching strategies and educational choices. Much of the content is related to students with other learning difficulties such as dyspraxia or ADHD.

Teacher swap

A permanent teacher of English and history in Athlone is hoping to swap with a teacher in Sligo, Leitrim, East Mayo or South Donegal. Please Tel: 087-9370410.

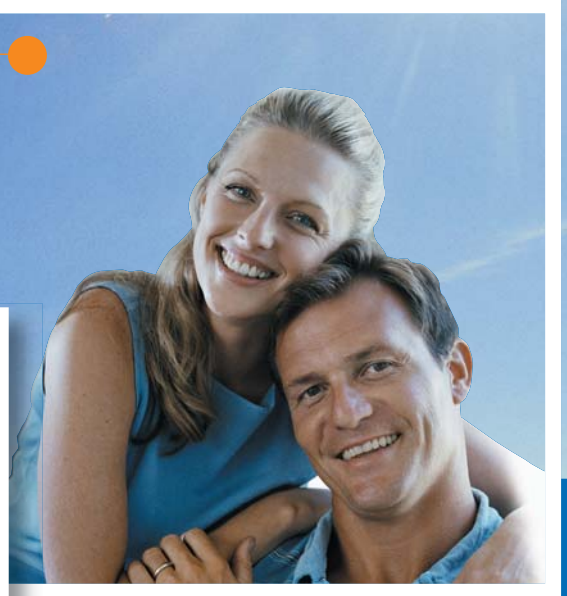
Separated Teachers Support Group

A meeting of the INTO Separated Teachers Support Group will be held in Galway on January 26. Separated, widowed, divorced and lone parent teachers are welcome. The meeting will take place in the Ardilaun Hotel at 11.00am. For further information, contact Maura Killackey, Chairperson, on 0505-21694/087-1233456, or Christina Henry, Secretary, on 01-8481405/087-6201153.

good news about mortgages!

Budget 2008 means:

**Tax relief increase for
First Time Buyers**



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

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- You can make the most of these budget changes
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