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Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland



## **BREAKING POINT –** ASTI research shows impact of budget cuts

Convention 2009

Budget impacts

Centenary celebrations

School patronage

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# astir

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Editorial: Ann-Marie Hardiman, Paul O'Grady.  
Design: Tony Byrne, Tom Cullen and Ruth O'Sullivan.  
Advertising: Pat Murray.

ASTI,  
Thomas MacDonagh House,  
Winetavern Street,  
Dublin 8.  
Tel: 01-604 0160  
Fax: 01-671 9280  
astir@astir.ie

[www.asti.ie](http://www.asti.ie)

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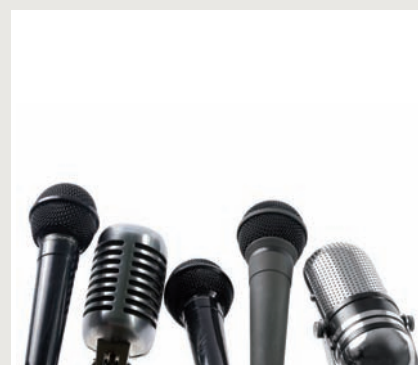
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# Planning for the next generation

This is the time of the year when teachers around the country begin their planning and preparation for the next school year. Subjects are timetabled, classes are planned, projects are chosen, extra-curricular activities are organised, budgets are worked out, resources are secured where possible, and pastoral care initiatives are developed. This kind of planning and preparation is essential if the coming school year is to be a success.

For many teachers and schools, planning for the 2009/2010 school year is proving very difficult, if not impossible. The education cutbacks introduced in October 2008 and the moratorium on posts of responsibility introduced in April 2009 will impact on schools this September. A recent ASTI survey, reported in this edition of *ASTIR*, indicates that approximately 50% of second-level schools will reduce subject choice for students this September, and up to half will drop or reduce programmes such as Transition Year and the Leaving Certificate Applied.

Many non-permanent teachers do not yet know if they will have a job in September. Others are waiting to hear if their teaching hours and incomes will be reduced. As this *ASTIR* goes to print, schools are making tough decisions about how they will operate next year given that they have even less resources and staff than they had in September 2008.

We hear business and economics experts talk about the importance of sustaining Ireland's "competitive advantage" during this recession. It is well acknowledged that Ireland's well-educated, talented and adaptable workforce is our main competitive advantage. This is why the most recent report from the National Competitiveness Council states that education has been at the centre of Ireland's economic progress to date and that "as knowledge and creativity increasingly become the basis of [global] competitiveness, high skill levels are vitally important to economic performance and living standards". The report goes on to say that: "The current broad holistic nature of the Irish school system is conducive to fostering flexibility and adaptability among young people".

The Taoiseach Brian Cowen recently echoed this view when he spoke of the intense global competition that Ireland will face as we emerge from the recession. "There will be a premium on critical thinking, innovation and entrepreneurship," said the Taoiseach. "So the more bright, inquiring young minds we can develop, the more self-confident, capable and articulate young people we have – the greater the levels of literacy in science and mathematics in particular – the better it will be for our country's future."

Despite the acknowledgement that education will have a profound impact on our ability to recover from the economic crisis, the education cutbacks are forcing schools to make decisions that will significantly reduce the quality of education available to our young people. Is the Government really thinking about the next generation?

## Non-permanent teachers' conference

As this *ASTIR* goes to print the final preparations are being put in place for the ASTI's first conference for non-permanent and part-time teachers. The conference, entitled 'Your Future as a Teacher', is a response to the concerns of up to 3,000 ASTI members who are unable to secure full-time permanent teaching positions. Many of these talented and committed young teachers have spent years in precarious employment in the hope that their commitment to their school communities would one day be rewarded by the opportunity of a permanent teaching job. Following the recent Government decision to worsen the pupil-teacher ratio in our second-level schools, many of these teachers now face losing their jobs or having their incomes reduced. The ASTI is committed to supporting these teachers at this difficult time.

Finally, as this is my last editorial as President of the ASTI, I would like to thank all those members who have supported the ASTI campaign against the education cutbacks over the past seven months. We are living in unprecedented times where a quality, adequately resourced education service is more important for our country's future than ever before. We will continue our campaign until the cutbacks are reversed.



Pat Hurley

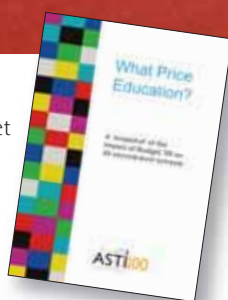
ASTI President

# ASTI research confirms real impact of budget cutbacks

Case study research conducted by the ASTI has confirmed that cutbacks to education made in the October budget will result in schools losing teachers, dropping subjects, and raising parents' contributions.



The research carried out by the ASTI in March 2009 justifies the ASTI campaign against budget cutbacks to education and endorses the anger and outrage articulated by delegates at this year's Convention in speaking of the very real and significant impacts budget measures are having on schools.



## Safety concerns

A school in Leinster with a student population of 782 will lose four non-permanent teachers from September; this includes one resource and language support teacher. The loss will mean that other teachers will be re-allocated across the timetable, which will result in the merging of weak and high ability students in the core areas of English, maths and Irish. According to the principal, students at all levels will suffer, especially the disadvantaged students. The principal of this school is also concerned that: "Classes not covered for teachers on uncertified sick leave lead to indiscipline and lack of focus in school atmosphere. Eventually there will be safety issues".

## Fewer choices

Conducted at a time when principals were making decisions about subject choice and deployment of staffing and other resources for the coming school year, the case study research confirms the ASTI's belief that all schools will lose teachers in September 2009 as a result of the increase in the pupil-teacher ratio. Between the 20 schools surveyed, 48 teaching jobs will be lost, forcing schools to contract subject choice and limit vital student supports.

Reacting to the findings of this survey, ASTI General Secretary John White warned: "The full impact of the October budget will only be properly felt in schools from September. The research shows that the cutbacks are not only impacting on tangible resources such as teacher numbers, funding and subject choice, they are penetrating the very soul of the school – its ethos, its pastoral care endeavours, and the holistic nature of the education delivered. The research makes it clear that the entire school community will suffer because of the cutbacks – students, parents and teachers".

## Cutbacks

As a direct result of Budget cutbacks, 11 of the 20 schools surveyed reported that they will have to reduce subject choice for senior cycle students from

September 2009. Nine schools said they would be reducing subject choice at junior cycle level. Nine schools – almost half of those who participated in the research – said they would be curtailing or dropping programmes such as the Leaving Certificate Applied and Transition Year.

These impacts are compounded by a further hit to education in the form of a €30 million cut to the Schools Building Programme announced in the supplementary budget in April, which means that many schools will lose out on vitally needed improvement works.

### Two teachers lost

The principal of a 600-student school in the midlands reported that because of the increase in the pupil-teacher ratio announced in the October budget, the school will lose two of its eight non-permanent teachers from September.

The reduction in teachers will mean that the availability of art, music, Spanish, religion and PE will be restricted. In order to maintain the current range of subject options, the school will have to consider withdrawing supports for Traveller and international students and returning these students to mainstream classes. Half of the 42 Traveller students in the school require learning support and at least 20 of the 31 international students require ongoing English language support. Until now the school had been in a position to allocate two teachers for these vulnerable students. However, from September, when these teachers will be lost to the school, the principal believes the school will be lucky if it can allocate half a teacher's hours to these students.

### Subjects dropped

The principal of a 550-student school in the north-west reported that a wide range of subjects, including design and communications graphics, technical graphics, accounting and music will have to be dropped from the curriculum, while changes in the supervision and substitution scheme mean that important field trips, workshops and visits will be stopped. The principal is unsure as to whether it will be possible to continue to provide the Leaving Cert Applied programme, which has been running successfully in the school since 2002.

### Impact of budget '09 on families

Principals were asked if school management had considered how to make up the shortfall in school funding across four options. The table below represents the number of schools which will respond to the Budget measures in the following ways:

Increase rate of parents' voluntary contribution	15
Introduce charges for specific activities	17
Seek support from external body, e.g. Trustees	5
Allocate more money to school fund for disadvantaged students	11

### Impact of abolition of Physics and Chemistry Grant

Principals were asked to indicate how the abolition of the Physics and Chemistry Grant would affect the provision of science subjects. The table below represents the number of schools which indicated the following effects:

Restrictions on student numbers	5
Financial contribution from students	12
Reduce practical work	11

Budget 2009 also abolished a range of grants provided to second-level schools, including grants for Transition Year, physics and chemistry, Leaving Cert Applied, and Leaving Cert Vocational. Many cash-strapped schools relied heavily on voluntary contributions from parents even before the cutbacks and are reporting that they will now have to ask parents for more money. Out of the 20 schools questioned by the ASTI, 15 said they will be seeking an increase in voluntary contributions from parents in order to make up for the shortfall in funding for the next school year.

### LCA dropped

The principal of a school with disadvantaged status in Munster, serving a student population of 331, believes that budget measures will have very significant effects on the school community: "The educational experience for all students will diminish; retention levels will fall; and, relationships with students, assisted by extra-curricular activities, will be affected".

With the abolition of and reduction in grants, the school will have to increase the rate of parents' voluntary contributions and to introduce charges for specific school activities. There is a high level of unemployment in the area and families have already been in contact with the school on financial matters.

Leaving Cert Applied, which has been running in the school since 1994, will not be provided in future, due to a lack of resources, while activities for Leaving Certificate Vocational and Transition Year will have to be curtailed.

### Impact of abolition of School Book Grant

Principals were asked to indicate how the abolition of the School Book Grant would affect the school library. The table below represents the number of schools which indicated the following effects:

Will reduce stock	13
Will impoverish quality of service	14
Will require school to seek additional funding	16

### Impact of increase in pupil-teacher ratio on the school community

Principals were asked to indicate how measures in Budget '09 would impact on the overall quality of school life. The table below represents the number of schools which will be 'directly affected' by the Budget measures in the following ways:

Reduce range of programmes provided in school	9
Reduce subject choice in Junior Cycle	9
Reduce subject choice in Senior Cycle	11
Impact on disciplinary climate in school	5
Affect capacity to meet needs of all students	13
Reduce range of extra-curricular activities	15
Affect workload of teachers	16
Affect morale of teachers	18
Affect operation of pastoral care structures	10
Affect capacity to provide a broad & balanced education	17
Affect capacity to attract a broad range of students from local community	12

Read the full report – 'What Price Education?' at [www.asti.ie](http://www.asti.ie).



From left: Pat Hurley, ASTI President; Minister for Education Batt O'Keeffe; and, ASTI General Secretary John White pictured at Convention 2009. Convention photos by MacMonagle Photography.



Delegates give ASTI President, Pat Hurley, a standing ovation.

## Annual Convention 2009

### President's address

The place of education in Irish society and its potential contribution to economic recovery were two themes undertaken by ASTI President Pat Hurley in his address to Convention 2009. His speech, which was punctuated by enthusiastic applause from delegates, began by acknowledging the historical significance of this year's Convention: "We are celebrating our centenary, 100 years of service to teachers and the education system. The ASTI has always been to the forefront in protecting teachers' rights, pay and working conditions. Second-level teachers have played a key role in the development of Ireland's education system. Despite pressures from a wide range of sources, second-level teachers and the ASTI have continued to champion a holistic education for our young people".

### Challenges

The President went on to refer to the current difficulties facing teachers and the union: "Today we are facing new challenges, not of our making, but the education service is being made to pay. First the October budget cutbacks in education, then we had the targeting of the public service workers in an unfair and unjust pension levy, next was the moratorium on posts of responsibility, then we had the April budget. All of these measures have penalised those who were not responsible for this economic crisis, while the banks and others responsible are being bailed out by Government".

Acknowledging that teachers are aware of the difficulties faced by all in the current crisis, Mr Hurley said: "Second-level schools are microcosms of society. Whatever is going on in society is reflected in the classroom and in the school community ... Teachers are, therefore, well aware of the impact of the current economic crisis on families and on the communities we live and work in. We see the impact that job losses have on families and communities ... We all know teacher colleagues who will lose their jobs because almost every school in the country will lose at least one teacher this September. We know the human dimension of the economic crisis.

We also understand that co-ordinated effort is necessary to protect jobs, to secure our young people's future, to ensure economic recovery. We are realistic. We are committed to the schools and the communities we serve. We believe that all of society will benefit when the burden is shared in a fair and responsible manner".

### Recovery

Mr Hurley said that education is vital to economic recovery, and pointed out that educators are not alone in holding this view: "In recent weeks the National Competitiveness Council of Ireland stated that education will be central to Ireland's future economic and social well-being, particularly in the context of the current recession. The employers' group IBEC, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, and the ESRI also emphasise the critical importance of education to the economy. At international level, just weeks ago the G20 countries formally recognised the need to invest in education and training in order to restore confidence, growth and jobs. I have yet to hear anyone present the argument that education cuts are vital to economic recovery".

Focussing on the national crisis in practical terms, the President said: "I've heard it said that in times of crisis, it's time to focus on what really matters. When a family is hit by a financial crisis they will not be found wanting when it comes to the education and health of their children. This is not the case with this Government. It is my view that when faced with a national crisis, such as the one we are experiencing today, a society should focus on what really matters – its core values: values such as protecting the vulnerable, cherishing our children, and promoting equality and inclusiveness, citizenship and voluntarism, and dignity and respect for all." Conversely, Mr Hurley noted, the cuts made to education "are about numbers – not about people, not about values. We all want public money to be used effectively and wisely. But we also want our children – our students – to get the education they deserve. All of our futures depend on it".





From left: John Byrne, Cork South; Ann Piggot, Standing Committee Region 6; ASTI President, Pat Hurley; and, Mary Lysaght, Standing Committee Region 9.



From left: Darragh McKeown, Pamela Campbell and Elaine Devlin from Dundalk pictured at Convention 2009.

### Pupil-teacher ratio

Moving on to the issue of pupil-teacher ratio, Mr Hurley said: "The increase in the pupil-teacher ratio will take 1,000 committed teachers away from students. It will mean larger classes and reduced subject choice. There is a myth in existence that all teachers are permanent and pensionable. This is not true. The ASTI has up to 3,000 members with no security of tenure. The abolition of grants for the Junior Certificate Schools Programme, the Leaving Cert Applied, and the Leaving Cert Vocational target some of the most vulnerable students ... Teachers will still hold the same values – protecting the vulnerable, equality and inclusiveness, cherishing the nation's children, respect and dignity for all – but their supports and resources have been severely diminished, and teacher morale has been badly damaged".

### Funding for education

Returning to the broader national crisis to finish, Mr Hurley said: "In the past few months I have spoken to hundreds of second-level teachers from all over the country. They have told me again and again that teachers and their students are not responsible for the decline in public finances. These teachers tell me that they work hard; that they pay tax and pension contributions; that their schools are not overstaffed; that there is no wastage of money and resources by their schools. In fact, it is the opposite. OECD research over the years has consistently found that Ireland is at the bottom of the league when it comes to the amount Ireland invests in its second-level schools.

Despite this under-funding, teachers and schools have continued to deliver a high quality education service to young people, as evidenced by recent OECD PISA surveys. I often think about what could have been achieved for our young people if spending on education had increased in line with economic growth during the boom years. To me, this is the greatest indication of the value that the Government places on education ...

Statements from the Government such as 'the importance of education cannot be understated' and 'the more bright young minds we can develop, the better it will be for our nation's future' are superficial unless they are anchored in the policies and decisions adopted".

Quoting An Taoiseach, Brian Cowen, who had recently stated: "It's not about the next election; it's about the next generation", Mr Hurley

reminded the Minister for Education and Science that "the next generation is sitting in our classrooms" and implored him to consider that: "Economies will sink or swim according to the quality of education accessible to young people. Our students only get one chance at second-level education; they cannot come back again in five or 10 years time. Minister, on behalf of pupils, parents and teachers, you must persuade your Government to reverse the education cutbacks".

### Minister's speech

Minister for Education and Science Batt O'Keeffe's first address to ASTI Convention was notable for its heavy focus on economic issues, fiscal policy and budget balances rather than matters directly related to education, teaching and learning. Indeed, he began by telling his reticent audience: "Your conference understandably focuses on education issues of direct concern to you as teachers. While that's also my focus, there are other compelling circumstances. This is a time of unprecedented difficulties for our country and all her people. Against this background, unfortunately there can be no sense of business as usual. My talk to you today would be less than honest if it didn't reflect the starkness of our national situation ... The real issue behind any economic statistic is the impact on people across the country. I know that in many homes there are real worries about jobs and future income. People are hurting".

### Decisions made

Speaking of the supplementary budget announced in the week before Convention, Minister O'Keeffe said: "You're understandably angry about some of the decisions we've made. I understand that anger. But action was required in the national interest, action that will secure Ireland's social and economic future". Referencing what he called "other unpopular measures", the Minister said: "I want to acknowledge that some of the decisions we have taken will cause real challenges for you in your professional roles as principals and teachers, and also personally for you and your families. I'm not underestimating these challenges, but I'm asking for your co-operation during these difficult times for our country.

In order to deal with this situation we have to increase our revenue, cut our expenditure and borrow only what's absolutely necessary". However,



*ASTI President Pat Hurley made a presentation to Immediate Past-President, Patricia Wroe.*



*Dublin delegates at the ASTI Convention centenary function. Front row (from left): Maire Quinn; Siobhan Davis; and, Tish Murtagh. Back row (from left): Tom Stanley; Joe Duddy; Tom Burke; Joe Costello; and, Gerry Whelan.*

the Minister assured delegates: "An absolute priority for Government in making decisions about tax was to be as fair as possible. People rightly expect that those who earn most must contribute the most".

### Investment and partnership

Minister O'Keeffe assured delegates that as part of the budget package, the Government will undertake a range of measures to stimulate economic activity. "While we had to make some cuts to capital spending, the Government is determined to maintain high levels of capital investment to provide better public facilities, support employment and improve competitiveness." He told Convention that in his own budget he expected to be able to do more with less and reported that discussions are ongoing on a new infrastructure fund to support projects in schools and other areas, that €610 million is to be invested in school buildings this year, and that there will be provision for a Summer Works Scheme this year.

Continuing on this positive note, the Minister reported that the consensus is that the world economy will begin to revive in 2010, bringing a return to growth in Ireland in 2011. "In the meantime, we must restore international confidence in Ireland by getting the message out there that we still have considerable strengths and that we're taking the right action to correct the problems in our economy."

The Minister concluded by endorsing the work of the ASTI and its members: "Your association has made a remarkable contribution to education in Ireland. Over the years, you have contributed to the forging of professional and committed teachers who have given distinctive service to the young people under their care, to their parents and to Irish society in general. It's to the credit of the many officers and members of the ASTI that it has had an influence on many aspects of our nation's social, cultural, political and economic growth. It gives me great pleasure to express warmest appreciation to your association for the valuable part it has played in Irish education down through the years, and for its distinguished record of service to the people of Ireland".

### General Secretary's address

The chief message communicated by ASTI General Secretary John White in his speech to Convention 2009, was that the ASTI is strongly opposed to

budget measures imposed on teachers, schools and students over the last nine months, and will continue to fight on behalf of its members until they are reversed.

Mr White began his speech by acknowledging the bittersweet nature of the ASTI's centenary year: "It is a great honour for me to address Convention as General Secretary of the ASTI in this, the centenary year of the founding of the ASTI. Celebrating our centenary has been a somewhat bittersweet experience to say the least, given that we are celebrating our centenary at a time of the most swingeing, indeed devastating cutbacks in education. However, I want initially to refer to matters that are worth celebrating in this, our one hundredth year. Firstly, our 18,000 members can be proud of the quality of the education we are providing for the young people of this country. Despite our poor resources, we continue to provide a broad, balanced, rounded education to our pupils. Irish second-level schools continue to develop the whole individual. This involves, of course, high academic standards, but also the more humane aspects of education that educationalists and employers – including IBEC – state are essential for economic, social and human well-being. Such characteristics as ability to work as part of a team, creativity, interpersonal skills, and capacity to learn on one's own are crucial in almost all areas of life and are crucial to our recovery from recession. We will continue to resist budget cuts that will lead to the dismantling of the humane education provided by Irish schools, which is central to the creation of the smart economy and the knowledge society".

### All change

Speaking of the suddenness with which change came to the education system, the General Secretary told Convention: "If someone had said to me just one year ago that I would be addressing our conference in the context of a cut in the take home pay of our members of at least 10% as a consequence of the pension levy and the tax increases, of an increase in the pupil-teacher ratio, suspension of the early retirement scheme, moratorium on appointments to posts of responsibility, curtailment of the supervision and substitution scheme, and reductions in funding for schools, I would not have believed it". However, he said: "From the ashes of this demolition can come major hope for the creation of a society where a sense of social harmony and social cohesion is central".



*Jimmy Staunton and Tracy Joy from the Sligo Branch pictured at ASTI Convention.*



*General Secretary, John White is interviewed for TV news.*

Addressing the divide between the public and the private sectors, Mr White said: "In the climate of economic recession, much of the public discourse has been marked by an attempt to divide public and private sector workers. In this discourse, public sector workers such as teachers and civil servants are almost made to feel as if they are parasites, sucking the lifeblood out of the community. Part of this feeling is being generated by commentators whose God has died – that is the God of the triumphant market ideology. This ideology, at least in its virulent form, has been found wanting, and rather than admit this, certain commentators have chosen to demonise the public service and those who work in it rather than focusing on the uninhibited gambling by the banks, which was fostered by light touch regulation. We reject this ideology".

### **Fighting cutbacks**

"We did have severe education cutbacks in the eighties, but never have we had such cutbacks, which are so deep and so wide-ranging and, indeed, so sudden." Yet, the General Secretary assured Convention: "I want to say to you here today that the ASTI does not accept these cutbacks and that we will fight and argue against them as long as they remain. And I want to tell you colleagues that I always knew that this campaign would not be a short, sharp campaign; it will in all probability be an extended campaign over a number of years, but we have the stomach for the fight and we intend to see these cuts reversed, however long it takes. And we will see them reversed".

"The most damaging effect of the infernal litany of cuts," said Mr White "is the loss of jobs for our temporary and part-time teachers. I want to nail once and for all the misapprehension that all teachers have permanent full-time contracts. We in the ASTI have up to 3,000 part-time and temporary members." Mr White called it a "tragedy for society" that many newly qualified teachers will not obtain work in Irish schools, and he said: "It is a personal tragedy for each and every one of our part-time and temporary members who may find that they have no job in September or have their hours severely reduced".

The General Secretary sought to assure these part-time and temporary teachers: "You are to the forefront of our concerns. Indeed, we sought and obtained a meeting with senior officials in relation to the continuation of concessionary posts. And we raised this issue as recently as last Thursday

at a meeting with the Minister for Education and Science. Concessionary posts will continue but schools must present their case following a curriculum and staffing audit ... And we call on schools to use every appeal mechanism available to them to ensure the continued employment of these fine young teachers".

### **Media focus**

Speaking of the media focus on teacher performance, the General Secretary said: "Our work is of interest to readers because it is such important work and unlike many other types of activity there is no hiding place. The classroom is a very public place and up to 30 pupils await a performance seven or eight times a day. This fact must always be part of every discussion on pay and retirement. Those commentators who speak of a bloated public service and speak in pejorative terms of the need to reform the public service can have no concept of the realities of the modern classroom. I wonder how many of them would survive a week in our schools".

Moving to the topic of pensions, the General Secretary said: "Pensions for teachers and other public servants are deferred pay. Ever since some coherence and rationality was introduced into the determination of pay 40 years ago, salary levels always had regard to the value of pensions. We pay for our pensions and indeed most second-level teachers have to purchase additional pension because of late entry into the profession. Reading the right wing economists, these facts are never allowed to interfere with their rhetoric".

Mr White concluded his address by noting that 100 years ago the founding fathers of the ASTI faced significant obstacles, as we do today: "Our founding fathers who first sowed the seeds of the ASTI in the College of Commerce in Cork 100 years ago, faced what seemed insurmountable problems: no security of tenure; no incremental salary; no pension; no system of registration. Over a period of years, heartbreaking at times when you read the history, they made real progress. They were people who believed in service to their community and solidarity with their fellow teachers. Together we too can overcome our difficulties ... We are living in extraordinary times, in the most severe economic recession for 80 years. The ASTI will survive this difficult period. Just as our founding fathers overcame horrendous problems, we will continue to fight for education and for teachers for the next 100 years".

# Motions debated at Convention

Six months on, the impact of budget cuts to education announced in Budget '09 dominated debate at ASTI Convention 2009. These measures, together with the public service pension levy and moratorium on posts of responsibility, permeated nearly all discussion, indicating the wide-ranging effects the budgetary measures are having on teachers and schools throughout the country.

## Pupil-teacher ratio

One of the budget measures referenced most often at the podium was the increase in pupil-teacher ratio. Elaine Devlin, Dundalk, proposed a motion that the ASTI demands that the proposed pupil-teacher ratio changes announced in October '08 be reversed and the present pupil-teacher ratio be maintained at 18:1 for all post-primary schools. In doing so, she chose to focus on the educational aspects of the class size issue, saying: "Ministers for education have disingenuously focused on pupil-teacher ratio as being in line with European averages and have refused to discuss the real issue of class size in our schools ... Teacher quality is one of the most significant qualities in the learning outcome and is, of course, affected by class size. High teacher quality is about teachers being able to understand where a student is at, to establish their learning skills and strengths, and to deliver a lesson that engages and motivates all the children in front of him or her".

In seconding the motion, Sean O'Neill of Dublin South County took up the effect of the pupil-teacher increase on teaching jobs. Mr O'Neill said it would be the most vulnerable teachers who would be most affected: "Teachers who from year to year have to worry about whether or not they've licked up to the principal enough to make sure they're kept on for another year. They're the people who have to tow the line; they're the people who cannot speak out".

**The motion was adopted.**

## Education cutbacks, pension levy

The second and third days of Convention were dominated by motions condemning the education cutbacks and public service pension levy, and debating a strategy of opposition to these measures.

A Standing Committee motion deploring the public service pension levy and committing the ASTI to working towards its removal for all public servants was debated at length on Wednesday and Thursday morning. Standing Committee proposed an amended motion to Convention, which sought that: the ASTI condemns the education cuts and consequent job losses, and the draconian and inequitable pension levy, and calls for its abolition; that the ASTI continues to commit to a strategy of opposition to these measures up to and including strike action, withdraws from parent-teacher meetings out of school time, withdraws from staff meetings out of school time, withdraws from school development planning meetings, opposes the moratorium on posts of responsibility by means of a directive to members, and limits co-operation with WSE and subject inspection by means of a directive to members; and, that the ASTI will seek the co-operation of the other teacher unions in implementing this strategy.

In proposing this revised motion, Joe Moran, ASTI Vice-President, said:

"We were the first teacher union to send out directives in implementing the ballot for industrial action and we were mobilised to strike on March 30. Industrial action is a gravely serious matter ... To be effective and to be successful it has to be used strategically. Standing Committee has continued to develop the strategy, especially the work to rule elements of it, over the last number of weeks ... This motion is a clear and graduated set of actions, some of which are already implemented and the remainder are in the process of being implemented".

Seconding the motion, Gretta Harrison of West Mayo promised delegates: "There is nobody on Standing Committee who does not want to fight this to the bitter end and you can rest assured on that ... everyone wants rid of this pension levy and everyone wants rid of the education cutbacks". But, she said: "Anyone who thinks that the pension levy is going to be overturned easily or soon is living in cloud cuckoo land. That is the reality. This Government is literally at the stage of recklessness ... Shock and awe doesn't always work; don't let's have a kneejerk reaction. I'm not saying we won't ever go on strike, I'm not saying we won't storm the Dail, but when the time is right and when our members are ready ... When we do these things, we have to do them right, there are directives here. Let's make sure that these directives, unlike others we have issued in the past, are adhered to".

Philip Irwin, Dublin South 1, speaking in favour of the motion, said: "The actions being taken and proposed are linked directly to the aim of abolition of the levy, to the reversal of the education cuts and to the reversal of job losses. The link is an important statement for us".

Christy Maginn, Dublin North West, suggested a further step of a series of half-day regional strikes: "What we have at the moment is a ballot and a mandate for two days of strike action, which I believe could work, were they to be enacted in a systematic, organised and structured way".

Bernard Lynch, Dublin South 1, speaking against the motion, said: "I wanted yesterday that we would put our heads together in a cool manner and come up with suggestions that would be sellable to members. I'm not talking strike, nobody is talking strike – I am talking about meaningful action that we can sell to members that will roll on as long as the pension levy rolls on".

**The motion was adopted.**

## Non-permanent and part-time teachers

One of the most discussed issues at Convention 2009 was the issue of non-permanent and part-time teachers and impending job losses in schools. Michael Coyle proposed a motion that the ASTI reviews the range of part-time contracts with a view to ensuring better security of tenure for



teachers on behalf of the Dublin North East Branch, calling the current system "institutionalised erosion of the profession". He said: "Each time a non-permanent teacher arrives in school in September, they can find they're on a different type of contract to the year before. Aggregate hours, different types of contracts and the whole business of not having security of tenure, leads to a situation where the people who are involved in those contracts cannot offer the same loyalty to schools". He reminded delegates that even in previous bad times, "there was recognition of the fact that a good educational system was predicated on a good solid core of teachers who knew each other, who worked well together and by virtue of their permanency, would give time and loyalty to their school". And he asked: "How can non-permanent teachers whose security of tenure is in question from year to year be expected to give the same level of loyalty?"

Justin McGree, in speaking to the motion, said: "Our profession as a whole has had a massive downward spiral in teacher retention rates and attractiveness over the last decade. Instead of aiming to attract the most highly qualified and most competent graduates into teaching, the current Government has made a concerted effort to casualise this once valued profession, while at the same time happily watching our most prized graduates leave the country or move to other employment sectors ... Casual employment damages the quality of teaching and learning within Ireland and robs individual teachers of a decent standard of living ... Casual employment artificially divides the workforce into two classes, encouraging division between them and resentment on both sides. Casual employment is often demeaning and humiliating, forcing teachers to work under conditions which are often intolerable, with no bargaining power or capacity to negotiate. Casual employment robs teachers of a professional identity and a secure future".

**The motion was adopted.**

Bill Lonergan of the Nenagh branch, in proposing a motion that the ASTI would vigorously protect the working conditions of part-time teachers in light of recent cutbacks in education, said: "A measure of any union is how it looks after its most vulnerable members. Can there be any more pressing cause for the ASTI at present than to protect the rights of part-time teachers? If we were to believe the media hype, job cuts do not apply to the teaching profession, but this year thousands of teachers will find themselves out of work due to the failure of the Government to realise that education is the way out of this recession. Those losing their jobs are colleagues and fellow members of the ASTI. They deserve our support ... These teachers are vital to the provision of a broad curriculum and frequently perform a variety of teaching roles in the school. They also

make an important contribution to the school's pastoral care and extra-curricular activities. The impact of the increase in pupil-teacher ratio and the restrictions imposed on supervision and substitution schemes are squeezing these teachers out of the education system".

Rosario Walsh, in seconding the motion, told of her own situation, waiting 22 years to obtain a permanent position. She called herself "lucky" as she had a job and was gathering increments and pension rights. But she said: "It now looks like there is a generation of young teachers coming after me who, if this Government gets its way, might never set foot in an Irish classroom. A generation of young, highly qualified teachers lost to the system. Are we going to be the generation that stands idly by and lets this happen?"

**The motion was adopted.**

### Early retirement

Micheál O'Neill of the New Ross Branch proposed a motion that the ASTI demands the immediate reinstatement on a permanent basis of early retirement strands 1, 2 and 3, which were agreed as part of the PCW. He told Convention: "The Government announced the suspension of the early retirement scheme in Budget 2009. This was done without any consultation with the public service unions. The measure was short-sighted and shows how this Government lacks any imagination or initiative in solving the problems of the Irish economy". Between 1996 and 2006, he reported, only 0.0025% of teachers availed of strand 1 early retirement, and asked: "We heard today about the numbers of young teachers who are going to lose their jobs and who will be unemployed next year. Would it not be better, at a small extra cost, to have these people employed and able to make a positive contribution to the economy?"

Lily Cronin, Kerry Branch, speaking to the motion, recalled voting on the PCW agreement under which the strands were established, saying that it had been a positive development for teachers, meaning they "could go with dignity out of the classroom when they'd contributed their all both to the students and to their colleagues". She continued: "We're actually holding society together in our classrooms ... but there is no support for those of us at the front line of minding our young people".

**The motion was adopted.**

### Psychological services

On behalf of the Stillorgan Branch, Liz Crummey proposed a motion that the ASTI demands that the Department of Education and Science extends the NEPS service to ensure that psychological assessments may be fast-tracked and that follow-up support may be easily accessed. She told

Convention: "The system is there for assessments to be done immediately but if you don't have the money you're left languishing on a waiting list. That is grossly unfair. This is an insult to our students with learning difficulties and special needs. Firstly, these students are not appropriately assessed in primary schools. They then arrive into our schools with little information and neither a diagnosis nor recommendations for their learning needs ... We know from the expertise we've built up in the last 10 or 15 years, that this information is imperative if we are to provide an education tailored to these students' educational needs ... We need to acknowledge that these students are human beings with needs and entitlements. They need and sometimes benefit greatly from a clear diagnosis and list of recommendations of their needs".

Sally Maguire, in seconding the motion, said: "It's very clear to everybody that this is very important and very necessary. It's important to the students for their self esteem and it's important for teachers as well to have these reports ... How is a teacher supposed to be able to differentiate her work without a psychological report to say what particular difficulties this student has? It's just ridiculous ... We need to extend it and make it a proper decent service for all of our students".

**The motion was adopted.**

#### LCA, LCVP, TY grants

Lily Cronin, Kerry, proposed a motion that in light of new economic challenges, the ASTI deplores the removal of the grants for LCA, LCVP and TY, which will in turn have the effect of a reduction in the retention level of students at senior level with the resulting negative impact on society. She said: "We all know that students who take LCA in particular are often from marginalised social groups; they might have disadvantaged backgrounds from the point of view of education ... With the grants gone there will be no money ... the programmes will be dropped and students will fall out ... Transition Year has been the success story of Irish education ... But money will talk and money will mean that many of our students will be denied this very important year ... It is essential in any climate, especially in the economic climate we are in at the moment, that the vast majority of students are kept in school to give them the skills, to give them the encouragement, and to give them the confidence to face the world".

Breda Lyons, Kerry, in seconding the motion, said: "The LCA, LCVP and TY programmes were a welcome forward development in education. The withdrawal of the grants is certainly a backwards step. LCA has the effect of retaining students in the second-level system, which is far more cost effective than if they drop out of the system".

**The motion was adopted.**

## Election results 2009



Joe Moran  
*President-Elect*



Jack Keane  
*Vice-President*



Ray St John  
*Honorary Treasurer*

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Joe Moran

#### Vice-President

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#### Honorary Treasurer

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#### Rules Committee

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Sheila Marie Herlihy  
Sheila Parsons  
PJ Sheehy  
Niamh Walker

#### Standing Committee

##### Regional Elections Committee

Maire Ní Laoire  
PJ Sheehy  
Ann Piggot  
Lily Cronin

#### Business of CEC

##### Sub-committee

Caitriona McGrath  
Ellis Casey

# Resolutions adopted at Convention 2009

## **Motion 32: education cuts:**

That the ASTI:

- (i) demands that the education cuts announced in the budget be rescinded immediately;
- (ii) deplores these savage cuts that attack the education system at both junior and senior level, especially the ones that affect the disadvantaged;
- (iii) highlights the effect of these cuts in public and in the media; and,
- (iv) uses all means at its disposal to oppose any future cutbacks in an already under-funded education system.

## **Motion 29: pupil-teacher ratio:**

That the ASTI demands that the proposed pupil-teacher ratio changes announced in October '08 be reversed, and that the present pupil-teacher ratio be maintained at 18:1 for all post-primary schools.

## **Motion 8: early retirement strands 1, 2 and 3:**

That the ASTI demands the immediate reinstatement on a permanent basis of early retirement strands 1, 2 and 3, which were agreed as part of the PCW.

## **Motion 11: superannuation scheme:**

That the ASTI refuses to negotiate any changes to the superannuation scheme that would reduce the entitlements of members.

## **Motion 46: NEPS:**

That the ASTI demands that the Department of Education and Science extends the NEPS service in order to ensure that psychological assessments may be fast-tracked and that follow-up support may be easily accessed.

## **Motion 43: removal of grants:**

In light of new economic challenges, that the ASTI deplores the removal of the grants for LCA, LCVP and TY, which will in turn have the effect of a reduction in the retention level of students at senior level, with the resulting negative impact on society.

## **Motion 52: suspension and expulsion:**

That the right of students to learn and teachers to teach receive equal emphasis to the rights of students who incur the sanctions of suspension and expulsion in education legislation.

## **Motion 55: assessment:**

In view of the planned changes for post-primary Irish, that the ASTI rejects any proposals that teachers would assess their own pupils.

## **Motion 54: Task Force on the Physical Sciences:**

That the ASTI:

- (i) demands the implementation in full of the recommendations of the Task Force on the Physical Sciences;
- (ii) deplores the removal of grants for physics and chemistry;
- (iii) condemns the continued refusal to provide laboratory technicians in schools; and,

(iv) elects a sub-committee to assess the impact of these matters on the workload of teachers, to evaluate the success or otherwise of the new Junior Certificate science syllabus, and draft proposals on courses of action the ASTI can now take to progress these issues.

## **Motion 22: part-time contracts:**

That the ASTI reviews the range of part-time contracts with a view to ensuring better security of tenure for teachers.

## **Motion 25: part-time teachers:**

That the ASTI would vigorously protect the working conditions of part-time teachers in the light of recent cutbacks in education.

## **Standing Committee motion:**

1. That the ASTI condemns
    - (a) the education cuts and consequent job losses; and,
    - (b) the draconian and inequitable pension levy, and calls for its abolition.
  2. The ASTI:
    - (a) continues to commit to a strategy of opposition to these measures up to and including strike action;
    - (b) withdraws from parent-teacher meetings out of school time;
    - (c) withdraws from staff meetings out of school time;
    - (d) withdraws from school development planning meetings;
    - (e) opposes the moratorium on posts of responsibility by means of a directive to members; and,
    - (f) limits co-operation with WSE and subject inspection by means of a directive to members.
- The ASTI will seek the co-operation of the other teachers' unions in implementing this strategy.

## **Motion 26: teaching posts:**

That the ASTI seeks to arrest the erosion of the teaching profession by demanding that all posts vacated by teachers who retire be filled as full-time permanent posts.

## **Motion 19: job-sharing and career breaks:**

That the ASTI enters into immediate negotiations with the Department of Education and Science to negotiate that:

- (i) job-sharing and career breaks should be available to all teachers who wish to avail of them;
- (ii) the over-quota status of a school should not be a factor in the refusal of a career break or job-sharing application; and,
- (iii) the Department of Education and Science grant replacement temporary cover for those seeking career breaks or job-sharing regardless of whether the school is over-quota or not.

## **Motion 17: parent-teacher meetings:**

That the ASTI negotiates that all parent-teacher meetings take place within normal school time.

## **Motion 27: brief absences:**

That the ASTI demands that teachers' partial daily absences be recorded as such in all related returns to the Department of Education and Science.

# Vox pops

## How can schools contribute to economic recovery?



**Carmel Murphy, Cork South Branch**

I think schools must continue to do what they have always done and that is to continue to prepare our young people – who come to us as children and leave as adults – to deal with the workplace. They will be the employers, employees, taxpayers, and entrepreneurs of the future. We have always equipped our students with the best skills possible, but it is unfortunate

in the current climate that things like grants for Transition Year and Leaving Cert Applied have been cut because they are the very courses that develop entrepreneurial skills. Teachers are going to be under inordinate pressure to continue to provide high calibre students. We want students to be literate in mathematical skills, scientific skills and all of that. The abolition of science grants is going to militate against that, but we will continue to give our utmost commitment.

The loss of teaching jobs makes absolutely no sense at this time. Point out to me the school in the country that has a teacher too many. I don't know of any. Having funded the education of these fabulous, dynamic young teachers, they are now going to have to sign on in September. Rather than doing something meaningful, of value within the schools, they are on the dole queue. It doesn't make sense and that message has to be given loud and clear. It is so short-sighted and the loss is going to be huge.



**Noel Buckley, Tipperary Branch**

I certainly think schools can contribute to economic recovery. All economists who are future-looking point out that the key to the future is investment in education. If we are to contribute to economic recovery, we need to add our voice to that of the economists in highlighting the urgent need to invest if we are to exit in a positive sense from this

economic disaster.

One of the ways we can possibly do it even at the moment is to educate our students to be flexible, to be multi-skilled and skilled in the use of IT. In an economic downturn, people's confidence is zapped. Schools and educators can counteract that by working on building students' confidence and looking at positive ways of working out of the economic distress we're in, rather than focussing on the negative impacts. That would be done not just through the regular subjects but through all the extra-curricular activities that happen in schools that enhance a student's confidence.

The challenge to that is teachers' disillusionment with the cuts, but given that we are the adults in this situation, we need, rather than cursing the darkness, to light a candle and lead the way out of it by example. We have to challenge the Government and be the voice for the voiceless, the most vulnerable in society – LCA students, JSCP students, people with special needs, and so on. If we are to have an inclusive society that is positive and contributes to economic success in the future, those voices need to be heard.



**Bill Lonergan, Nenagh Branch**

In the past, Ireland has always prided itself on having an educated workforce and that's probably one of the reasons why the multinationals came to set up here. When we come out of the economic recession, it's important that our workforce is educated to the highest degree possible. I think schools contribute greatly to that in terms of

educating people in foreign languages, in science and maths, and also developing people in terms of their whole being so that they are confident and employable to these companies.

The education cutbacks are short-sighted. We have had debate this morning about the impact on non-permanent teachers, who are often young teachers who are very energetic and bring a new buzz and new life to schools. It'd be terrible if we lost these people, or if they had to emigrate or couldn't find employment at all. It's very important that we maintain as many of these people as possible in our schools so that we will have an impact on the schools themselves and also on the students.



**PJ Sheehy, Wicklow Branch**

I think the major thing that can be done is that instead of cutting back investment in schools, the opposite should be the case. With investment in schools, while the recovery won't be immediate, it will be much more sustained long term. The Minister for Enterprise is trying to encourage American businesses to Ireland's knowledge-based economy. But the Government

is overlooking fundamentals; if you want to focus on third level, indeed fourth level, the basis for that is in second-level schools, especially in the areas of technology, science, physics, and chemistry.

Until the budget cuts, many schools allowed the luxury of maybe a chemistry class with eight students or a physics class of 15, which everybody went along with because it was deemed to be necessary for a broad curriculum, good for the school, and good for the pupils. Now because of cutbacks in grants and cutbacks in the pupil-teacher ratio, these subjects are at risk.



Over the last 10 years, we have made great strides in a lot of our schools and in society in general, where we have had a value put on subjects such as art and music and the lifelong benefits that they bring. I think these subjects will also suffer. It sounds as if I'm just being critical of the Government for the sake of it, but it's not that. Whatever money there is to be pared should not be cut off in those particular areas. Certainly, where schools or the DES could save might be in more streamlined allocation in terms of the Summer Works Scheme, which in many cases have resulted in schools paying over the odds and not getting value for money. The Minister is reintroducing the Scheme next summer. I would think that it would be better if money was given to a school to do with as they wanted, as long as they get the job done for that.



**John Byrne, Cork South Branch**

Schools have always contributed to economic recovery. I remember back in the late 1980s Margaret Thatcher said Ireland will never prosper as long as it exports its best commodity – its young people who were all highly educated. We were investing money in education and it was other countries that were reaping the benefits. It's beyond doubt

now that one of the major contributors to the Celtic Tiger was the fact that we have a young, educated population. All the research and development industries that came into the country, and I dare say will come in again when times get good, are as a result of education. As we all know, we're massively underfunded and we're still producing the goods. Given the constraints under which we have to work in education, financially and otherwise, we are actually doing an amazing job. We are actually contributing to recovery now and if we were to be given proper funding, we could contribute to it a hell of a lot more.

## How can the ASTI support non-permanent teachers?



**Justin McGree, Tipperary Branch**

The current method of employing young teachers robs them of a professional identity. What I would like from the ASTI is that they secure for me the same recognition as every one of my teaching colleagues. No Garda goes in May to look at projected crime rates for September to see whether they will have a job or not. I would like the Association to

fight to rescind the current method of allocating hours to schools

instead of teachers and the current trend, which sees three or four non-viable posts being created long term from one permanent post vacated through retirement.

I'd like to see one category of full-time permanent teacher, rather than three or four, since younger and non-permanent teachers do the same job and with the same level of professionalism.



**Sheila Marie Herlihy, Carbery Branch**

The ASTI has achieved a lot for part-time and non-permanent teachers in recent years, assisted by legislation protecting the working conditions of part-time and fixed-term employees. Legislation establishing CIDs is also to be welcomed, and it is great to see the recent changes in the terms and conditions of CIDs, meaning that teachers on CIDs for 18+ hours

are entitled to be paid for the full 22 hours.

Assisting in the enactment and implementation of this legislation represents achievement on the part of the ASTI. However, it is the duty of non-permanent teachers to inform themselves of their rights. The years between having a fixed-term contract and a CID are the most precarious for teachers and awareness is crucial. A non-permanent teacher may have rather 'woolly' information regarding their rights or entitlements. The ASTI should try to ensure that all recipients of non-permanent contracts are made aware of their entitlements for that specific contract and for future employment contracts. Non-permanent teachers should also seek clarification of their duties with regard to supervision and substitution in their schools, among other responsibilities.

It is important that the ASTI continues to be vociferous about the fact that not all teachers have permanent, pensionable jobs. The reality is that a significant number of ASTI members – approximately 3,000 of 18,000 – are working on a non-permanent basis. We are not operating with fewer capacities, nor have we fewer responsibilities than our permanent colleagues; in fact, we are delivering the exact same curriculum and performing the exact same professional duties. Non-permanent teachers also feel obliged to get involved in a plethora of extra-curricular activities in order to be retained in a school for the following academic year.

The issue of non-permanent teachers does not concern newly qualified teachers only. Many non-permanent teachers are in their 30s and 40s and have the same financial and familial responsibilities as their full-time counterparts.

Knowledge is power and it is good to see that the ASTI is organising a special non-permanent teachers' conference in May. In this time of great upheaval and change in the education sector in particular, it is necessary to become informed.

# ASTI pursues CID appeals to adjudication

The ASTI regularly represents members at CID appeals. ASTIR details two recent cases of note.

An appeal of a school's decision not to award a contract of indefinite duration (CID) to an ASTI member was recently upheld by the agreed adjudicator. The case concerned a teacher who commenced employment with a school in the 2004/2005 school year on a fixed-term contract. She continued employment on successive temporary whole-time contracts for the following two years, replacing a teacher on approved leave. In 2007/2008 she was offered an RPT contract because the permanent teacher she was replacing had resigned, but the school was only offered replacement concessionary hours by the Department. The board of management of her school refused a CID on the grounds that even though she had four years' service in the school, she did not qualify for a CID as for two of those years she was replacing a teacher on approved leave of absence. The school was represented by the JMB at the adjudication.

Maire Mulcahy, ASTI Assistant General Secretary, represented the teacher at adjudication. She contended that Paragraph 4.2.1 of Circular Letter 0055/2008 does not include reference to any of the three years previous to the current year in the exclusion relating to replacement of a teacher on leave of absence. She cited an earlier decision of the adjudicator, which found that this clause was not to be interpreted as disqualifying an employee where a period within the first three years of employment was one where the employee was covering for a post holder on approved scheme of absence.

The adjudicator found that the teacher was not to be disqualified from receiving a CID under paragraph 4.2.1, stating: "I do not interpret the Transitional Agreements as discounting any year when a teacher was covering for a teacher on leave of absence from the requisite four-year period". He also stated that the school had not made the case that the post was not viable within a reasonable period and that the teacher is entitled to a CID based on the number of hours worked in the year 2007/2008. The teacher has since been awarded a CID by the board of management of her school. The Department of Education and Science has agreed with the decision.

This decision is important in that it reaffirms the principle that any period



within the reckonable years spent replacing a teacher on career break or job-sharing does not, of itself, defeat a teacher's entitlement to a CID. The crucial issue is the status in the fourth year.

## Non-payment from Oireachtas funds

Another CID appeal case recently brought to the adjudicator involved a teacher who commenced employment on September 1, 2003, and was employed in the same school until 2008/2009.

In the school year 2005/2006 the teacher was offered and accepted 11 hours. She stated that it was not presented to her at that time that she would be substituting for another teacher on study leave. Her understanding was that the principal was juggling a number of factors in terms of teachers, hours and quotas. She was not given and did not sign a contract appointing her as a substitute. She states that she did not in fact take over the teacher on study leave's class groups, and instead continued with her own class groups from previous years or took new class groups. The school contended that she was employed on a private arrangement to replace another teacher, who paid the teacher's salary. The teacher accepts that she did not receive payment from the Department of Education and Science or any pension contributions during the year. The school states that the teacher on study leave made payments to the school, which were then used to pay the appellant.

In 2008, the school refused the teacher a CID, stating that the teacher was employed under a private arrangement in 2005/2006, was not paid from Oireachtas funds during that time and, therefore, did not have four years' continuous teaching service for the purposes of the Transitional Agreement. The adjudicator found that employment in the year 2005/2006 could not be included in the computation of the requisite four years' continuous teaching service due to the fact that her salary did not derive from Oireachtas funds. The adjudicator determined that the appellant was not entitled to a CID under the terms of Circular 0055/2008.

This decision clarifies the adjudicator's position in relation to the requirement for Oireachtas funding for the full four years' salary.

This case is being appealed to the Rights Commissioner.



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# Junior Spider Awards – inspiring the next generation

For the first time in Ireland, the search begins in schools nationwide for Ireland's most talented and innovative users of the Internet in education, with the launch of the inaugural Eircom Junior Spider Awards. Seeking entries from students in the Republic and Northern Ireland, this unique competition will recognise successful and clever ways in which students use the web to benefit their local school communities. It will also provide a benchmark of excellence and best practice in the use of the Internet in education in schools on both sides of the border. ASTI President Pat Hurley, a teacher of ICT at Middleton CBS, will represent the ASTI on the judging panel.

Second-level students are invited to submit entries into one or more of six categories, including best web application, best concept and a 'watch your space' category, which will recognise innovative projects or websites that make a real difference to the school or wider community. Teachers will also have the opportunity to win an Eircom Junior Spider Award, as students entering the competition can nominate a teacher from their school for their contribution to students in the use of the Internet in school. To enter the 2009 Junior Spider Awards, simply log on to [www.juniorspiders.ie](http://www.juniorspiders.ie). The closing date for entries is Friday, November 6, 2009, and the awards ceremony will be held on December 18. The Junior Spiders programme is endorsed by the ASTI, NCTE, TUI, INTO, and *The Primary Times* and is supported by .ie Domain Registry.



## Junior Spider post-primary schools categories

### Best concept

*(website/application)*

This category applies to any ideas and concepts developed by students. Creativity, originality and innovation are the most important factors to take into consideration to submit a project.

### Best online content

*(including websites, blogs, podcasts, videos, social networks)*

This category applies to all websites created and/or run by students, which aim to provide information about a specific subject.

### Best website design and functionality

This category applies to all websites created and designed by students, which excel in user-friendly look and feel, navigation and structure.

### Best web application

This relates to projects that demonstrate practical new applications of the Internet in everyday life.

### Best educational website

This category applies to all websites created and/or run by students with an educational approach. The aim of the website should be related to the school curriculum or school activities.

### Watch\_Your\_Space award

This category covers projects done by students, which promote a positive, more effective use of technology by young people in Ireland. This award will recognise innovative projects and/or websites that can make a real difference to the school and/or wider community.

Some examples include: awareness campaigns highlighting online privacy issues; safe use tips and advice; cyber bullying coping strategies; online copyright issues; use of websites, including social networking, to improve quality of life for young people, make a positive contribution to the school community, and have a positive impact on the community; and, research projects that give us a greater understanding of young people's issues when using Internet and mobile phone technologies.

### Best teacher contribution

*(web/Internet)*

Students can nominate a teacher in their school for their contribution and support given to students in the use of the Internet in school. The award will be given to one teacher at primary and one at second level.

### Grand prix

The content, design, usage, and popularity will be taken into consideration.



## St Clement's opening



Pictured at the opening of St Clement's College, Limerick, are (from left): Mark O'Sullivan; Eoin O'Toole; Eilis Casey; ASTI President Pat Hurley; and, ASTI President-Elect Joe Moran.

## The alternative Turner Prize



Why Violence?, the campaign for violence reduction, is organising a cartoon competition for second-level students. Students are asked to create a cartoon conveying the idea that violent behaviour is unacceptable. Each school is encouraged to run its own internal cartoon competition, from which the top three entries will be selected locally and then submitted by email for display in the national contest. Final adjudication will be by Martyn Turner of the *Irish Times*. The winning entry will receive a prize of €500, and the cartoon will be circulated to the media for publication, and may also be used in Why Violence? promotional material. The teacher who organises the school contest that produces the winning entry will receive a framed original Martyn Turner cartoon.

Entries in black and white and not exceeding A4 size should be emailed to [whyviolence@gmail.com](mailto:whyviolence@gmail.com). The closing date for submission of artworks is September 21. Students', teachers', and schools' names should be stated on the covering email.

## Headstrong

A report from Headstrong, the National Centre for Youth Mental Health, conveys worrying news in relation to the mental health of young people, reporting that two-thirds of young people say they are unable to cope with their problems, while almost half have experienced bullying at some time.

Only 38% of the young people who were surveyed as part of the report – 'Somewhere To Turn To, Someone To Talk To' – felt that they could deal with the issues they face, while 36% said they did not have an adult available to them to regularly discuss their problems. Nearly one in ten of those surveyed reported that they had serious problems but did not seek professional help.

Teachers and school environments have an obvious role in facilitating children in feeling safe and secure. However, demands placed on teachers due to additional workload and increased class size can infringe on this. A survey carried out by the ASTI in 2007 found that 62% of teachers said they lacked time to spend with individual students. Commenting on the Headstrong report, Moira Leydon, ASTI Assistant General Secretary: Education and Research, said: "This report demonstrates that youth mental health is a very serious issue. Increasingly, we are finding that teachers are talking about the mental health of students and the inadequacy of the services to meet their needs. Teachers are working with students during a time when, for a significant number, many developmental issues become problematic. They should have access to appropriate therapeutic interventions. At present, it is quite obvious from reports such as produced by Headstrong, that these young people are not getting the help when they most need it.

Schools are in the front line in dealing with young people's emotional and behavioural disorders, and it is vital that schools and teachers are properly resourced to support the wellbeing of children in their care and to ensure that children know where to turn if they need help. Provisions such as appropriate time allocation, supports for relevant curricular areas such as SPHE, and posts such as home school liaison teachers and guidance counsellors are central to this. Teachers also need to be confident that, for disturbed children, the external services are responsive and easily accessible. This is not the case at present". Headstrong works with those who provide services to young people. Its primary service development activity is the development of a model for an enhanced youth mental health support system called Jigsaw. For more information, visit [www.headstrong.ie](http://www.headstrong.ie).

## Young Environmentalist Awards

Congratulations to all schools shortlisted in ECO-UNESCO's Young Environmentalist Awards 2009. A showcase of the shortlisted projects opens to the public on Wednesday, May 20, at the Round Room in Dublin's Mansion House.

Speaking about the standard of this year's entries, Elaine Nevin, National Director of ECO-UNESCO, said: "We are extremely proud of all the young environmentalists that participated in this year's programme. All of the shortlisted projects show a great deal of creativity and innovation in their approach to protecting the environment and promoting environmental awareness".

# On the web



## New teaching resources website

The English Language Support Programme, part of the Trinity Immigration Initiative at Trinity College, has launched a website to help second-level teachers to support their newcomer students in accessing subject material. The site – [www.elsp.ie](http://www.elsp.ie) – offers free downloadable teaching resources focusing on specific curriculum topics. Subjects currently available include English, history, geography, CSPE, science, business studies, home economics, music and preparing for exams.

Resources for maths, religion and wood technology are coming soon. At the moment the site offers resources for Junior Cert subjects only; however, from September 2009 the site will also offer Leaving Cert resources. Although the site was primarily designed for newcomer students, the Language Support Activity Units and other activities on the site are equally suited to the needs of all students, as they encourage both subject and language learning. Resources can be used in the classroom, as part of homework or as self-study activities.

As well as accessing subject- and topic-specific resources, visitors to the site can read about the issues related to English language support, such as levels used for accessing language proficiency of non-English speaking students.

Other resources available on the site include lab, workshop and safety language, and short classroom activities, as well as resources on learning how to learn, and listening, speaking, reading and writing activities. Zachary Lyons, a second-level maths teacher and Research Fellow with the English Language Support Programme, says: "The challenge of ensuring that newcomer students can access mainstream education at post-primary level is acute. The curriculum is delivered by subject specialists whose initial training has not prepared them to take account of ESL students in their classes. We have analysed the linguistic demands of the mainstream curriculum to develop teaching and learning materials to support accessing the curriculum and provide support to subject and language support teachers and their students".

Moirá Leydon, ASTI Assistant General Secretary: Education and Research, welcomed the launch of the website, saying: "Resources such as these are especially welcome at a time when ensuring language competence and curriculum engagement among newcomer students has been made especially challenging due to cuts to English language support posts and an increase in the pupil-teacher ratio".

## Lessons in lingo

Don't know your wiki from your tweet? Log on to [www.scoilnet.ie](http://www.scoilnet.ie) and have a look at their 'Web 2.0 in the classroom' section to find out how to make use of web applications like blogs, wikis and podcasts in your teaching. You can also read about other teachers' ideas and experiences on the site.

If you are interested in keeping up with developments in the area of IT and education, you can check out Donal O'Mahony's blog, E-learning Island at <http://donalomahony.edublogs.org>. Visit <http://edubloggerdir.blogspot.com> to search for more education blogs.

## Irish online

A new Irish-speaking social networking website was launched in March by An Chultúrlann, Belfast. The site – [www.talkirish.com](http://www.talkirish.com) – allows teachers and learners of Irish to get together to chat in Irish. The website offers a number of services useful for language learning and teaching, including a word-a-day podcast, flashcard service, and audio dictionary. The site also offers vocabulary-building games and quizzes,

and allows users to share audio, documents or images and browse lots of interesting Irish language content.

## Online resources, books and more

Ever thought about going back to college? Well, now you can sit in on a range of lectures from Irish and international universities – without ever leaving home. iTunes U offers free audio and video presentations from a variety of university departments downloadable to your computer or music player.

Your students may find the service very useful to discover more about third-level courses or subjects of interest to them.

In the wake of teaching resources websites such as [teachnet.ie](http://teachnet.ie) and [skool.ie](http://skool.ie), a number of Irish educational publishing companies have started publishing downloadable resources or interactive textbooks online. Have a look at their websites to find out more.

European Schoolnet's Learning Resource Exchange service offers online learning resources from ministries of education and other content providers across Europe. Find out more on [www.ireforschools.eun.org](http://www.ireforschools.eun.org).

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## Seven ASTI representatives appointed to Teaching Council



*ASTI members recently appointed to the Teaching Council pictured with Minister for Education and Science, Batt O'Keeffe, and Teaching Council CEO, Áine Lawlor (from left): Bernadine O'Sullivan; Jack Keane; Susie Hall; Teaching Council CEO, Áine Lawlor; Minister for Education and Science, Batt O'Keeffe; Noel Buckley; Elaine Devlin; Christy Maginn; and, Lily Cronin.*

Following elections, the Minister for Education and Science, Batt O'Keeffe, appointed 37 members to the second Teaching Council at a ceremony in Dublin in March. Among those appointed were ASTI members Bernadine O'Sullivan, Jack Keane, Susie Hall, Noel Buckley, Elaine Devlin, Christy Maginn, and Lily Cronin. The Teaching Council was established in March 2006 to promote teaching as a profession at primary and post-primary levels, to promote the professional development of teachers, and to regulate standards in the profession.

Since its establishment, the Teaching Council has published the first written Codes of Professional Conduct for Teachers, drafted registration regulations to ensure a uniformity of entry standards, maintained the Register to

safeguard the high standards of entry to the profession and, as part of that process, arranged the Garda vetting of more than 14,000 new teachers and assessed approximately 5,000 qualifications. The Council has also awarded 45 research bursaries as part of its research brief and commissioned two separate pieces of research on teacher education.

### Teaching Council registration

The Teaching Council would like to thank all teachers who have renewed their registration for the year 2009-2010. Those who have missed their registration renewal deadline, but who wish to remain on the Register of Teachers, should return their renewal form and fee to the Council without delay or renew online through the home page of [www.teachingcouncil.ie](http://www.teachingcouncil.ie). Over the coming weeks, the Council will facilitate retrospective renewal of registration, i.e., renewal of registration with effect from March 28, 2009. Teachers availing of this should note that the payroll bodies (Department of Education and Science and VECs) have notified the Council that **the option to pay the fee by means of deduction from salary is no longer available for the current registration year**. Teachers should therefore select another payment option when completing the registration renewal form. The most cost-effective option is online payment. When Section 30 of the Teaching Council Act, 2001 is commenced by the Minister for Education and Science in the coming months, registration will be mandatory for all teachers wishing to teach in recognised schools and have their salaries paid from State monies. Registered teachers who allow their registration to lapse and who subsequently wish to re-register with the Teaching Council will be required to undergo the full application process including submission of transcripts and a process of Garda vetting. The ASTI, therefore, strongly advises its members whose registration renewal is outstanding to renew without delay.

## The importance of investment in education

The importance of investment in education at this crucial time was highlighted at a recent symposium organised by The National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD) and the Post Primary Education Forum (PPEF). The NAPD hosts a vision and values in education symposium each year, and this year, in the light of the severe cutbacks in education, the PPEF came on board to jointly host the event entitled 'The Importance of Education in Ireland's Recovery'.

The symposium, attended by representatives from 36 organisations involved in education in Ireland, heard from Dr Chris Horn of Iona Technologies, who emphasised the importance of innovation and provided food for thought on the education of a technologically literate generation. Dr Horn was followed by Fergus Finlay, CEO of Barnardos, whose presentation emphasised the importance of investment in education from an early age and stressed that tackling educational poverty was not simply important in terms of social justice, but was also an economic imperative. Sean Kelly, former president of the GAA, stressed the contribution of education and of teachers to the social wellbeing of the country, while Dr Don Thornhill, Chairman of the Competitiveness Council of Ireland, presented a paper in which he restated the importance of teachers and of investment in education, saying that the commitment and skills of our educators and the support of parents make strong outcomes possible. He



*Pictured at a symposium on investment in education are (from left): Jim Moore, National Parents' Council Post-primary; Dr Chris Horn, Iona Technologies; and, Dr Fergus Finlay, Barnardos.*

stressed that our ability to take maximum advantage of the eventual upswing in the global economy will be enhanced if we can continue to raise the quality of education and to exploit the capacity of the economy to recover quickly.



## Teachers increase role in tackling homophobic bullying in schools

New materials designed to support teachers in tackling homophobic bullying were launched at ASTI Convention last month. The resources, produced by the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN), were distributed to delegates at the event and will be sent to teachers across the country in the coming months. The resources aim to equip teachers in addressing homophobic bullying and in supporting lesbian, gay and bisexual students. Speaking at the launch of the resources, Sandra Gowran, GLEN Education Policy Director, said the materials represented a major initiative in addressing homophobic bullying in schools: "The ASTI is demonstrating strong commitment to addressing this problem by providing the necessary leadership to its members, very many of whom are dealing with this issue on a day-to-day basis in their work".

John White, ASTI General Secretary, commented that: "Respecting the diversity of all students, regardless of their identity, is critical in the thrust towards excellence in all spheres. If we are to ensure that all young people in our schools are treated with the respect and dignity they deserve, we have to ensure that the most vulnerable are protected and supported. Our members are committed to tackling homophobia in schools and welcome the guidance that is being offered in this resource".

He continued: "It's a great shame that this guide is being launched at a time when due to the non-filling of promotional posts, schools and students will suffer a serious reduction in pastoral care facilities. Year heads, so central to the promotion of the students' well-being, will be reduced in number.



*Members of the ASTI Equal Opportunities Committee pictured with GLEN representatives at the launch of the GLEN resources are: Back row (from left): Dan Healy; Maire Mulcahy, ASTI Assistant General Secretary; Orla Egan, Training Director with BeLonG To Youth Service; Mary Ohle; and, Tony McKiernan. Front row (from left): Sandra Gowran, GLEN Education Policy Director; and Carmel Heneghan.*

Notwithstanding this, ASTI members will do their utmost to promote a climate of respect in schools".

## Put Litter in its Place

Dublin City Council's new national anti-litter awareness drive aims to get Ireland's young people to 'Put Litter in Its Place'. The interactive DVD and education pack build on the hugely successful 'Filth' campaign, which opened up dialogue and debate among young people around the issue of litter.

The information pack contains a DVD and an information booklet, which includes informative and challenging activities for young people and is suitable for both primary and secondary schools.

According to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, John Gormley TD: "We invest significant resources in combating our litter problem and progress is indeed being made. We must foster a collective public attitude that looks upon littering as unacceptable behaviour so that we can all look forward to a cleaner, greener Ireland in the future".

## Top of the league

ASTI member, Jimmy Johnstone was appointed Vice-President of the Board of the Irish League of Credit Unions at the annual League Conference on April 26. Jimmy has been involved in the ASTI Credit Union in many roles over the past 17 years and currently serves as Chairman. He has also been involved at national level over the past number of years and has just completed a two-year term serving as League Treasurer. The ASTI and the ASTI Credit Union would like to congratulate Jimmy and wish him every success over the next two years.



## In your union

### Membership cards

New membership cards were distributed to all members through their school stewards during March. Cards were also posted to members not attached to a school at their home addresses. The cards expire after three years; however, the validity of membership depends on teachers continuing to meet the requirements of ASTI membership, including annual subscription payments where applicable. If you did not receive a card or are unsure of your membership status, please check with the membership section on 01-604 0162, or at [membership@asti.ie](mailto:membership@asti.ie).

### Update your membership details

Remember to update your ASTI membership details if you change your address or contact details, or move school. It's as simple as phoning the membership section on 01-604 0162, or emailing [membership@asti.ie](mailto:membership@asti.ie) to request a 'Change of Membership Category' form.

The membership details held on our database are used in important postal ballots and to contact members directly, so it is very important to notify Head Office if your contact details change.

### Want to write for ASTIR?

ASTIR is looking to publish articles written by ASTI members. In particular, the ASTIR Editorial Board welcomes contributions relating to education and also lighter/humorous articles relating to teaching/life as a teacher. Articles in Irish are also welcome.

Contributions should be forwarded to ASTIR, ASTI, Thomas MacDonagh House, Winetavern Street, Dublin 8, or emailed to [astir@asti.ie](mailto:astir@asti.ie).

## From Lifeskills to SPHE

'Lifeskills', a series of resources originally devised by the North Western Health Board in 1991, has been revised, redeveloped and revamped. It is evident that the success of the Lifeskills Programme, encompassing the 'Healthy Living', 'Healthy Times' and 'Healthy Choices' materials, was a key factor in the formalisation of the Social, Personal, and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum. Such is the programme's quality that it remains a core and recommended text in the Department of Education's 'Guidelines for Teachers' for SPHE. The 'Lifeskills' programme uses active methodologies in the context of the experiential cycle, as recommended for SPHE. The new Teacher's Lesson Plan book has been aligned to the SPHE curriculum and includes new lesson plans and activities for use in the classroom. While the lessons are facilitated by the teacher through the detailed lesson plans, a portfolio-based student workbook allows students to 'capture' the work undertaken, providing a record for both student and school. An 'SPHE in Action' DVD and handbook featuring live classroom footage and additional resources for teachers have also been developed.

Information about the revised Lifeskills resources was sent to all post-primary schools in April through the principal and SPHE co-ordinator.

## Learning about the real slum children

The movie *Slumdog Millionaire*, which was a worldwide smash hit this year, was filmed in real Indian slums where real children live on the streets. Since 1999, the Hope Foundation has been working to improve the lives of over 250,000 children who live on the streets of Calcutta. Unit 4 of the CSPE curriculum encourages students to take a closer look at the development work carried out by Irish charity organisations like the Hope Foundation. Hope has developed a schools' pack that fits into the CSPE programme and includes a guide for teachers. The programme runs from first to third year and teaches students about the lives of young people in Calcutta and the difficulties they face.

The Hope Foundation also runs a Transition Year programme where, following fundraising and education, students travel to India to visit projects running there. The organisation also runs an enterprise project programme where students raise funds for the street children of Calcutta by selling Butlers Irish Chocolate Bars.

**For a Hope teachers' pack, or for more information, contact Madeleine Cummins, Tel: 021-429 2990, or Email: [Madeleine@hopefoundation.ie](mailto:Madeleine@hopefoundation.ie).**

## President visits new school in Kells



*President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, recently paid a visit to St Ciaran's in Kells. She is pictured with staff and students at the school.*

## Focus Ireland campaign

Focus Ireland has launched an Internet campaign calling for public support to help secure a legal right to aftercare to protect young people leaving state care. This legal right would help to protect the most vulnerable young people from many problems including becoming homeless, addiction issues, exploitation and becoming involved in crime. Focus Ireland stresses that not everyone leaving state care requires support but it is vital that each person's needs are assessed well in advance of their 18th birthday to ensure that the most vulnerable people get the support they need to help them move successfully on to independent living.

Focus Ireland's campaign urges people to log on to [www.focusireland.ie](http://www.focusireland.ie) and send an email to the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Barry Andrews, in support of the housing and homeless charity's campaign.

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## Green Schools save over 7,700 tonnes of carbon



*Hannah Hedderman, Faye Morgan and Eadaoin Fitzmaurice, students at Gael Cholaiste Na Mara, Arklow, Co. Wicklow, pictured with Andrew Hetherington, CEO of Repak.*

Green Schools throughout the country have helped save enough water to fill 85 Olympic sized swimming pools, enough petrol to power a car for five million kilometres, enough energy to power a light bulb for 1.4 million days and enough waste to fill over 1,000 bin trucks.

These statistics were announced as a number of schools were awarded Green Flags for successfully implementing the Green Schools seven-step programme. Three hundred and forty six new schools achieved their Green Flag status over the last year, bringing the total number of Green Flag schools to 1,500. Green Schools is an international environmental education and management programme that promotes and acknowledges long-term, whole-school action for the environment.

The Green Schools programme continues to grow, with 420 new registrations during the last school year, bringing the total number of participating schools to 3,109. Cathy Baxter, Green Schools Manager for Ireland, said at the launch: "We are delighted with the ongoing success of the Green Schools programme in Ireland ... The research data on waste, energy, water and transport that we have recently collated – we estimate at a minimum value of over €2 million per year – really does show the value of the programme, not to mention the impact on the students involved and their wider communities".

Repak has developed a free online tool to help schools calculate and reduce their carbon footprint. The web-based programme allows schools to input their recycling waste data, along with water and energy consumption, to produce an overall report. The carbon calculator is available on [www.repak.ie](http://www.repak.ie).



### Graduate Diploma/ Masters in Dance

Developed with teachers in mind, the Graduate Diploma/MA in Dance at UL is a part-time programme of study. The graduate diploma is a taught programme which runs on 14 Saturdays throughout the academic year, full-time during one week of Easter and two weeks in July. The MA programme is an additional year of independent research under supervision.

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**Closing date for applications is June 13th.**

For further information contact:  
Brigitte Moody. Tel: 061 202807  
or Email: [Brigitte.Moody@ul.ie](mailto:Brigitte.Moody@ul.ie)



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Transforming Ireland

This programme is funded under the National Development Plan (Postgraduate Skills Conversion Programme).





## Limerick Branch retirement function



A group of retirees pictured at a recent Limerick South Branch function held in their honour, along with ASTI General Secretary, John White, and ASTI President, Pat Hurley.

## School Leavers' Survey

The results of the latest Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) School Leavers' Survey once again highlight the importance of educational attainment in providing long-term opportunities and protecting young people who come from vulnerable sectors of society.

The 2007 survey shows that 86% of students surveyed completed secondary education. This represents an increase of 4% on the previous year's figures and the highest school completion rate to date. Male students continue to be over-represented among those who leave school early, while females continue to outperform their male counterparts at Junior Cert and Leaving Cert examinations and are more likely to go on to higher education. Encouragingly, the findings show overall growth in entry to higher education, with the majority of school leavers now progressing to higher education.

The importance of education and qualifications for life chances is emphasised in the report. School leavers who complete post-compulsory education are more likely to find employment, while job satisfaction is strongly associated with level of education attained at second level. School leavers who left school without any qualifications experience the highest levels of unemployment. In this context, the importance of programmes designed to encourage school retention and achievement such as Leaving Cert Applied and Leaving Cert Vocational cannot be underestimated. The survey showed that students who achieve higher Leaving Certificate grades are more likely to have completed Transition Year. These performance differences may reflect issues over and above the impact of participation in the programme, such as the selective nature of participants in the Transition Year programme. However, the link is significant and highlights the short-sighted nature of budget cuts to Transition Year grants. Speaking about the survey results, Delma Byrne of the ESRI highlighted the importance of educational attainment in the uncertain economic climate: "Young adults continue to be the group with the highest risk of unemployment and their unemployment rate has increased further since the time of the survey. Adequate preparation in terms of educational and vocational qualifications will be more important than ever in ensuring that they are equipped to take advantage of the shrinking pool of job opportunities".

## North Eastern Branch events

### Wednesday, May 20

- lunch at 12.30 in the Headford Arms, Kells, Co. Meath;
- coach tour to Clonbreaney Farm, a restored manor farmyard;
- the homestead and gardens of St Oliver Plunkett's family at Loughcrew, Oldcastle, Co. Meath;
- Loughcrew Cairns (3,000 BC);
- tea, sandwiches, finger food, etc., in the Headford Arms at 7.00pm; and,
- a local tour guide for the day.

The all-in cost depends on numbers, but should be no more than €50 (if we fill a coach, it will be considerably less).

### The Cooley Peninsula

An outing to The Cooley Peninsula is planned for September (date to be confirmed in the next newsletter). A coach will meet the Dublin train at Dundalk Railway Station and start the tour from there.

### Golf outings

These will be organised by the North Eastern Branch.

For more details on the above North Eastern Branch outings, contact Michael McMahon, Tel: 042-966 1097, or 087-753 5280.

## Trips abroad

### Budapest October 11-18, 2009

Difficulties have arisen for the organisers in getting the best deal; it is important that they know the exact number of committed travellers so plans can progress for an enjoyable holiday for all.

If you are interested in coming along, contact Nuala Carroll, Tel: 086-854 8942, or Eileen Brennan, Tel: 086-811 1245.

### Oberammergau 2010

There is the possibility of attending the Passion Play in September/October. A two-night stay in a four-star hotel five minutes from the centre, transfers to and from the play, and first category tickets, as well as dinner both nights and lunch during the play, will cost €789. Updates on the above offer will appear in later newsletters.

## North-South link

Members of the RSTA National Committee and of the North Eastern Branch met our Belfast colleagues from the NASUWT (retired) in Ballymascanlon Hotel, Dundalk, on January 29 to review our joint activities of the past six years and to plan future events. Speakers from both groups expressed their pleasure at how this connection has gone from strength to strength, enriching the experiences of all concerned.

## A trip north

On June 16, there will be a visit to Cultra Folk and Transport Museum, Belfast. The train departs from Connolly station at 9.35am. For further details, contact Nuala O'Connor, Tel: 01-298 0819, or 086-876 8950, or Aileen Kilduff, Tel: 087-664 1466.



# Hibernia College

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- i-Learning
- Contemporary issues in education

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### Key Facts

- Deals with current issues faced by today's teachers
- Focus on application in the Irish classroom
- Fully HETAC accredited
- Delivered by experienced educators
- Assessment by written submitted reports
- Modules can be completed as stand alone continuing professional development courses
- Next class September 2009
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Hibernia College is a HETAC accredited online college offering quality assured blended and online education programmes



# A life-changing experience

RUAIRI O'HEHIR was a deputy principal at Rathdown Secondary School in Glenageary before he decided to become a VSO volunteer. He writes about his experiences working in Rwanda.



After 25 years teaching in Rathdown Secondary School in Glenageary, I decided I wanted to do something different while age, health and other circumstances allowed. I had heard many people talk about Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) and had met one or two of their returned volunteers. I went to an open day, applied for acceptance as a volunteer and was accepted by March 2008.

Initially I was offered a placement in The Gambia but when I heard that a place in Rwanda was available, I jumped at the opportunity. I had been teaching a module on Rwanda for seven years as part of my school's Transition Year politics and international relations course, so the opportunity to actually work there as an education management advisor seemed too good to be true!

So here I am – almost exactly six months now. I live in a small village called Gisagara in the far south of Rwanda: no water, no electricity, some very basic shops and a small market for foodstuffs twice a week. But at least five pubs, quite like many parts of rural Ireland!

## A complex country

Rwanda is a country with a tragic past and an ominous future. As we near the 15th anniversary of the genocide, the aftermath rumbles on in everyday life. Yesterday, after visiting a local secondary school to adjudicate an English club debate, I went for a drink with my friend Enock who is the English teacher. There I met Venuste who had been the deputy principal until he was denounced in 2005 as a genocidaire. He spent three years in prison until the court decided there was no foundation to the charge and he was released. My regular moto driver, the inappropriately-named Déo Gratias, spent 13 years in prison under similar circumstances while all his property vanished and his wife died. He was released immediately as soon as the court got around to hearing his case. While nobody ever uses the 'H' or 'T' words aloud, it's impossible to ignore the divisions that still exist.

If the past casts a long shadow, the clouds on the horizon are equally dark. Rwanda is already the most densely populated country on the mainland of Africa and its population is set to double by 2016. Ninety-two percent of people survive on subsistence agriculture; the country has virtually no natural resources to exploit and being 1,000 kilometres from the nearest port and having no railway, everything has to be trucked in at great additional expense.

## A language revolution

All Rwanda has is its people and that is what they are banking on. Rather like Ireland in the 1970s, the government is pouring everything it can into education, hoping to become the location of choice for foreign investment when the East African Community takes off. Part of this involves a linguistic revolution. Almost overnight the country has dropped French as its second official language and replaced it with English. Teachers were informed in late November that, as of January when the school year starts, all secondary school teaching would be in English instead of French. Primary school teaching in maths and science would also be through English and French was completely dropped from both primary and secondary curricula. Most teachers have little or no English, the few textbooks available are in French or Kinyarwanda, and the education system is already massively under-resourced and unable to cope with these additional demands. Well, it'll all work out in the end somehow!

The amazing thing is that everyone has accepted this. Primary teachers are now working from 7.15am to 16.45pm with a single 30-minute break for lunch. All teachers are spending their weekends and holidays on English courses. School principals are struggling with the new requirement to draw up their own timetables and allocate their staff, which was all done centrally before. Yet, there has been virtually not a





word of complaint. This is a society where authority carries an enormous weight and – for good or ill – people do as they are told!

### Volunteering

So what do I do? Not what I was expecting when I came out! So far my main job has been learning how Rwanda works – elastic concepts of time, interminable meetings in Kinyarwanda, and a complete inability to say 'no' to anything or criticise anything, no matter how bad it may be. I have been learning all sorts of new customs, not to mention trying to learn a language that makes every other language I have come across seem easy by comparison.

Professionally, my main job for the first few months has been trying to accumulate statistical information to find out what exactly the situation is in the 83 schools in my district. I visit schools, partly to inspect them, mainly to try to find out what they need in the way of training, which will be the next phase of my work. Of course, what they all say is: We don't want training, we want textbooks in English, and French-English dictionaries and English classes for the teachers. I am also teaching English to the district staff three days a week because, as of January 2010, all local government work is to be done in English. It is tough going at times. Schools are incredibly lacking in everything except enormous numbers of students. Classes of 70 and 80 are not uncommon. I visited one class in Mugombwa where throughout the day 15 of the students in a class of 73 took it in turn to stand because there weren't enough seats. Going somewhere like that and asking: 'What do you need?' almost seems insulting at times. There is also the problem that teaching is appallingly paid and regarded with contempt as a profession. Turnover is high but, worse still, very few people are teaching because they want to – they just couldn't find anything better and will probably vanish the instant they do.

### Rewarding

My work here is amazingly fulfilling, educational, and humbling. It is amazing to see what some of these teachers are doing with their students and what they are willing to do once they are exposed to new techniques and methodologies. The students are so hungry to learn – a class of 70-80 perfectly behaved and attentive seven-year-old students is quite an unnerving sight the first time you encounter it! When things get a bit tough, with about 40 VSO volunteers in a country the size of Munster, friends are never far away. There are places to visit, birthdays to celebrate and many other excuses for having a good time. There have been some difficulties, some tough days, times when you feel you are banging your head off a very thick brick wall, but never for even one moment have I regretted my decision to come out here. Much as I miss my own students and colleagues, this kind of experience opens your eyes, teaches you more about yourself and transforms your life. I heartily recommend it to anyone. And from the emails I have got from the friends I made in training, they would recommend it too!



*Ruairi O'Hehir*

*If you want to follow Ruairi's adventures in more detail, check out his blog at [www.roheithir.blogspot.com](http://www.roheithir.blogspot.com) or email him at [roheithir@gmail.com](mailto:roheithir@gmail.com).*

# Gala dinner celebrates the ASTI and teachers

On March 21, teachers from all over the country gathered in Dublin's Mansion House to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the foundation of the ASTI.



*Pictured at the gala dinner to celebrate the ASTI centenary are (from left): ASTI President, Pat Hurley; President Mary McAleese; and, ASTI General Secretary, John White.*

A gala dinner attended by the President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, and representatives from all ASTI branches, celebrated the work of the ASTI in serving teachers and promoting education during the last century. Speaking at the event, ASTI President, Pat Hurley, paid tribute to ASTI members' tremendous commitment to the union: "Tonight we celebrate 100 years of the ASTI and in doing so acknowledge the work of those who founded that ASTI and those who followed them – the thousands of ASTI members who over the years gave of their time, talents and energy to serve their fellow teachers and to promote second-level education. John White, ASTI General Secretary, echoed this sentiment, saying: "Our founding members, who first sowed the seeds of the ASTI in the College of Commerce in Cork and then founded the ASTI at a meeting in this very room 100 years ago, were people who believed in service to their community and in solidarity with their fellow teachers. That is what we do as teachers and as members of the ASTI. We serve our communities in solidarity with our colleagues. And what a proud tradition this is – the tradition of P.J. Kennedy, our first President; Tomas MacDonagh; and, future Taoiseach and President of Ireland, Eamon de Valera. Let us tonight celebrate 100 years of this service and this solidarity". President McAleese paid tribute to the work teachers do and acknowledged the transformative power of that work on Irish society,



*From left: John Hurley; Terry Hurley; Eilis Casey; and, David Barry.*

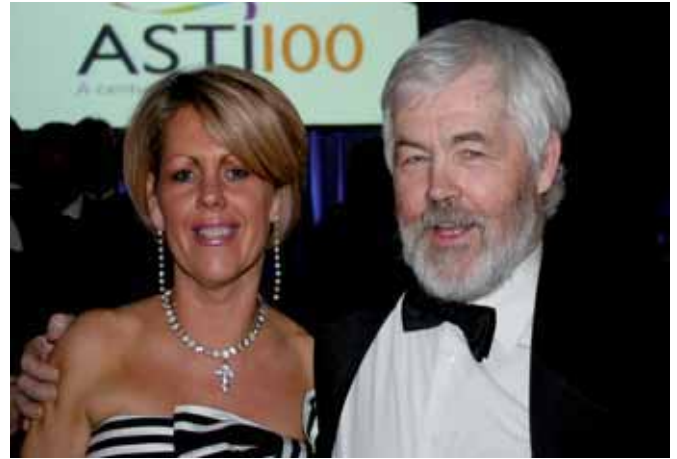
saying to those teachers gathered: "There is surely an entitlement to national recognition and that is why I am here, to say 'thank you' to you and to all your members who, for a century, have made formal education their vocation and their life's work. This union works for its members. Its members work for our young people". On a historic night, the President looked back to the impact education has had on Irish society and forward to the place education and teachers hold in the country's future success: "If ever there was a generation which has witnessed the sheer transformative power of education, both for the individual and for society, then ours has to be it. So many of the endemic problems that had defeated past generations for centuries, peace and prosperity among them, were reduced to achievable proportions. In these moments when both peace and prosperity are under attack we do well to remind ourselves that these days are still only the very earliest opening chapters in the new narrative that Ireland is writing, thanks to the infusion of confidence and fresh thinking that formal education, with its certificates and diplomas and degrees, has wrought throughout civic society".

Speeches made at the gala dinner are available on the ASTI website – [www.asti.ie](http://www.asti.ie).





The President of Ireland pictured with ASTI Presidents from five decades (from left): Michael Corley (1998); Kathleen O'Sullivan (1988); H. Duffy (1968); President Mary McAleese; ASTI President Pat Hurley (2008); and, Derek Nolan (1978).



From left: Jane Craig Elliot, Cavan with Michael Moriarty, Athlone.



Former female Presidents of the ASTI (from left): Sheila Parsons; Catherine Fitzpatrick; Kathleen O'Sullivan; Bernadine O'Sullivan; Mary McCarthy; Susie Hall; Mary Dowling Maher; Margaret Walsh; and, Patricia Wroe.



Members of the Cork North Branch pictured with ASTI President Pat Hurley. From left: Maire Ní Laoire; ASTI President Pat Hurley; Maire Ní Chiarba; and, Dan Healy.



From left: INTO General Secretary, John Carr; ASTI General Secretary, John White; ICTU General Secretary, David Begg; and, TUI General Secretary, Peter MacMenamin.



Bernard Lynch, Dublin South 1, pictured at the Mansion House.



Members of the Kerry Branch (from left): Lily Cronin; Breda Lyons; former ASTI President, Mary McCarthy; and, John O'Donovan.



The officers of the ASTI pictured with President Mary McAleese (from left): Patricia Wroe, Immediate Past-President; Joe Moran, Vice-President; Pat Hurley, President; President Mary McAleese; John White, General Secretary; and, Ray St John, Honorary Treasurer.



Members of the Longford Branch, Tony Waldron and Padraic McWeeney, pictured with ASTI President, Pat Hurley (centre).

## Centenary celebrations

Branches around the country have been holding their own celebrations to mark the ASTI's centenary.



Recently retired former officers of the East Galway Branch, Mattie Quinn, Frances Holohan, and John Molloy, pictured with ASTI President Pat Hurley, and General Secretary, John White, at the ASTI East Galway Branch dinner in Ballinasloe.



ASTI President, Pat Hurley making a presentation to Finbar Clayton at a retirement function held in East Cork.



# Convention centenary function

A special function was held on the Wednesday night of this year's Convention to mark the 100th anniversary of the foundation of the ASTI.



*Cork North delegates (from left): Nancy Twomey; Maire Ní Chiarba; Maire Ní Laoire; Donal O'Mahony; and, Margaret Searson.*



*Dublin South Central delegates (from left): Breda Lynch; Maire O'Ciarain; Gabrielle Connolly; Mairin Ní Bhreitiunaigh; Rosemary Flynn; and, Deirdre Healy.*



*Donegal delegates (from left): Sean Carr; Neil Curran; Rosaleen Grant; Gerard Logue; Bernie Curran; Ollie Horgan; and, James Rodgers.*



*Enniscorthy delegates (from left): Marie Travers; James McGovern; Mary Whelan; Rosemary Lenihan; and, Theresa Kerins.*



*From left: Pat Morris and Dan O'Sullivan, Cork South; Eilis Casey; Michael Cronin; Aine Vaughan; Tony McKernan; and, Ger O'Donoghue, Limerick South.*



*Galway delegates. Front row (from left): Liam Glynn; Ellen Scanlon; Maura Greaney; and, Maire Ní Choncubhair. Back row (from left): Bridie Higgins; Linda Dunne; Paul Kilrairie; Carol Dunleavy; Sarah Withero; and, Eileen Ní Shuilleabhain.*

# Sligo Branch claims centenary golf victory

ASTI members recently came together for the Association's centenary golf competition.



*The winning team, Donal Cronin and David Connealy, were presented with their prizes by John Hurley (left) and ASTI President Pat Hurley (right).*



*From left: John Hurley, ASTI President Pat Hurley, and Assistant General Secretary Pat King, who organised the event, enjoy the 'apres golf' celebrations.*

It rained throughout the country on Monday April 6; however, in picturesque Glasheen Golf Club in Athlone the sun was shining, as the ASTI celebrated its centenary with an inter-branch fourball golf competition. Winning team Donal Cronin and David Connealy of Summerhill College represented the Sligo Branch and carded a brilliant score of 42 points on the challenging championship course. Over 120 golfers representing 40 ASTI branches participated in the exciting competition. The Sligo pair was almost matched by Michael Halton and Seamus Meehan from the Monaghan Branch in second place, who also scored 42 points. Dublin North East's Michael Coyle and Brendan O'Brien came a close third on 41 points. The brothers Davin (John and Tommy) from the Tuam Branch came fourth, and the skilful pairing of Val Carr and John Parker preserved the honour of the Athlone Branch by taking fifth place. Seamus Meskill from Desmond stunned everyone with his accuracy and strength by hitting the longest drive and Shane Kennedy of Sligo caused great excitement when his tee shot on the 13th ended up inches from the hole.

Captain for the day was John Hurley, former president of the ASTI and single handicapper for 25 years. In his address at the after golf dinner, he noted the value of social occasions of this nature, saying that the ASTI founders in 1909 probably hatched their plan to set up the Association at a social gathering of teachers.

Pat King, ASTI Assistant General Secretary, who organised the event along with John Hurley, Sarah Fagan and Ann-Marie Ryan from ASTI Head Office, thanked the sponsors, including Cornmarket, AIB, VHI, The ASTI Credit Union and BCM Hanby Wallace. The visitor's prize was won by Alfie Barrett from the Department of Education and Science in Athlone. Martin Keane from the Department's Pension Section won one of the lesser prizes and Pat took that opportunity to thank Martin for his assistance and kindness to the many ASTI members who contact him and his colleagues on a daily basis seeking advice on their retirement plans.

The prizes presented on the day were slightly older than the ASTI: 5,600-year-old bog oak pieces from Boora bog, Co. Offaly, beautifully crafted by the Celtic Roots Studio in Ballinahowen.



# Meet the Presidents part III

Five more former ASTI Presidents share their experiences.



MICHAEL CORLEY, President 1998/'99, recalls the major issues facing the ASTI during his time as an officer of the union.

Reminiscing on one's time as President of the ASTI, times and events tend to become confused. Anything began during one's term of office is seldom finished by the year's end and any significant union achievement has usually commenced much earlier. By focusing, however, on one's years as Vice-President, President and Immediate Past President – that is, one's terms as an officer of the union – memories become more accurate. My presidential year was 1998-1999, so my term as an officer of the union spanned the period 1997-2000.

## Programme for Competitiveness and Work

There is little doubt that the late 1990s were a tense and difficult time for the ASTI. The main cause of these tensions and difficulties, in my opinion, centered on the now infamous Programme for Competitiveness and Work (PCW). The PCW was the third of our social partnership agreements. These social partnership agreements were an attempt to bring about an economic recovery from the major economic recession of the 1980s.

Initially, the ASTI was a strong supporter of the centralised bargaining approach of these agreements and while as a profession we were still suffering from the effects of the cutbacks of the 1980s, nevertheless, by a large vote of members, we agreed to support the new agreement in 1994. Probably of all these partnership agreements before or since, this agreement was to have the greatest and most long lasting effect on teachers, teaching and the ASTI itself.

From an ASTI point of view, it was not the main pay element of the agreement that caused all our tension and debate, but what was known as 'Clause 2(iii)'. This clause allowed unions to process claims that had not been processed under previous agreements. We had a lot of unfinished business. The clause provided that unions could negotiate for increases above the basic terms of the pay agreement in return for productivity or restructuring – any increase was limited to 3% of the pay bill of the group involved. The negotiations with the Department of Education on the restructuring package were long and difficult. Our main concerns centered on questions of early retirement, length of salary scale and promotion. The Department's side agenda concerned issues like standardising the school year, participation of teachers in non-teaching activities outside normal school hours, supervision for absent colleagues, commitment to parent-teacher liaison,

and competitive interviews for new posts. The first restructuring package put to members was overwhelmingly rejected but 12 months later, in 1997, a new package was accepted by members by 63% to 37%.

Now, however, another problem arose; the ASTI was one of a group of unions that concluded an early agreement under Clause 2 of the PCW. Such unions were to become known as 'early settlers'. When other unions later made settlements under the same clause but for amounts considerably in excess of that recovered by teachers, the stage was set for the long-running dispute that eventually saw the ASTI leave the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) in 2000.

## Reversal of 1980s cutbacks

While we were busy trying to solve the issue of early settlers, we were simultaneously trying to reverse the cutbacks of the 1980s – particularly in relation to the pupil-teacher ratio. During the late 1990s we conducted a major campaign in relation to class size. Earlier progress had been slow but hard earned. At Annual Convention 1999, members passed a motion seeking to reduce the ratio using all necessary action including a ballot of members on industrial action. The ballot resulted in an overwhelming vote in favour of industrial action. By the end of 1999 our campaign began to bear fruit; 800 new second-level jobs were announced and by September 2000 the pupil-teacher ratio was 18:1. It looks like we will have to do it all again given the recently announced ratio increase.

Writing now, ten years or so later, it is difficult to convey the atmosphere, tensions and strains at all levels within the union that arose from our efforts to deal with the PCW, the 'early settlers' issue and other related issues. Our debates and conflicts gained huge media attention; the media had a field day – indeed, they had many field days. But as we approach our 100th birthday, I believe that we are a stronger union as a result. There will be future campaigns and future disputes and since education is a vitally important, though emotive, issue, tensions may again run high. But we know we are strong enough to work through them. We have regrouped and moved on. We have rejoined ICTU and will again use our voice to ensure that education remains to the forefront in all future agreement programmes. I believe that we are ready to face the next century as a confident, united trade union.



DERMOT QUISH, President 1987/'88, recalls the year of his presidency.

I became President in 1987, but thanks to the generosity of the previous year's President, John White, my vice presidential year had been a useful apprenticeship. John spent some time in the USA examining the education system there, and in his absence he invited me to take over as acting President. So I had a good idea of the day-to-day routine of the job before I took over office myself the following year.

I remember in the early stage of my term calling for the establishment of a Teachers' Council. Little did I think that 20 years on I would be elected to represent Leinster on the first Teaching Council of Ireland.

In pre-Celtic Tiger Ireland there was not a lot of money floating around and much of our time in Head Office was spent defending the education system against cutbacks – not unlike present times.

*I was highly critical of government policy and lost no opportunity to say so.*

I was highly critical of government policy and lost no opportunity to say so. I met with the then Minister for Education, Mary O'Rourke, frequently, and initially I was a little embarrassed by the harsh things I had to say about her office and the Department of Education. However, one evening she assured me that my remarks did not upset her in the slightest and in fact she found my comments quite helpful when she was arguing for more resources at cabinet meetings! I look back on that encounter as a valuable lesson in real politics.

Another memorable political meeting I had at the time was with Charles J. Haughey, the then Taoiseach. The presidents and general secretaries of the education unions met Mr Haughey and his officials in the Taoiseach's office to discuss our broad concerns for the education service. He was extremely alert and fully informed on the details of his education brief.

*In my year as President the redeployment scheme was agreed guaranteeing security of employment to secondary teachers in the event of school closure or amalgamation.*

In relation to lack of resources, I proposed that a special education tax be levied on profit-making companies such as the banks and other commercial interests, as they were immediate beneficiaries of the school system. Mr Haughey was utterly dismissive of my suggestions, saying that what the country needed was fewer, not more, taxes to enable it to develop.

In my year as President the redeployment scheme was agreed guaranteeing security of employment to secondary teachers in the event of school closure or amalgamation. I remember using the President's right to obtain independent legal advice to draw up the union's first contract for its General Secretary. Later in the year, the General Secretary of the time, Kieran Mulvey, signed the contract. I also chaired the interview body that selected Charlie Lennon as Assistant General Secretary.

Head Office at the time was in Baggot Street, and my warmest memories have to do with the office staff. We were all like one big happy family with a great appetite for partying and in general having the craic together, but when work had to be done, people always gave it their best shot and those good relationships formed at that time remain with me to this day.



HENRY COLLINS, President 1984/'05, recalls three prominent figures in the ASTI's history and their influence on education in Ireland.

We each owe our own debt of gratitude to predecessors and colleagues whose example inspired us.

#### W.G. Kirkpatrick

W.G. Kirkpatrick, President in 1949 and for many years Trustee of the Association, was my first contact with the ASTI. His Leaving Certificate history and English students attended his classes anticipating that knock on the classroom door that would summon him to the telephone for an important call from the Department of Education, or to bring him notice of an urgent meeting with Department officials in Marlborough Street. We enjoyed a sense of vicarious participation in discussions that could influence what might be taught in courses or change for the better what could be done in schools.

The ASTI members at Wesley College were proud of their 100% membership and their active involvement in the Dublin South Branch. W.G. Kirkpatrick was still on Standing Committee in 1969 when the Association took industrial action on the salary issue. In a memorable interview with Radio Éireann outside the then Head Office in Hume Street he was asked to justify taking industrial action. He won public sympathy with the impassioned statement that ASTI members were "ready to beggar ourselves" to secure proper salaries for the teachers of the future.

#### Liam Hogan

It was a natural progression on entering the profession to join the Association. At the time Liam Hogan, being a member of Standing Committee, held sway in the Waterford Branch. In his teaching career and his involvement in the ASTI and beyond, he was the very epitome of the professional lay teacher. He worked to secure recognition of that professionalism within schools by getting more responsibility for lay teachers in the running of the schools, and by securing professional conditions for teachers within the school system. When President, he was instrumental in bringing in the 22-hour maximum for the teaching

week. He welcomed the broadening of the scope of secondary education and the introduction of the Transition Year concept.

When Liam Hogan was Vice-President and President of the Association, I was honoured to have his nomination from the Waterford Branch to serve on the Education Committee. The Education Committee at the time was a little known but very hard-working committee. It was set up after the 1969 strike and salary campaign to advise on matters of education policy and to raise the educational profile of the Association by commenting on matters of educational policy and on developments affecting secondary schools and teachers.

#### Maire MacDonagh

Maire MacDonagh, then General Secretary of the ASTI, was a person of significance, not least for becoming a union general secretary in an overwhelmingly male trade union movement. She was closely associated with the establishment of the Education Committee and was very supportive of its work. She ensured that the Standing Committee gave due consideration to the deliberations of the Education Committee and to its recommendations on matters referred to it for comment and advice. She had a very high regard for teachers and teaching, and was firmly committed to the pursuit of excellence in education. She also brought a wider perspective to the Irish context from her involvement in the international trade union movement through FIPESO and WCOTP. She was rigorous in the conduct of business, always seeking the highest standards from those working with her. She expected and required all written reports submitted to her to be precise and accurate in substance and grammatically correct in expression.

In stringent and testing times, the ASTI succeeded in bringing into focus both the professionalism of the educator and the commitment of the trade unionist to advance the interests of teachers and to promote the better delivery of the educational service at second level. This same duality of purpose and perspective continues to be required today in meeting the challenges of our current economic circumstances.



PIERCE H. PURCELL, President 1973/'74, discusses some "unfinished business" in relation to pay and professionalism.

It's not easy being a poor old pensioner. My senior moments are becoming ever more frequent, and they're a nuisance. Some weeks ago I started this bit of an article sitting at the outdoor swimming pool of my Cambodian hotel, and in fact I had got the thing practically finished. Where is it now? I've absolutely no idea. I know I put it carefully away somewhere, so it could still be in the mini-bar in room 13. This is draft number two, being written in the slightly less exotic environment of a Tipperary secondary school, as I supervise sixth year home economics with an occasional chilly scowl. Many retired teachers swear they'd never go 'subbing', but it suits me fine. The theme of this diatribe is 'unfinished business', which on reflection is a pretty stupid tautology, as trade union business is never finished. However, let's dive in where angels fear to tread. Centuries ago, before I became ASTI President, I was involved in complex negotiations on the report of the 1968 Ryan Tribunal. Before Ryan, there were separate salary scales for primary, vocational and secondary teachers.

### Professional salary

The main result of Ryan was the common scale of basic salary and allowances, which all primary and second-level teachers 'enjoy' to the present day. This was supposed to reflect the concept of a unified profession – at that time one of the favourite mantras of my old chum the late Senator Jacky Brosnahan, General Secretary of the INTO. Now here's where the 'unfinished business' clicks in. These days there are shiny new mantras floating around the pedagogical galaxy, such as 'lifelong learning' and the 'indivisible continuum of education', to name but two. This all begs a very fundamental trade union question: why don't the teachers' unions adopt one of these slogans, and start demanding a properly united profession with a commensurate salary? If the INTO managed to bridge the gap 40 years ago, and achieve pay parity with secondary teachers (and more luck to them for so doing!), surely it is possible for the ASTI/TUI/INTO to seek similar parity with our

third-level colleagues. Let's face it: do third-level teachers have to endure the constant barrage of bad manners and indiscipline inflicted daily on our members in the classroom? Do pigs fly?

### Teaching Council

Of course, the salary question isn't the only bit of our unfinished business. For as long as I can remember our union has been demanding a Teaching Council. One of the principal arguments in its favour was that it would develop and enhance our professionalism. Now we actually have a Teaching Council, but unfortunately it has got off to a rather shaky start. Ask most teachers about the image evoked by those two words, and the response is somewhat negative.

This is a pity, as the Teaching Council has the potential to significantly improve the working conditions of teachers. Recently I attended a subject association meeting organised by the Council, and I was impressed by the apparent commitment of the Council officials to a general upgrading of our education system. Right now they could do a lot worse than scrap the annual fee. Such a step would earn the Council the good will of the teaching profession.

There's that P-word again. What exactly is meant by professionalism?

The word conjures up two visions in my not particularly active imagination. One is of the medical consultant who took precisely 18 minutes to tell me that some of my creaky bits may eventually have to be replaced, and relieved me of €130 for the privilege. The other is of the mechanic who changed the oil and filter, and told me that the old car's creaky bits required a similar fate. She charged me €146. Now, that's what I call professionalism!

It looks as if my main theme is money, and I make no apology for that. Money should be the primary focus of any trade union, and we're celebrating the centenary of a great union, and we're celebrating the centenary of a great union. I suppose it's unlikely that any of us will be around for the 200th anniversary, but let's be optimistic anyway and say: 'go mbeirimid beo ar an am seo aris'!





SHEILA PARSONS, President 2005/'06, gives her experiences of management change and the impact of management on teaching.

The ASTI, as a trade union, is charged with protecting teachers' pay and working conditions. During the span of my career, improvements have been achieved in the area of pay. Nevertheless, for me, an incremental scale of 26 years has meant a life of genteel poverty enjoying intellectual, social and political pursuits not dependent on money. I am not an exception.

With regard to working conditions, classes have got bigger, student educational and interest profiles have evolved, and updated curricula and methodologies have been introduced, so that my present workday experience has little connection to that which I enjoyed at the outset of my career. However, the most significant and surprising insight I attained both as a teacher and an activist is that in schools, as a workplace, teachers often suffer unmerited injustices. Countering such problems led to the birth of the ASTI and regrettably teachers still require its services in this centenary year.

In the 1970s I was employed by the De La Salle Brothers in an all-boys' school. A high level of autonomy was granted to teachers and teaching was challenging, fulfilling and fun. To this day, I enjoy working with students.

#### All change

By the early 1980s, amalgamations were managements' response to necessary rationalisation arising from an increase in student numbers allied with a concomitant decrease in religious personnel. The De La Salle, Holy Faith and vocational school in my area amalgamated, becoming a 'secondary' school. Power sharing was not on the agenda then. It was also the only mixed JMB school in the Finglas Branch. With characteristic aplomb, unsupported by external agencies, we honed new coping skills and negotiated extensive change.

My epiphany in relation to the influence of a school's management on a teacher's life came into sharp focus in 1983 when the Holy Faith Order was involved in the historic dismissal case of Eileen Flynn and lifestyle had become an issue that could lead to dismissal. The irony of this outcome was very poignant when a decade later it became public knowledge that a bishop and various clergymen had long been leading very inappropriate lifestyles. There was no rush to establish justice. Teachers became very disillusioned with an ethos that failed to intervene on behalf of the innocent.

Time passed and in 1999 our school underwent further momentous change. The two religious orders, without warning or consultation, unilaterally decided to withdraw from our school and on February 9 announced their imminent departure. Teachers were offended. Is it too harsh a judgement on conscientious religious to conclude that by the manner of their leaving we shall know them?

We are now governed by the VEC. Our need for a strong trade union has remained constant.

#### Management influence

In recent years, I have had the honour of serving as ASTI President. At this time, I became very aware of unacceptable behaviour by management in a small, but significant, number of JMB schools and the arbitrariness of the injustice shocked me. To my knowledge, no board of management has ever intervened in curtailing unacceptable practices by principals in their management of staff. The concept that management or principal may be wrong is firmly resisted. The source of conflict in these cases has nothing to do with either a teacher's proficiency or moral calibre. Any principal who cannot manage interpersonal relations or tolerate open discussion introduces a culture of bullying into a school and an intricate web of manipulation and intimidation is woven. Unfortunately, the ASTI cannot boast of much success in eradicating bullying. Though managements and the ASTI naturally engage at system level to promote their respective ideals at school level, when conflict emerges, management's response is obstructive and the ASTI's efforts to promote collegiality have been strikingly underproductive. Accordingly, and as public funds contribute to the provision and maintenance of these schools, it is incumbent on the State to intervene to create a safe workplace for teachers.

Back in my classroom, learning and laughter are interspersed throughout the day. Students continue to challenge and inspire me and such will always be the lot of teachers as we ASTI members move on into a future that is uncertain, demanding, innovative, and forever changing. Teachers will meet all these joys and challenges. The ASTI will evolve with us, ready to champion our profession, defend our rights and allow us to attain our worthy aspirations. As a union, we continue our journey selflessly dedicated to the greater good of each and every member.

# School patronage: does it matter?

ASTIR continues its look at the issue of patronage in second-level schools.



The role of patrons is defined in Section 8 of the Education Act 1998. Traditionally, these have been patrons or trustees of schools. Usually, the trustees were the superiors of the various religious orders, for example the Christian Brothers, the De La Salle Brothers, the Mercy Sisters, the Presentation Sisters, etc., and, in the case of diocesan schools, the local bishop. Because many of the religious congregations were decreasing in numbers, many of the congregations came together to form single trustee bodies for a number of congregations, e.g., Le Chéile and Cheist. The trusteeship bodies that have been created from religious congregations have as a central aim the protection of the religious ethos. Other patron bodies such as Educate Together, VECs and An Foras Pátrúnachta, may have their own fundamental priorities. The patron/trustees are required under the Act to appoint, where

practicable, a board of management. The ASTI believes that whereas members of boards of management agree to act as a member of a board, the individual's own position with regard to their personal religious belief and practice must be respected. The ASTI has also expressed concerns about the continuity of employment of its members and that school closures and rationalisations should not take place unless dictated by the educational needs of the community served by the schools, rather than financial or other considerations of the patron/trustee. Boards of management have been seen by teachers and others as participatory democracy in action and the role of boards of management should not be curtailed.

*ASTIR* asked some patron body representatives for their views on the topic:

### Gerry Bennett, Chief Executive of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust

The Edmund Rice Schools Trust acts as Patron to the schools in its network. This lay trust of 97 schools was established by the Congregation of Christian Brothers under civil law and canon law in September 2008 to ensure the continuity of Catholic education in the Edmund Rice tradition.

Patronage provides a structure whereby a network of support and advice is available to the boards of management, principals, and school communities. The exercise of this patronage provides for consistency of ethos, as expressed in the Charter. The Charter is the statement of the characteristic spirit of our schools. Being part of a network of schools provides a unique opportunity for shared learning experiences among our school communities.

The Edmund Rice Schools Trust facilitates the continuation of a faith-based structure and network that ultimately equips our students with a vision for the future.

### David Tuohy, Advisor to Le Chéile Trust

The Le Chéile Trust is the way a number of religious congregations are coming together to set up a new collaborative governance structure for their schools. In doing this, they are affirming their commitment to the future of Catholic education as an option within the Irish system, by providing financial resources to develop infrastructure and support for the values they have promoted. This affirms their strong conviction of the contribution these values make to the individual person, and also to society as a whole. Their vision of schooling is open and inclusive while being deeply rooted in the gospel. In building community around these values, the Trust affirms its partnership with government and parents for the education of young people in Ireland.

### Emer Nowlan, second-level Project Manager with Educate Together

Patronage matters because ethos matters. Research shows that a good school is one in which all members of the school community are working together towards clear objectives based on an agreed set of values. Educate Together's model of patronage is one that builds up a clearly defined ethos based on principles of equality and human rights. Independent patrons with purely educational aims have an important function as partners in Irish education. Their role is to articulate an educational set of values and principles, independent from the State, and act as advocates for those particular educational outlooks, and for learners and their families who share those outlooks.

*Educate Together is a patron body at primary level and is campaigning for recognition as a patron body at second level.*

### Dónall Conaill, Stiúrthóir/Rúnaí, Foras Pátrúnachta na Scoileanna Lan-ghaeilge Teo

Foras Pátrúnachta was founded in 1993 to act as patron for all-Irish medium schools and is the fastest growing patron in education, with 57 primary and three secondary schools under its patronage and management. Our response meets the needs and choice of parents from a language and a religious standpoint. We act as patron to 35 Catholic ethos gaelscoileanna, 14 interdenominational (Catholic/Protestant) ethos gaelscoileanna and eight multi-denominational ethos gaelscoileanna in the primary sector; and two Catholic ethos meánscoileanna and one

interdenominational ethos (Catholic/Protestant) meánscoil. Our schools welcome pupils of every background, culture and religion whose parents wish all-Irish medium education for their children.

In Ireland the issue of education through the medium of Irish is an important one and Gaeloideachas is a matter of ethos and characteristic spirit also. This is a choice that parents make regarding the education of their children. Without the important input, involvement and contribution of parents in seeking all-Irish education, this would not be possible. Foras responded to this need and became a patronage and management body to meet this need. The education system requires that schools have a patron. It is the role of the patron to protect, promote and defend this ethos. It is necessary to have an ultimate authority responsible for the school and to whom other partners in the school have recourse, which is the patron. The patron delegates this responsibility through the appointment of boards of management who manage the school on behalf of the patron.

There are other areas of responsibility for the patron, which deal with accommodation, leases, finance, appointments, amalgamations, conflict resolution, etc.

To the question, 'School patronage – does it matter?' the simple answer is: it does.

The knock-on question or suggestion in the question is: do we want to continue the patronage system or do we want to have a state patronage system or just a one-type patron that fits all?

Foras Patrúnachta na Scoileanna Lán-Ghaeilge would reject such a move as the diversity ensured by the present situation is far more desirable than any alternative. The vital issue in ensuring this freedom is the continuation of the grant-aided system and proper state support.

### Jacinta Stewart, CEO, City of Dublin VEC

School patronage does matter. The Education Act 1998 outlines the complex roles and functions of patrons. In his paper on 'Trustees and Trusteeship' to the CEEOA Autumn Conference in 2003, Pat O'Connor (CEO, County Dublin VEC) noted that 24 of the 58 sections in the Act make reference to the patron and signal an active participation and consultative right of the patron in relation to a range of issues. Taken together, I believe the references confer the ultimate management function to the patron. In schools, therefore, the patron has overall responsibility for good governance, the board of management has responsibility for direction and support for the principal and staff, and the principal has responsibility for the education and development of students on a day-to-day basis.

In CDVEC, we develop a five-year plan to give overall direction to our 22 schools and colleges. Explicit policies and procedures are developed and shared across our scheme. As a result, each school has a similar homework policy, Section 29 appeals are dealt with in similar ways, and we bring experience and good practice on a range of policies from one school/college to another.

Like all VECs, we believe that education is a critical vehicle of inclusion. We ask: how can our schools provide a service for, and meet the needs of, the whole community? Schools are often regarded as static institutions and this is far from true. Schools need to be ready for and to manage change: demographic change, societal change, changes in ethos, crisis management. The patron, who is outside the day-to-day management of the school, will take a wider view and provide an invaluable role in terms of vision, support and governance.



## Your voice on the NCCA

ASTIR introduces members to their ASTI representatives on the NCCA and looks at some of the curriculum and assessment areas currently under development.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is responsible for advising the Minister for Education on curriculum and assessment issues for first and second-level education. There are 25 members of the Council, representing teachers, parents, school managers, employers, trade unions, and other interests in education.

In April, ASTI President-Elect Joe Moran, and Moira Leydon, ASTI Assistant General Secretary: Education and Research, were appointed to represent the ASTI on the NCCA.

In representing the ASTI at Council they will voice the concerns and opinions of teachers in regard to curriculum and assessment and will uphold ASTI policy. To contact Moira or Joe, please Email: [curriculum@asti.ie](mailto:curriculum@asti.ie).

The ASTI also has a number of subject convenors and second representatives who sit on NCCA course committees. For a full list of ASTI convenors, log on to the curriculum section of the ASTI website – [www.asti.ie](http://www.asti.ie).

### What's happening in your subject?

#### Junior Cycle

##### Syllabus rebalancing

The introduction of new syllabuses and increased subject options at Junior Cycle led to concerns about excessive content in some syllabus documents. The NCCA commenced a process of syllabus rebalancing to reduce curriculum overload and overlap using a model syllabus template. The outcome of this process will be syllabuses with a common structure and design, and reduced content.

The rebalancing of five subjects – art, craft and design; English; history; home economics; and, music – was completed earlier this year and, following consultation, these are now ready for implementation. However, resources will be required and in the present climate, delay or deferral is likely.

#### Syllabus review and curriculum development

##### Gaeilge

The Gaeilge Course Committee is currently examining adjustments to assessment arrangements to take account of increased emphasis on oral competence in the Junior Certificate examinations. From 2010 onwards a new marking system, awarding 40% for an optional oral component, will apply to Junior Certificate Gaeilge. The ASTI and the TUI have reiterated that their members will not examine their own students. Existing assessment arrangements for Senior Cycle Gaeilge are being reviewed to achieve consistency with the increased emphasis on oral competence at Junior Cert.

##### Maths

Project Maths commenced a two-year pilot programme in 24 schools last September. The aim of Project Maths is to put greater emphasis on the skills of analysis and problem solving and to increase uptake of higher-level maths. Following the pilot project, development of the maths curriculum will involve phased implementation of curriculum change in maths at Junior and Senior Cycle for all schools, beginning in

### ASTI representatives



*Moira Leydon, ASTI Assistant General Secretary and ASTI representative on the NCCA.*



*Joe Moran, ASTI President-Elect and ASTI representative on the NCCA.*

The ACTION section of the NCCA website is an excellent resource for teachers, providing online support for teaching and learning. It is designed to support teachers in the 'how to' of teaching and learning through the use of multimedia. The website provides sample teaching activities, multimedia supports and samples of student work. It includes resources on assessment for learning, ICT, English as an additional language, and intercultural education.





September 2010. To achieve a greater alignment between primary and second-level Maths, five strands have been identified that will be applied to both syllabuses:

1. Statistics and probability.
2. Geometry and trigonometry.
3. Number.
4. Algebra.
5. Functions.

Changes to a number of Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate examination questions will take place on a phased basis for students in schools in the pilot project. While the questions will adopt a different approach in the content areas above, the standard, range and choice of questions will be maintained for all candidates.

#### *Other subjects*

Classical studies is a new Junior Cycle subject currently in development. It will incorporate the three existing subjects: Latin, Ancient Greek, and classical studies.

The NCCA has prepared a draft position paper on environmental and social studies.

A draft syllabus for Junior Cert Jewish studies has been approved.

Reviews of business studies, technology subjects and geography are to be undertaken.

#### **Senior Cycle**

Two new subjects are under development at Senior Cycle – physical education (PE) and politics and society. The NCCA is also overseeing the development of curriculum frameworks in Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and PE (non-examination).

#### **Physical education**

Two physical education courses are being developed – a non-examination curriculum framework and a syllabus for examination. The examination syllabus for PE has undergone extensive review. Three themes and six areas of learning have been identified. Learning outcomes have been written in these areas and are now being refined to allow maximum engagement with the learning. A proposal on assessment is being developed that will outline the learning to be assessed and the recommended methods of assessment for the Leaving Certificate examination.

#### **Politics and society**

A draft syllabus for a new optional subject, politics and society, is complete and has been approved by the NCCA for consultation.

Required teacher qualifications have yet to be decided and availability of qualified personnel will be problematic. You can contribute to the consultation process for this subject at <http://nccaconsultation.com/ncca/>.

#### **SPHE**

A curriculum framework for Senior Cycle SPHE is complete and a draft implementation framework has been presented to Council, including the recommendation of a phased introduction and a class size of 15. In discussions, ASTI representatives expressed concern about the framework for implementation and noted that adequate professional development and resources must be made available.

#### **Other subjects**

A change in assessment for classical studies has been proposed, including a reduction in the number of essay type questions set.

A revised art syllabus is ready for implementation; however, required funding has not been secured.

Biology, chemistry and physics are currently under review. The focus is on updating the syllabuses with an increased emphasis on scientific reasoning, the application of science process skills and the ever-increasing role of science and technology in society. Second component assessment is to be proposed for all science subjects.

#### **Short courses**

Short courses are new curriculum components and are discrete units of study of 90 hours' duration. In phase one, short courses are to be developed in four areas: enterprise, music technology, art technology and psychology. To date, enterprise has been completed and sent to the Department of Education. A psychology course is near completion.

#### **Transition Units**

Transition Units are 45-hour courses developed and assessed in schools. Currently, sample units are being developed in partnership with schools. Finalised units are available on the NCCA website – [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie). These units build on successful modules already provided by schools as part of Transition Year programmes. In developing Transition Units, schools may devise from scratch or may decide to adapt some of the modules they already offer. The difference is that they are developed to a common template and can be shared between schools. Transition Units will be assessed as part of the teaching and learning in schools, not as part of examinations.

*To find out more, go to [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie).*

## Clare Branch



Clare delegates pictured at the ASTI centenary buffet in the Malton Hotel, Killarney. Front row (from left): Marie Bourke; Helen Meade; Jack Keane; and, Mairead Bergin. Back row (from left): Peter Quinn; Niamh McDonnell, Pauline Nagle; Mary Carroll, Geraldine O'Brien; and Michael Corley.



Jack Keane.

### Branch Officers 2008–2009

Chairperson: Helen Meade  
Vice-Chairperson: Geraldine O'Brien  
Secretary: Mary Carroll  
Treasurer: Marie Bourke  
Branch Organiser: Mairead Bergin  
Equality Officer: Pauline Nagle

Membership: 402 members

### Meetings

Branch meetings are held on average six times per year or as necessary. The usual venue is The West County Hotel, Ennis, at 8.30pm.

### History of the Branch

It was a great honour for the Clare Branch when Michael Corley served as President of the ASTI in 1998. Michael, who is now retired, was a very active member of the Branch, representing Clare on the CEC for many years and serving as Branch Chairperson on many occasions. He was also elected to Standing Committee in 1992 and 1993.

We are also very proud of the fact that Jack Keane, a longstanding member of the CEC and former Standing Committee member, was elected Vice-President at this year's Convention. Jack was elected as an ASTI representative to the inaugural Teaching Council in 2005, and is currently an ASTI nominee to the Teaching Council.

CEC member and Regional Organiser Peter Quinn was elected to the ASTI Education Committee at Convention 2009, while Branch member Pauline Nagle was elected to the Sub-committee on the Physical Sciences this year. On the sporting front, Jamesie O'Connor of St Flannan's College, Ennis, senior county hurler and dual All Ireland medal winner, was honoured with an ASTI Achievement Award in 1995.

The Clare Branch has hosted Annual Convention on four separate occasions:

in 1973, 1990, 1995 and, most recently, in 2006.

The Clare Branch submitted the motion to Convention that resulted in the establishment of the Benevolent Fund.

### Branch activities

2008–2009 has been a busy year for the Clare Branch. We held our annual function for incoming school stewards in October. To kick off the centenary year celebrations, the Branch organised an inaugural forum for young teachers in November where our regional representative, Ger O'Donoghue, former President Michael Corley, CEC representatives, and the Branch Chairperson, gave presentations on matters of interest to young teachers and young teachers had an opportunity to raise issues of concern to them. The Branch hopes to host a centenary table quiz for members in the autumn and we are hoping that each school will be represented by at least one team. This term the Branch is holding a dinner to honour the ASTI members who have recently retired from the classroom. This will be a follow-up to a very successful retirement function held in late 2007.

### List of schools

Coláiste Muire, Ennis  
Rice College, Ennis  
St Flannan's College, Ennis  
St Joseph's Secondary School, Tulla  
CBS Ennistymon  
Scoil Mhuire, Ennistymon  
Mary Immaculate Secondary School, Lisdoonvarna  
St Joseph's Secondary School, Spanish Point  
St John Bosco Community College, Kiladysart  
Kilrush Community School  
Kilkee Community College  
St Patrick's Comprehensive School, Shannon  
St Caimhin's Community School, Shannon

## Bernadette (Bernie) Kelly 1959–2007

Bernie Kelly (née Walsh) was a native of Kilmacthomas, Co. Waterford. She attended Kilmacthomas National School and received her secondary education at the Mercy Convent, Dungarvan (now Árd Scoil na nDéise). Having completed her Leaving Certificate in 1977, Bernie studied Cathecetics and English at The Mater Déi Institute of Education in Dublin. She graduated in 1981 and began her teaching career as the first full-time lay Cathecist at the Loreto Secondary School in Youghal. On her marriage to Billy in July 1984 they moved to Glendine and set up home and family.

Bernie was a dedicated and committed teacher and quickly earned the respect and affection of both students and teachers. After a very short time the Loreto Sisters knew that the religious education of Youghal students was in safe hands.

Bernie had wonderful human qualities, which enabled her to empathise with anyone in need. Her students always knew that they could expect a compassionate, non-judgemental and understanding response to any problems. Bernie was also a favourite in the staffroom and went out of her way to make new staff feel welcome. She was never too busy for a chat and a cuppa. She had the enviable ability to relate to both old and young and all thoroughly enjoyed being in her company.

As head of the religion department, Bernie set very high standards. She ensured that annual school mass, carol service and graduation mass were unique, inclusive and spiritual experiences for all. She also encouraged both students and teachers to think of those less fortunate by organising the annual Concern Fast. Bernie was also a class tutor, year head, member of the board of management, and served as school steward. In February 2006 she was part of the staff tour to Prague to mark the impending closure of Loreto Secondary School. A wonderful time was had by all and we celebrated Bernie's 47th birthday during a memorable night out.

Bernie enjoyed many rewarding and happy years as a wonderful wife and mother. However, she had developed a problem with her eyesight and was forced to reduce her workload, which led to her taking up job-sharing. As always, Bernie was cheerful and optimistic and any worries or concerns about the future were for the impact on her husband and children. Due to her condition Bernie was unable to take up her teaching post at Pobalscoil na Tríonóide in September 2006, and with great regret she resigned her post.

In May 2007 we were all shocked to learn that Bernie had been diagnosed with a serious illness. She fought her illness with dignity and humour and with the unfailing support of her loving husband, children, parents, extended family and close friends. Bernie died peacefully on November 14, 2007. To her husband Billy, children Liam, Claire and Deirdre, her parents Myra and John, her brothers and sisters, we extend our deepest sympathy.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a hanam dilis.

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Rev. Daniel O'Leary • Rev. Ruth Patterson

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## Geology competition for TY

The Irish Geological Association (IGA) is co-ordinating a geological essay or project competition for Transition Year students in the coming academic year. Students are asked to enter either an individual essay or group project and the IGA is offering 10 first prizes for the best school entries. The essay will relate to a geological topic of interest to the individual student. Class projects will take the form of collections, with identifications of local minerals, rocks, or fossils. Alternatively, students can enter a project that demonstrates a geographical/geological process observed in their area. The entry deadline is April 2, 2010. For some geological ideas in your area or for more information, contact [info@geology.ie](mailto:info@geology.ie). The IGA also offers audiovisual talks for geography classes. See [www.geology.ie](http://www.geology.ie) for more information.



## The Irish in Argentina

ASTI member Micheál de Barra has recently published *Gaeil i dTír na nGauchos*. The book tells the story of the Irish who emigrated to Argentina and is available from [www.coisceim.ie](http://www.coisceim.ie).

### CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS

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## Health promotion conference

The NUI Galway Health Promotion Department is hosting their 2009 conference on June 11 and 12. Themed 'Closing the gap in child and adolescent health: the settings approach', the conference deals, among other things, with youth health and social care, and health and schools, communities and workplaces. For more information, or to register, contact [hprconference@nuigalway.ie](mailto:hprconference@nuigalway.ie).

## Reading Association conference

The Reading Association of Ireland will hold its annual international conference from September 24-26, 2009, in St Patrick's College, Drumcondra. It will include presentations on the following topics:

- reading and writing communities in classrooms;
- research-based best practice in reading comprehension instruction;
- developing a balanced literacy framework in classrooms;
- English as an additional language and literacy learning;
- building best practice in literacy in the Irish language;
- challenges and opportunities in today's changing classrooms; and,
- adolescent literacy.

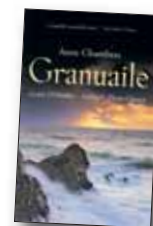
See [www.reading.ie](http://www.reading.ie) for details. To book, Tel: 01-806 5227.

## New book by ASTI member

Anita Fennelly, a teacher at St Mary's Secondary School, New Ross, has recently published her first book, *Blasket Spirit: Stories from the Islands*. Seeking solitude after a personal crisis, Anita spent a summer alone on the Great Blasket Island. This is her account of the experience and she weaves the island stories, its people and places into her story of recovery. The memoir is available from [www.collinspress.ie](http://www.collinspress.ie).

## Granuaile

A revised and updated 30th anniversary edition of *Granuaile: Grace O'Malley - Ireland's Pirate Queen* has been published by Gill & Macmillan. Author Anne Chambers draws Grace O'Malley in from the fringes of myth and folklore, weaving together historical evidence to present the life of this extraordinary figure.



## Solidarity and equality course

The INTO Professional Development Unit is inviting ASTI members to avail of a new professional development summer course taking place in INTO Head Office in Dublin from August 24 to 29. The course, entitled 'Solidarity and Equality, developing sustainable attitudes in schools', focuses on expanding teachers' knowledge and interest in solidarity and equality issues, as well as equipping them with approaches to introduce such issues into the classroom. This course will appeal to any teacher with an interest in global solidarity issues and in particular to teachers involved in Transition Year, CSPE, English and SPHE.

The course costs €100. Further details and a course booking form are available from Linda Johnston, Tel: 01-804 7702, or Email: [ljohnston@into.ie](mailto:ljohnston@into.ie).



# The Transition Year Programme Co-ordinator

John Kerr is Transition Year Programme Co-ordinator at The Patrician High School, Carrickmacross, Co. Monaghan. He is a local facilitator for the SLSS Transition Year Programme for the North Eastern Region, as well as an active member of the Transition Year Teachers' Professional Network (TPN) interim executive.

## What is involved in your role?

The Transition Year Programme (TYP) acts a bridge between Junior and Senior Cycle with a keen focus on students' personal, social and vocational development. The role of the TYP co-ordinator is to plan and develop a detailed and exciting programme, which addresses all of these aims.

Offering such a comprehensive programme encompassing cross-curricular links together with innovative and dynamic content and delivery, requires planning and negotiation with school management, colleagues and outside agencies.

TYP success is rooted in the breadth and quality of the learning experience. Protecting this range of learning is a challenge with a now discontinued TYP grant. Sourcing and managing funding and resources is central to my role as TYP co-ordinator. I am lucky to have great support from colleagues within the school, along with support from the local community and enterprise.

## What would a typical week be like for you?

Busy and varied! Planning for the TYP starts in the spring term of students' last year in Junior cycle. Along with other colleagues, I provide information to parents about the TYP and the application process begins.

The establishment and development of links and partnerships within the local community and outside agencies is fundamental to supporting and enriching the learning experience of the Transition Year student. The organisation and facilitation of additional modules like Gaisce and Enterprise is a daily challenge.

## Have the budget cutbacks had an effect on your work?

The budget is a disaster on many levels. The TYP is so important to the holistic development of the student; it has to be protected. My colleagues and I are determined to maintain our successful TYP. The discontinued TYP grant will have a significant impact on the delivery of the Programme. In a time of cutbacks, job losses and higher taxes, the absence of the TYP grant will mean asking already stretched parents to provide additional cash contributions for their child to have the best of TYP experiences.

Typically, field trips and school outings are central to the TYP. However, the removal of substitution for teachers on school business seriously jeopardises the viability of such valuable learning experiences for the students and limits the scope of alternative teaching methodologies for teachers.

The TYP TPN interim executive will attempt to protect the success of the TYP in the current economic climate. This group was established in September 2008 by a group of interested TYP co-ordinators. The principal aims of this executive are to provide moral and peer support for TYP teachers, along with

providing a forum to share professional practices, ideas and resources. It also allows teachers at a local level to pool resources and address specific TYP needs, thus improving cost efficiency. The network also has the potential to be the voice of the TYP and to lobby appropriate agencies.

## What are some of the challenges of your job?

There will always be challenges in a job like this. There are never enough hours in the day, so managing my time, prioritising work and relying on the good will of colleagues is essential to the success of the TYP in my school. Resources are always a challenge and never more so than in the current economic climate. This is where co-operation from supportive colleagues, along with partnerships in local community and enterprise, are vital. One of the biggest challenges is to have an evolving vision for the programme, putting it ahead of its time, keeping it fresh, relevant, and up to date. Having said that, it is important to remain true to the ethos of the programme, which is the holistic development of the students and their contribution to society. It is important to remember that you cannot put a price on developing socially responsible and participative young adults. The inception of the TPN interim executive will be a valuable support in meeting and conquering these challenges together.

## How do you hope Transition Year will develop in the future?

Vision and an eye on developing trends are essential to the success of the TYP. The premise of the TYP is to provide a forum for learning on areas that it may be difficult to incorporate into conventional subject curricula. It is important to protect the progress already made over the last 35 years. Going forward, the effects of globalisation will impact on the TYP experience. Improvements in technology will enhance the sharing of international learning experiences.

The learning experience for the TYP must be relevant to its time. For example, in today's society, the TYP addresses areas such as sustainable living, environmental issues and enterprise. This will change with the changing demands of society at a particular time and demands that the TYP co-ordinator must always have their finger on the pulse.

One of the great things about the TYP is that it gives the student the scope to explore and experiment with new ideas and ways of doing things. Focusing on life-long learning, one of the key areas for development into the future is teaching skills that will support student autonomy and self-directed learning. Project work and competition are valuable tools; providing students with skills such as these depletes ritualistic learning and promotes deep meaningful learning experiences.



## ASTIR CROSSWORD NO. 0903

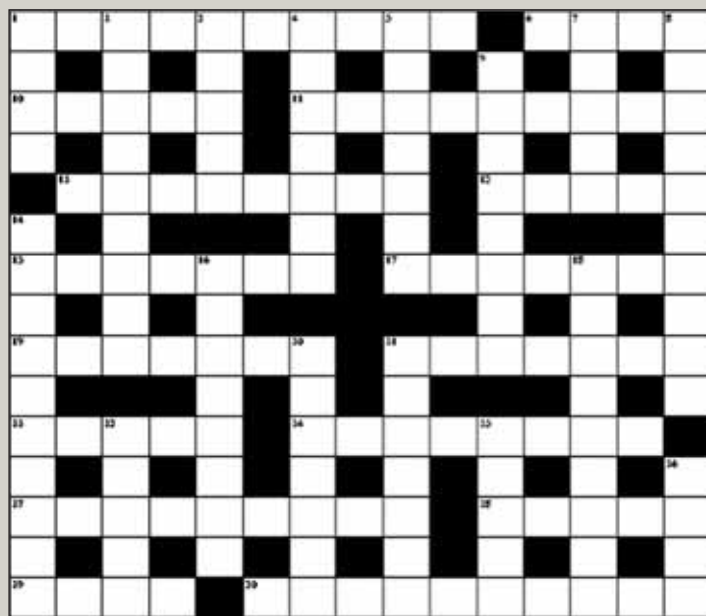
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Name

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ASTI Branch

Entries to: **Astir Crossword No. 0903, Think Media,  
The Malthouse, 537 NCR, Dublin 1.**

To arrive by: **Friday, June 26, 2009.**

## ACROSS

- 1 Roast mules go head over heels (10)
- 6 Dust the large nail head on the farm? (4)
- 10 See 8 down
- 11 *To make like this* (9)
- 12 Greek god, Ulysses in Latin (8)
- 13 A burning crime (5)
- 15 Dec and Etna made into law (7)
- 17 An' chips with this vegetable! (7)
- 19 Adam Ant could be inflexible! (7)
- 21 *The Cherry Orchard* was one of his works (7)
- 22 "If I can ease one life the aching,  
Or cool one pain,  
Or help one fainting ..... unto his nest again,  
I shall not live in vain" (5)  
(Emily Dickinson)
- 24 A published notice of a death, with a brief biography of the deceased (8)
- 27 Clearer to correspond (9)
- 28 Black and white set (5)
- 29 One of the five rivers of Hades (4)
- 30 Soothe past practitioners of complementary medicine (10)

## DOWN

- 1 Mac's swindle! (4)
- 2 Extravagant theatrical work in alarm mode (9)
- 3 Macgillicuddy gives off strong smell! (5)
- 4 You might find this flavour in French absinthe or Italian sambuca (7)
- 5 Forms close bond or connection (7)
- 7 Flip side! (5)
- 8 Et 10 across: !? (6,4,1,4)
- 9 Put the last touches to (8)
- 14 Passing events! (5,5)
- 16 A neat rise to those undergoing instruction (8)
- 18 A born hater is repugnant (9)
- 20 Helen was the cause of the Greeks fighting them! (7)
- 21 Any of the Sino-Tibetan languages (7)
- 23 As of 2009, the only woman of African American descent to have won an Oscar for Best Actress (5)
- 25 Remove the covering from the cup an' saucer (5)
- 26 Pass the small snakes (4)

## Solution to ASTIR crossword No. 0902

## Across

1. Clique
4. Attempts
9. Summit
10. Cannibal
12. Midge
13. Tradition
15. RSA
16. Noses
17. Timbre
22. Alleys
24. Leave
27. ESA
28. Of liberty
31. Tacit
32. Altruism
33. Soothe
34. Desserts
35. Psyche

## Down

1. Casement
2. Immodest
3. Universal
5. Tiara
6. Ennui
7. Public
8. Silent
11. Statue
14. Dub
18. Moseys
19. Relations
20. Narcotic
21. Aesthete
23. Lee
25. Coward
26. Slates
29. Bruce
30. Reset

Congratulations to the winner of Crossword No. 0902:

**Anne Curran, Newtown School,  
Waterford, Waterford Branch member.**



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