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ASTIR

Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland



ASTI GOES ONLINE FOR CONVENTION 2021

ASTI survey highlights
pressing issues

Report from
Convention 2021

One Billion Voices
for Education



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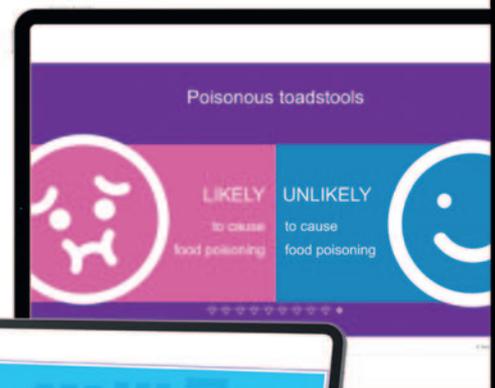
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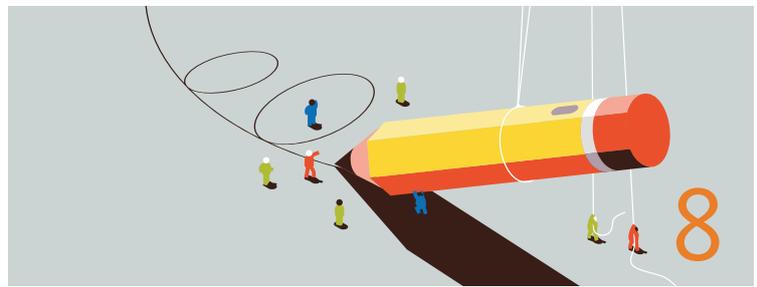


* An online exam for industry certificate is also available for students

*Exam only available to students in ROI

CONTENTS

4	From the President's desk <i>A lot achieved</i>
4	General Secretary's update <i>Teachers let down</i>
5	News
8	News features
8	<i>Educational disadvantage</i>
10	<i>Vaccinate teachers, protect schools</i>
12	<i>Smaller class size a priority for teachers</i>
14	Convention 2021
14	<i>Key speeches</i>
18	<i>Meaningful engagement with teachers needed on Senior Cycle reform</i>
20	<i>Action needed on casualisation of the teaching profession</i>
22	<i>ASTI calls for research into national redeployment scheme for teachers</i>
23	<i>Convention calls for vaccination of teachers and all frontline workers</i>
24	<i>Elections and motions</i>
26	<i>Vox pops – ASTI online</i>
28	ASTI in the media <i>Protecting frontline workers</i>
30	RSTA news
31	Features <i>One Billion Voices for Education</i>
32	Obituaries
33	Noticeboard
34	Crossword



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31

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Members can email astirfeedback@asti.ie or text 087 934 9956.

A lot achieved

Like bruised butterflies we hope to emerge from gloomy but necessary cocoons, after long periods in cooped-up isolation. The chrysalis will crack and our historic confinement will be part of the past. The shackles of safe seclusion have saturated our lives with difficulty and inconvenience. The solitude of sitting rooms has been crucial but arduous. Since last summer a lot has been achieved for ASTI members, in particular the action to work remotely in early January when cases were multitudinous and rife. The virus still roams discreetly and deadly wherever people mix. Due to cramped and crowded conditions, schools are potential hot spots: we await vaccines.

Vaccinations

Together with the TUI and INTO, we have established a united position in reaction to the Government's indifference towards teachers in the restructured roll-out plan for vaccinations. Previously placed 11th on a 15-point plan, teachers cease to exist on the latest list. We have never wanted to take vaccines from the elderly or the vulnerable. The plan correctly continues to look after both. However, we feel that having returned to pent-up classrooms, teachers ought to come before those who work remotely. We aim to be vaccinated prior to the return to school in late August; we were assured vaccination in the first third of the population. Several countries such as the USA, Russia, Vietnam, Indonesia, Serbia and others have prioritised teachers for immunisation so schools can function effectively. In Ireland our elected representatives have not displayed a similar educational vision.

Convention

Despite all the limitations, Convention 2021 was very successful. Although not as spectacular as the 'real' event, it fared well amid Covid disruptions. The dedication of delegates was remarkable as you assiduously attended over two days, and took interest in every motion, speech and contribution. I appreciate all the good wishes expressed following the event. We all optimistically look forward to the hundredth Convention, which will take place during Easter 2022.

Leaving Cert

The latest DCU study has perfectly encapsulated the negative experiences of teachers during last year's calculated grades process. After 2021, we aspire to never engage in this process again. The ASTI has vigorously and consistently called for adjusted exam papers this year. This has been achieved by our persistent efforts. We hope that students will sit exams to gain the best possible results in a fair, standardised fashion; we want the best for students as they approach the exams.

I thank you all with the utmost sincerity for your kindness and support, your loyalty and your work. Ireland is fortunate to have committed and compassionate teachers who have remained industrious and dedicated throughout the pandemic. I wish you well as we emerge from the shells of darkness and obscurity.



Ann Piggott
ASTI President

Teachers let down

It is regrettable that, as schools are fully reopened and there are tentative grounds for optimism, the row on the roll-out of the vaccination programme for teachers has erupted. This comes against a backdrop of months of assurances that open schools were the top societal priority and that education workers would be vaccinated within the first third of the population. The episode has left a bitter taste, particularly in the context of the enormous efforts and strides that teachers have made. At all points during this pandemic, the ASTI has sought to balance the paramount importance of keeping school communities safe while protecting the right of our teachers to teach and their students to learn. We led the way by insisting that substantial increased investment in the day-to-day running of our schools needed to be put in place for a successful and sustained reopening to be maintained. The fight for vaccines will continue.

Investment

The ASTI is highlighting the fact that the young people of Ireland have suffered an extremely traumatic experience over a sustained period of time. They must be properly supported as education begins to pick up the pieces, and normal teaching and learning resumes. The system must be provided with the additional funding, resources and staffing to support young people in education recovery and enable teachers to do their job properly. Teachers and students deserve no less.

Right to disconnect

The ASTI has been active for some time in asserting the right to disconnect from work-related contacts outside of working hours. We highlighted the need for proper protocols to be in place to the Department of Education, the management bodies and at ICTU level. The requirement became more apparent in the context of the remote teaching and learning experience. As part of our membership of the ICTU, the ASTI was to the forefront of submissions to a process that led to a Workplace Relations Commission Code of Practice being launched recently. It gives guidance to organisations and their employees on the right to disconnect. The Code is going to be vital for safeguarding work-life balance. Now that the guidance is issued, the ASTI will be to the forefront of efforts to secure its full application and implementation within the second-level education system.

ASTI Annual Convention 2021

ASTI Annual Convention features prominently in this issue of *ASTIR*. Like many other years, the breadth and depth of discussion that took place shows that the ASTI is a union that rightly sees itself at the heart of debate on all the key issues affecting our members and our schools. Motions on overcrowded classrooms, curriculum change, entry to the profession, casualisation in teaching, education of students with special education needs, and lots of issues related to teachers' terms and conditions of employment were thoroughly explored. The ASTI has been to the forefront of the fight on all these issues and will continue to be so.



Kieran Christie
ASTI General Secretary

ASTI Scholarship Award

The ASTI Scholarship Award is open to ASTI members who are undertaking or wish to undertake further third-level studies. The programme of study can be either full-time or part-time.

Two successful applicants will receive €2,000 each to fund their studies. Award recipients will be chosen by a selection committee comprised of ASTI officers. The criteria for selection are:

- relevance of proposed course to the professional lives of teachers and second-level education
- potential for study to inform the ongoing policy agenda and work of the ASTI, and
- potential for the research to enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

Due to Covid-19 circumstances we are extending the closing date to September 30, 2021. Download an application form from the ASTI website – www.asti.ie/member-benefits/awardsgrants/.

Preliminary findings on calculated grades process

The Centre of Assessment Research, Policy and Practice in Education (CARPE) in DCU has released preliminary findings of a survey of post-primary teachers involved in the Leaving Certificate 2020 calculated grades process in Ireland. Over 700 teachers took part in an online questionnaire in late 2020, following the publication of the Leaving Certificate results and the completion of the appeals process. The preliminary findings of the research found that overall teachers felt that they were confident in their professional judgement and that they were fair to their students when awarding calculated grades. However, teachers also experienced challenges relating to decision-making around grade boundaries, combining qualitative and quantitative assessment data, reconciling inconsistencies in student performance, maintaining an unbiased position in relation to individual students, and expressing concerns about how school colleagues arrived at their decisions. Teachers were given an opportunity to answer an open-ended question about their experience of the calculated grades process at the end of the survey. The researchers noted that the pressure felt from some members of the school community and the stress of having to engage in the calculated grades process were articulated by many. In particular, very strong feelings of annoyance and disappointment were expressed around the decision to release rank order data to students. Many comments also focused on the issues around conscious and unconscious bias, approaches adopted by colleagues, the application of Department of Education guidelines, and the use of school historical data and the impact of the national standardisation process on the grades awarded to students.

Data from this survey will inform complementary research papers by the researchers based on more in-depth analysis. To read the preliminary findings in full visit <https://www.dcu.ie/carpe>.

Reminder: ASTI training programme for 2021/22

The ASTI runs various free training courses for members each year. The training programme for 2021/22 includes online training on the following topics, starting from September 2021:

- school steward training
- leadership seminar
- lead worker seminar
- board of management training, and
- retirement seminar.



Participants at a recent ASTI Lead Worker Representative training.

Dates for this training will be posted on the events section of the ASTI website as soon as possible – <https://www.asti.ie/member-benefits/events/>.



Holocaust Education Trust Ireland



The Crocus Project

A project for young people aged ten years and over, remembering all of the children who died in the Holocaust, learning about acceptance and respect for all people.

Register by 30th June 2021

(so we know how many bulbs to order)

Participation is FREE!

HETI provides participating schools with yellow crocus bulbs to plant in Autumn. The yellow flowers recall the yellow Stars of David Jews were forced to wear under Nazi rule. When people admire the flowers, the young people explain what they represent and what happened to the children. Teachers can share photographs and swap stories of their school's experience of The Crocus Project on our secure Facebook group, The Crocus Club.

Download the registration form from our website:
hetireland.org/programmes/crocus-project/

Crocus bulbs and teachers' Information Packs will be sent to schools in early October 2021.






For further information please contact:
Holocaust Education Trust Ireland, Clifton House, Lower Fitzwilliam Street, Dublin 2, Ireland.
Tel: + 353 1 6690593 Email: info@hetireland.org www.hetireland.org

Right to disconnect code

A new code of conduct which gives workers the right to disconnect came into effect in April.

The code, developed by the Workplace Relations Commission, emphasises the right of employees not to engage in electronic communications – such as emails, telephone calls, and other digital communications – outside of normal working hours.

The code is based on employers' obligations as set out in a number of pieces of legislation, including the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act and the Organisation of Working Time Act.

Employers should engage proactively with employees and/or their trade union to develop a right to disconnect policy for workplaces. The policy should state the objective of supporting the right to disconnect, rather than restrictions and blockages to communications. It should emphasise that there is an expectation that employees disconnect from work emails, messages, etc., outside of their normal working hours and during leave.

The code is available here:

https://www.workplacerelations.ie/en/what_you_should_know/codes_practice/



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Institute of Child Education and Psychology

Children's rights report card

The Children's Rights Alliance recently launched its annual *Report Card 2021*, which analyses 16 promises to children made by the *Programme for Government: Our Shared Future* and rates the Government on its efforts from June to December 2020.

The Report Card series began in 2009 and documents Ireland's treatment – both good and bad – of its children. An independent panel of experts, chaired by former Supreme Court judge Catherine McGuinness, grades the Government's performance.

Report Card 2021 awards the Government an overall 'C minus' grade for its work over the past six months, noting that many of the positive developments during this time were a continuity of work that had been in train under the previous Government, but which took on a new level of urgency in the context of the global pandemic. When considering the 16 promises, the Government secured a report card with 8 Ds, 7 Cs and just 1 B.

The highest individual grade in Report Card 2021 is a 'B', which was awarded for enacting the Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Bill.

The lowest grades were awarded to 'Reduced Timetables' and 'Child Safety Online', which both received 'D minus' grades. Former Minister for Education and Skills, Joe Mc Hugh TD, initiated a consultation process on the use of reduced timetables in schools in September 2019. Notwithstanding a strong consensus emerging in the feedback on a rationale for and protocols around the use of reduced timetables, the Department of Education has yet to issue guidelines on this important issue.

The Programme for Government promised to ensure robust data collection on the use of reduced timetables, and to ensure that reduced timetables are only used in a manner that is limited, appropriate and absolutely necessary. A 'D minus' was awarded to the Government in this area due to the lack of progress in issuing guidelines to schools, the absence of information on the data collection procedure, and the lack of monitoring to ensure new guidelines are adhered to.

Another area of interest to second-level teachers may be the 'C minus' grade awarded to the Government for its work on the promise to commence a free school books pilot scheme in September 2020.

Although the pilot scheme commenced in the school year 2020/21, the size of the pilot scheme is limited and there has been no provision made in Budget 2021 for its continuation or clear timelines in place for the completion of the review of the pilot and further roll-out of the scheme.

Covid-19 has graphically exposed the inequalities experienced by children living in poor families in terms of access to books and other learning materials, in particular access to digital devices and broadband.

To read the full Report Card 2021 visit

<https://www.childrensrights.ie/content/report-card-2021>

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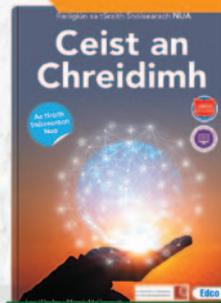
Irish Exam Skills



JC Irish



JC Spanish

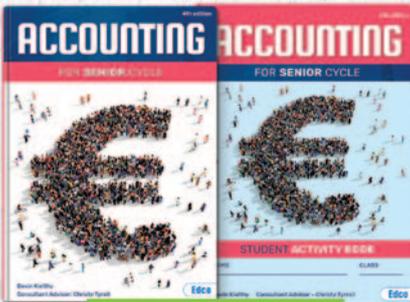


JC Religion

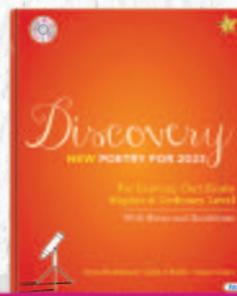


JC SPHE

LEAVING CERTIFICATE



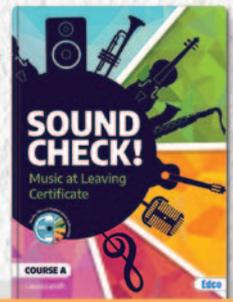
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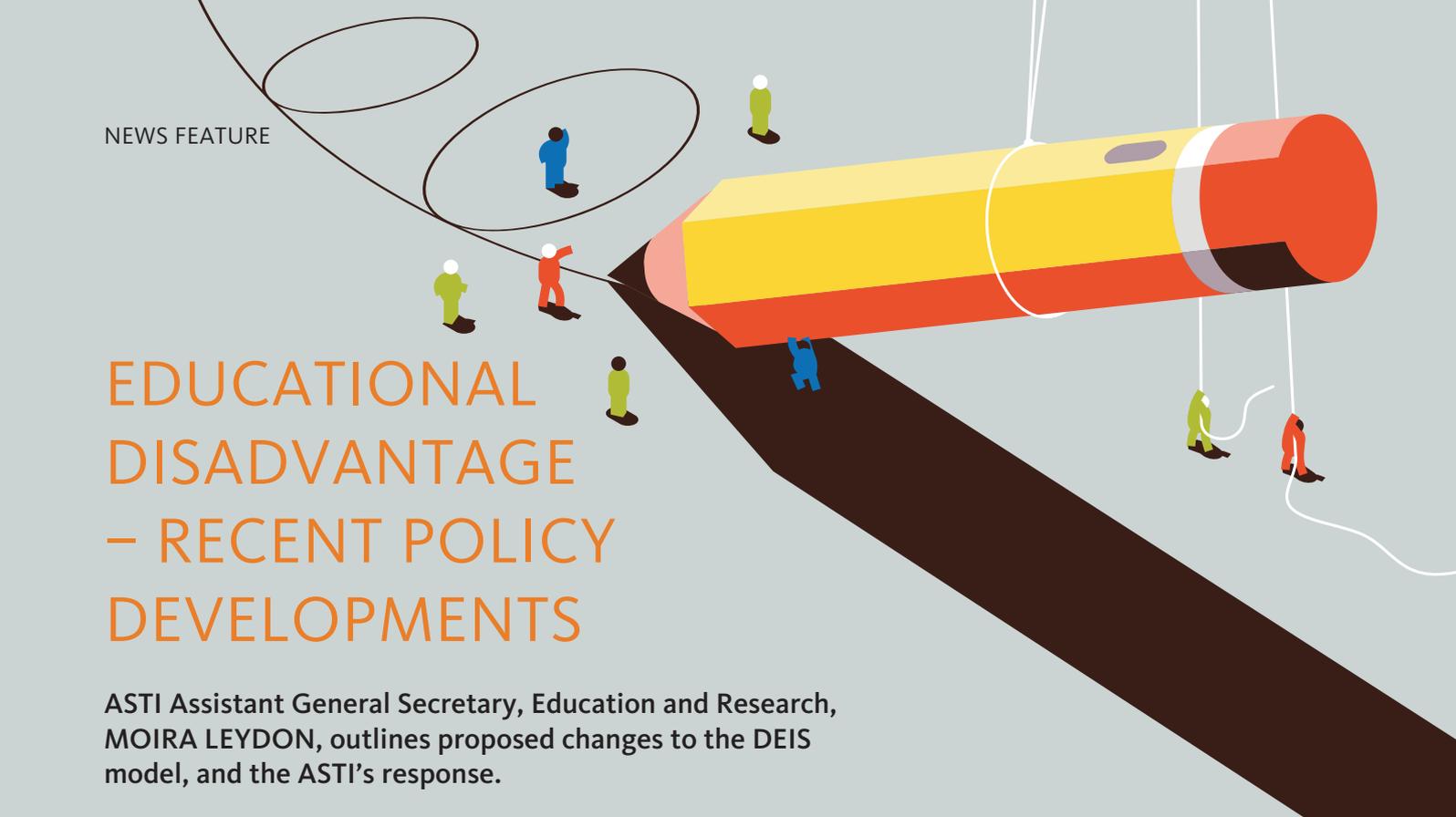
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EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE – RECENT POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

ASTI Assistant General Secretary, Education and Research, MOIRA LEYDON, outlines proposed changes to the DEIS model, and the ASTI’s response.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) is the Government programme to address educational disadvantage. It is a targeted approach that prioritises schools serving the most disadvantaged communities. The rationale for this approach is the existence of a ‘multiplier effect’, whereby students attending a school with a concentration of students from disadvantaged backgrounds have poorer academic outcomes, even taking account of individual social background. DEIS provides additional funding, access to literacy and numeracy programmes, and assistance with school planning. Currently, 198 post-primary schools are in the DEIS programme. The current DEIS programme commenced in 2017 and that plan contained a commitment to a new model of identification for including schools in the programme.

“The ASTI has long made the case that the allocation of additional resources to address educational disadvantage must supplement the targeted approach of DEIS.”

New model of identification of disadvantage

The ASTI took part in a stakeholder consultation on a refined identification model for DEIS schools in 2020. The outcome of that process is a model of identification based on school databases – the Primary Online Database (POD) and Post-primary Online Database (PPOD) – wherein students’ addresses are geo-coded using Eircode and converted to HP Deprivation Index scores. The latter is a statistical tool based on the quinquennial Census of Ireland to examine deprivation index for small areas and captures demographic profile, social class composition, and labour market situation. Usage of the HP Index enables the Department of Education to compute the percentage of students in each school coming from disadvantaged areas and compile an indicator of concentrated disadvantage. Schools are then ranked in terms of the latter for inclusion in the DEIS programme.

ASTI concerns

While acknowledging the technical merits of the HP Index approach to measuring educational disadvantage, the ASTI communicated its concern about potential unintended consequence of the model. In particular, the ASTI was concerned that, in order to receive additional teachers and resources, the level of educational disadvantage would have to be high. Schools that have worked hard to improve educational outcomes for students, including improved attendance, retention and achievement in State examinations, could inadvertently subsequently experience a reduction in resource allocation in future DEIS programmes. ‘Punished for being successful’ was a major criticism of the former process of identification of schools for inclusion in DEIS. The 2015 ESRI Report ‘Learning from the Evaluation of DEIS’ also expressed concern over the sharp distinction in resource allocation between DEIS and non-DEIS schools, especially at post-primary level:

“This means that schools with relatively high levels of disadvantage may fall below the cut-off for additional support. Research indicates that a significant proportion of disadvantaged students attend non-DEIS schools. In this context, there would appear to be a case for a degree of tapering of funding for schools rather than a sharp withdrawal below the specified cut-off point”.

The ASTI has long made the case that the allocation of additional resources to address educational disadvantage must supplement the targeted approach of DEIS with a model, which captures the reality of poverty and deprivation that is ‘hidden’ outside of the major urban areas. The closure of schools during the pandemic has dramatically exposed the extent of poverty and need in communities across the State. An ESRI report on child poverty during the pandemic documents this situation in stark terms. It states that in the face of widespread Covid-19 employment losses, and without an economic recovery, child income poverty rates could rise as high as 23%, a one-third increase relative to the start of 2020. Poverty and deprivation in childhood have lifelong impacts on health, well-being, education, employment opportunities and income levels. Schools can – and do – counter these impacts. However, they cannot do it without sustained and adequate investment to meet the educational, nutritional and well-being needs of students.



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VACCINATE TEACHERS, PROTECT SCHOOLS

Following the passing of a joint motion by all three teacher unions, the ASTI has continued to engage with stakeholders regarding teachers' reinstatement in the national vaccination programme.

Covid-19 has had many negative consequences for second-level education in Ireland including periods of school closures, uncertainty for 2020 and 2021 Leaving Certificate students, and disruption to the lives of more than 400,000 second-level students.

Less obvious implications, which have been well researched, have included an exacerbation of social inequalities and an increase in mental health challenges experienced by young people. Teachers' lives have also been negatively impacted by increased workload and work-related stress.

This is the context in which the teacher unions expressed dismay at the Government's announcement in March that it was abandoning its plan to vaccinate key workers, including school staff, in favour of an age-based vaccination programme.

The ASTI has always argued that healthcare workers, older people and the medically vulnerable must be the first to be vaccinated. The union also holds the view that education is a public good and a human right for children and young people. To support the Government's stated objective of keeping schools open, the ASTI has continued to demand that school staff who are working in crowded settings be vaccinated as a matter of urgency. Vaccinating education staff will mean less staff absences due to Covid-related illness. Schools are more likely to be able to remain open.

The three teacher unions passed a joint motion at their Easter conferences demanding the immediate reinstatement of education staff as a priority group within the national vaccination programme.

Commitment

In February 2021, a commitment was given that education staff would be vaccinated in the first third of the population.

Following the Government's renegeing on this commitment in March 2021, the three teacher unions passed a joint motion at their Easter conferences demanding the immediate reinstatement of education staff as a priority group within the national vaccination programme. In the event that the Government does not agree to schedule the vaccination of education staff by the end of the current school year, the three unions will organise to ballot their members on industrial action, up to and including strike action.

The ASTI passed this motion at its online Annual Convention on April 7. A report of the debate is on page 23. The wording of the motion is on page 25.

Following the adoption of the joint motion by the ASTI, INTO and TUI, the three teacher unions and other education partners met with Department of Education officials and public health advisors. This meeting did not address the teacher unions' key concerns.

The Department of Education advised the ASTI in early April that teachers who are pregnant should temporarily continue to work remotely until further notice.

The teacher unions have since written to An Taoiseach, Micheál Martin TD, to request engagement with him and other relevant departments regarding the vaccination of teachers and to discuss several anomalies in the roll-out of the vaccination programme.

For updates visit www.asti.ie.

Representing pregnant teachers

Six stillbirths have been associated with Covid-19 in Ireland, the ASTI made representations on behalf of pregnant members.

The Department of Education advised the ASTI in early April that teachers who are pregnant should continue to work remotely until further notice.

The Department has sought clarifications from the HSE on its earlier guidance (set out in Circular 21/21) for pregnant education staff. Section 4.3 of the circular refers to pregnant employees.

For updates visit www.asti.ie.

Leading on safety

The ASTI played a central role in achieving the Lead Worker Representative (LWR) initiative, which requires schools and other workplaces to appoint at least one staff member to assist in the implementation of, and monitor adherence to, Covid-19 safety measures. LWRs in schools are allocated two hours per week to carry out their role.

Following pressure from the ASTI, it has been confirmed that the role of LWRs will continue into the 2021/22 school year, including the allocation of time for LWRs.

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SMALLER CLASS SIZE A PRIORITY FOR TEACHERS

The recent online ASTI/RedC survey highlights teachers' concerns post pandemic, including class size, IT for students and mental health support.

The recent online ASTI/RedC survey, 'Rebuilding our School Communities: Teachers' Priorities – March 2021', examined what teachers think is important after a year of the pandemic, disrupted school life and remote teaching. The survey found that smaller class sizes, bridging the digital divide for students and teachers, and comprehensive mental health and well-being supports for students outside school were teachers' priorities.

The ASTI conducted the survey to gather data on teachers' priorities for building resilient school communities in the post-pandemic period, including how best to support the work of classroom teachers, student and teacher well-being, ICT integration, effective school leadership, and the physical environment.

Supporting classroom teachers

When it comes to supporting the work of classroom teachers, smaller class size was identified by the majority of teachers as the priority investment area. Such a measure would reduce current overcrowding. A total of 63% of teachers who responded said that this is the most important measure that would support their work in the classroom post pandemic. Associated measures to increase the time teachers have for non-teaching professional work were also a high priority.

Some 62% would like more time in the school day to prepare and plan, while 47% feel that a reduction in teacher workload is needed.

In all, 43% of respondents believe investment is also needed to help students with emotional and behavioural problems, while 36% would

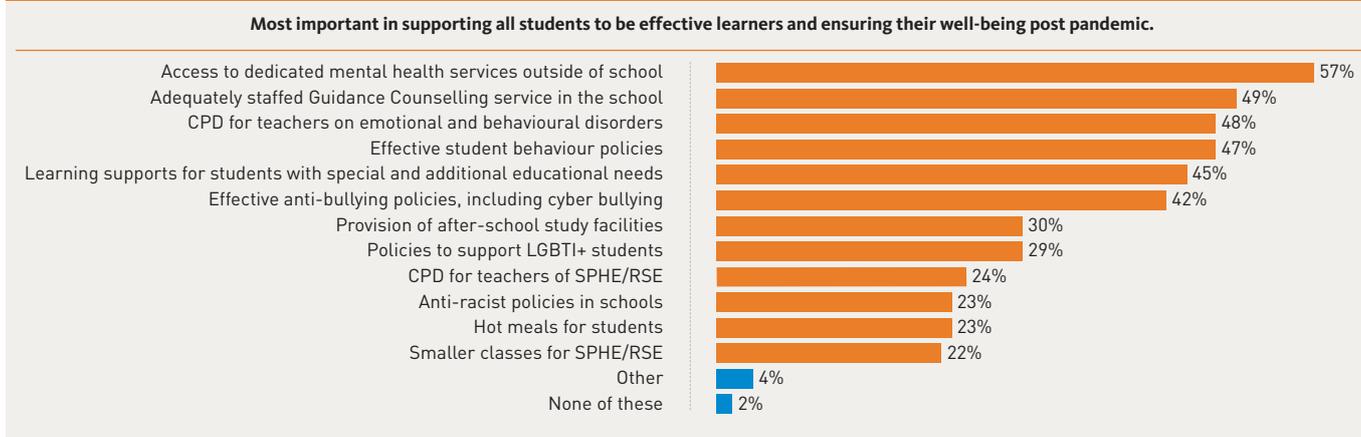
Smaller classes and more preparation time are the most important ways of supporting work in the classroom

(Base: all non-principals, n=2,472)

Most important to support work in the classroom post pandemic?



Mental health and guidance counselling services important in supporting students
(Base: All respondents – n=2,527)



like to see more support for students with special education needs. Integrating ICT into classroom teaching and learning is seen as crucial by teachers.

63% of teachers who responded said that smaller class size was the most important measure that would support their work in the classroom post pandemic.

Those surveyed identified the need for investment in devices for students and teachers, especially devices other than mobile phones for students (60%). Training for students on how to use these devices and associated software was identified as an important requirement by 54% of respondents. A total of 48% of teachers said they need ongoing ICT CPD. Some 39% and 38% of teachers spoke about the need for better broadband in schools and free broadband for students, respectively. Regarding the most important factor in supporting all students to be effective learners and ensuring their well-being post pandemic, 57% of teachers identified access to dedicated mental health services for

students outside of school. This is closely followed by adequate guidance counselling services in schools (49%) and ongoing teacher CPD on emotional and behavioural disorders (48%). Future investment also needs to provide adequate learning supports for students with additional educational needs. Consonant with a focus on students with emotional and behavioural disorders, teachers also emphasised the need for effective student behaviour policies in schools.

Effective school leadership

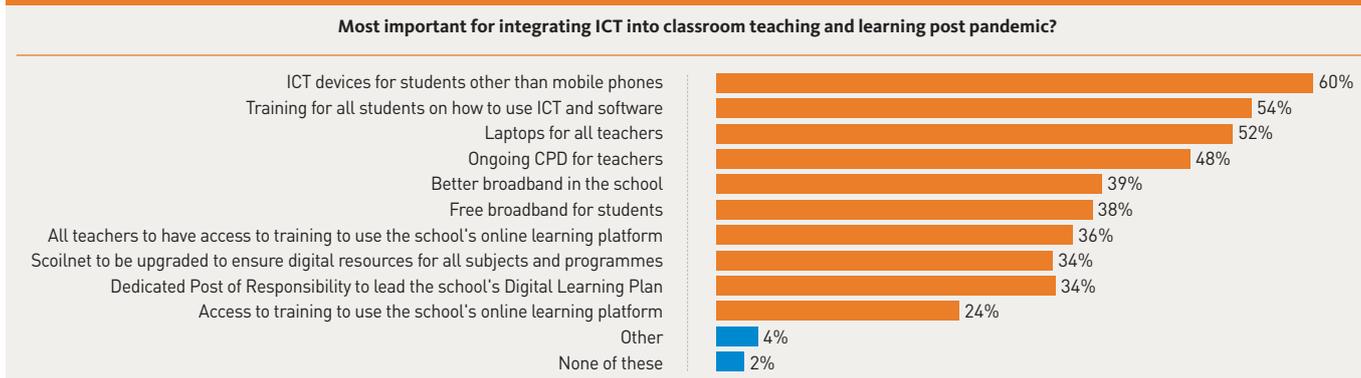
A total of 65% of teachers believe there must be quality consultation by senior management with staff, and 62% said quality communication from senior management is important. Reducing teacher workload is critical, as is ensuring a whole-school approach to a better work–life balance for teachers.

Other key areas for investment have already been highlighted by Covid-19 safety measures, including improving ventilation systems, upgrading toilet/sanitary facilities for teachers, adequate canteen facilities for students, and improving heating systems.

Work intensity

Work intensity is a constant in teachers’ working lives. Covid-19 has had a major impact on work intensity, with 90% of teachers stating that work intensity had increased, and 62% indicating a significant increase.

ICT devices and training for students are most important for integration of ICT
(Base: All respondents – n=2,527)





ASTI President Ann Piggott and ASTI General Secretary Kieran Christie prepare to open Convention 2021. Photo credit: Dave Cullen.

CONVENTION 2021 GOES ONLINE

This year’s ASTI Convention took place fully online. Delegates from all over the country logged on to listen and contribute to debates on a wide range of motions, while addresses from the ASTI President and General Secretary looked back on an unprecedented year.



Photo credit: Dave Cullen.

Key speeches

President’s address

The impact of the pandemic on teaching and learning was among the many issues that featured in a memorable address by ASTI President Ann Piggott.

“Táimid go léir i dteannta a chéile” – we’re all in this together. Without cherishing it outrageously, “together” is what we have always been at Easter Conventions, and although always appreciating such events, we took for granted packed halls, rousing speeches, chats over coffee, fervent electioneering and visits of dignitaries and guests. This year, the 99th Convention comes live from Head Office to your armchair, whether you are attending from Limerick to Leitrim, or Baltimore to Bundoran.



School closures/remote learning

March 2020 brought changes that we have never seen before in the Irish education system. A swift announcement on Thursday, March 12, meant most teachers and students grabbed their books and left the school premises with an innocent naivety of the situation, which has only been altered by hindsight and experience. With little if any training, a huge online revolution had begun. By the time the equally unexpected second closure of January 2021 locked everyone at home once again, major milestones were crossed and advancements were realised. The school day resumed and worked, learning and teaching took place virtually, amid the pandemic. A major change had occurred. People who did not previously own laptops became proficient at piloting platforms, pre-recording and teaching live classes. Homework was assigned and corrected via digital devices to the thousands of students who learnt online. The compelling fact that emerged is that teachers were no more lost among the virtual corridors of social platforms than students. Some pupils equally at first found it difficult to access and navigate their way around cyber classrooms; the associated work was challenging at first without adequate training. Obvious issues such as broadband access, equipment and privacy were problematic. The ASTI’s exposure of such problems last September led to the demand for IT equipment for students and teachers.

Masks

The ASTI repeatedly made representations for the wearing of masks ahead of the return to school last summer. Masks have been essential in keeping people safe, but masks alone cannot safeguard lives. When masks are loose, of poor-quality material, and sometimes sit under noses, teachers worry. The latest statistics inform us that 22% of positive cases are asymptomatic. This means there may be people in classrooms who are positive and may not know. Students travel to different rooms for optional practical subjects where equipment is shared and movement is unavoidable. Case numbers described as community numbers have been perplexing for teachers.

We are not the only union to feel anger at the abandonment. The TUI, INTO, Fórsa, GRA, AGSI, and NBRU have all publicly expressed disappointment.

Vaccinations

Although previously appearing at Level 11 on a 15-point list, we were suddenly thrust into oblivion as the last 6 levels after Level 9 were removed. The Minister for Health stated that it would “facilitate planning and execution of the programme”, the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) document informs that it will be “operationally simple” and “an efficient way of continuing the vaccine rollout”. A member of the National Public Health Advisory Team (NPHT) on the news agreed.

Did NIAC set the original list? Why was it changed? Was it for simplicity or for other concerns? Why will someone who is working from home, without meeting anyone, be vaccinated ahead of people who are in positions of potential exposure to coronavirus? We are not the only union to feel anger at the abandonment. The TUI, INTO, Fórsa, GRA, AGSI, and NBRU have all publicly expressed disappointment. This has been a brutal and sudden kick in the teeth for teachers and other public sector workers. Total disregard has been shown for the frontline workers in this country who come face to face with hundreds of people in the course of essential work where exposure to illness is unavoidable.

Despite the objective of keeping schools open, no vaccination of essential school workers is deemed important. In December, Unesco, Unicef and Education International called on governments to prioritise school staff for vaccinations. Last weekend, the United Nations called again for prioritisation of vaccinations for teachers. Other countries have prioritised the need to keep schools open. The USA, France, Chile, Italy, Canada, China, Serbia, Indonesia, Russia, Portugal, Argentina, Colombia, Turkey and Vietnam are just some of the countries who have vaccinated or are about to vaccinate their teachers.

I agree with the propositions of last weekend by union representatives. If the Government’s new strategy is the plan going forward, a parallel system of protecting frontline workers is the obvious solution. The rollout will continue and remaining frontline workers will be protected as they should. Over 27,000 vaccines were administered on one day last week; therefore, workers in exposed workplaces would be vaccinated in very little time. This is the obvious solution. We need to move from a two-tier parallel system of classroom measures to this parallel safety control for teachers, SNAs and others.

I also wish to clarify that having us on the list will not deprive vulnerable or senior people from getting vaccines. That is the last thing we want.

High risk

There has been much focus on high-risk teachers. The Chair of NIAC last week said that: “If we were to compare a 20-35 year old to a 65 year old, the 65 year

old has 70 times the risk of death as the younger”. Presumably the risk to people aged 60 to 64 must also be very high. So why are teachers in this age bracket being instructed to returning to choc-a-block classrooms, along with other people in the high-risk category who suffer from cancer, heart failure, chronic kidney disease? People in the high-risk categories must be facilitated to work from home until they are safely vaccinated.

Leaving Cert exams

Following talks, we are glad that a Leaving Cert is being held with second components. It is also heartening to hear that many students have so far signed up to sit exams. We had continually asked for adaptations to exam papers to offer choice and reduce strain, stress, anxiety and workload for students in Leaving Certificate 2021. The changes made are helpful in doing so and should encourage students to sit exams this year. The Leaving Cert. corrections will be standardised and every exam will be marked relative to each other, from a marking scheme that will be used uniformly by all examiners. No one will be unfairly brought down in calculating results, and a proper appeal mechanism is available involving a re-correction of scripts.

The Accredited Grades Model, also offered, it is not an option favoured by us, and we would only have liked to see it used as a last option contingency in the pandemic. However, it is here again. Results will be computed with no uniform schemes, in different ways, using diverse standards in separate schools. Subsequent standardisation may lead to school results being readjusted downwards.



Senior Cycle reform

Any future changes to the Senior Cycle curriculum must both enhance what is currently working well and address acknowledged problems. The externally assessed Leaving Certificate has high levels of public trust and is essential for maintenance of high educational standards. The majority of Leaving Certificate subjects now contain an examination of students’ practical skills – an important dimension of learning. What is problematic about the Leaving Certificate is the role it serves in providing points for access to higher education. We need to develop an entry model to higher education that does not rely exclusively on the Leaving Cert.

We wish to nurture creativity and imagination and independent thinking. We are not against reform and are in favour of changes such as oral exams for modern languages and would be open to discussion on timelines for project and practical work, but if we change the bathwater, we do need to ensure that the baby is protected and nurtured. The metamorphosis to the Junior Cycle has unimpressed teachers, who feel standards are lost, despite additional material bundled on courses. Too many repetitive CBAs exist and students state that the time given in exams is too short for the amount asked, and exam papers are at liberty to ask anything. The grouping of marks means students who get 55% or 74% both receive a merit. Only 2% of students get a distinction. We do not want a mirror image of this at Senior Cycle – standards and fairness must prevail.

New entrants

We have a teacher shortage in areas such as Irish, home economics, maths, science and English. Jobs are increasingly harder to fill. However, new teachers continue to report the same issues; while being extremely well qualified, precarious employment abounds. Job offers of seven hours a week with no guarantee of successive employment in the same school or any other are common. This is a meagre starting point to attract young teachers into the profession. Sunny days in Dubai, with rewarding tax-free salaries, are more attractive than the lesser two-tier pay scale. Previously, new teachers, who really wanted to teach, used to find second jobs in shops, bars and restaurants; their only dependable way to earn a steady income in the early years of teaching no longer exists.

Charter

As the teacher has been cut from the vaccination list, we continue to be invisible elsewhere. While schools could not run without us, while we are the cornerstone of teaching and learning in schools, we protect the students in our care and do

our best on a daily basis. The potential establishment of a charter will also exclude us. Despite all talk of inclusivity and rights in education, the exclusion of one of the main stakeholders is bitterly dissatisfying.

Remote inspections

In circumstances of continued remote learning, an inspection model is being considered. This could be a possibility in the next school year, if we find ourselves in this situation again.

Considering the efforts it has taken to get to this point, with little if any training and a major increase in workload, online teaching may potentially be judged in a distasteful series of published reports.

The teacher of a single subject would be entirely exposed, and in the time of a pandemic, it is not the right thing to do.

Read/watch the full speech on www.asti.ie



Photo credit: Dave Cullen.

General Secretary’s Report

ASTI General Secretary Kieran Christie’s report to Convention looked back on a year like no other in the history of the union.

ASTI activity in the past year has ranged across an enormous selection of issues, many of which were unique to the pandemic and have never been faced before. For our part, we in the ASTI have stepped up to the challenges that have been posed in our sector. We have sought to balance the paramount importance of keeping school communities safe while protecting the right of our teachers to teach and their students to learn. It has been a difficult balancing act.

I want to pay tribute today to our members who have steadfastly endured all the travails that have come their way. Whether it was remote teaching or massively reconfigured classrooms and schools, the challenges they have faced have been enormous and they deserve the gratitude of the nation for all their efforts.

ASTI interventions

At certain moments, the ASTI has made some key interventions. These have included the important intervention last summer regarding the necessity for a proper indemnity to be put in place to allow our members to engage in the calculated grades process with some sense of security. Again, we led the way last summer when we insisted on mask wearing by all within our schools. Our key intervention in January in ensuring that schools would remain shut while the numbers of confirmed cases in the community ran into the thousands was vital. Latterly, the reversal we achieved of the arrangements for oral examinations, by insisting that students and their teachers have the protection of masks, was widely appreciated by our members. We have won important concessions regarding school attendance by medically very high risk, high risk and pregnant teachers. And of course, our withdrawal from the discussions on the examinations in 2021 to ensure that the established Leaving Certificate should be protected insofar as possible could have repercussions that long exceed the pandemic. We led the way in insisting and ensuring that substantial increased investment in the day-to-day running of our schools would be necessary if a successful and sustained reopening could be maintained. We have now ensured that the additional teaching allocation and related supports that we negotiated, and that were provided to schools in the context of Covid-19, will be continued in 2021/22. These include additional teachers and substitution support, and an additional allocation in terms of guidance provision. The Lead Worker Representative (LWR) will also continue to receive protected time to carry out their very important and necessary role.

Investment in education

While teachers adapted fast to support their learners and their communities, without training or resources and with professionalism that was demonstrably second to none, inequalities in our society were laid bare for all to see. Whether it was broadband access or poverty, the cultural milieu that was exposed was far from desired.

The ASTI has been highlighting and fighting against these inequalities and fractures for years. The fundamental flaws in the way we have been managing our public services – especially education – must be addressed. Ireland’s place at the bottom of the pile on the list of OECD countries in terms of investment in education is well known. The policies that undermined equality in education and

drove many teachers from the profession must never be re-enacted. There must be no cutbacks when all this is over. Expansion and investment must be the only items on the agenda.

Supports for students

The young people of Ireland have suffered an extremely traumatic experience over a sustained period of time. They must be properly supported as education begins to pick up the pieces, and normal teaching and learning resumes. The system must be provided with the additional funding, resources and staffing to support young people in education recovery. They deserve no less. In our 2021 RedC survey, members told us that smaller classes, access to youth mental health services, and augmented guidance counselling must be prioritised if students' well-being and learning is to thrive.

Examinations 2021

On February 17, the Government announced its plan for 2021 Leaving Cert. Exams and State Examinations Commission (SEC) Accredited Grades. The ASTI expressed its bitter disappointment that SEC Accredited Grades are not underpinned in any way by externally validated elements such as coursework, projects, etc. SEC Accredited Grades will prove a very challenging proposition for all concerned given the lack of credible data in many instances. However, there were some important gains for the ASTI, including:

- removal of a requirement for teachers to place their students in rank order merit in their class,
- second components – coursework, project work, orals, aurals – are proceeding,
- adjustments to the 2021 Leaving Cert. written exams have been put in place,
- full indemnity for teachers and school leaders, as achieved by the ASTI in 2020, will be in place, and
- protections against canvassing of teachers, as achieved by the ASTI in 2020.

It was unfortunate that it took a very public walkout from the discussions by the ASTI to address the lack of visible planning in relation to the established Leaving Cert. 2021 second component exams – and what at the time was the inevitability of their cancellation – which would have led to an emasculation of the established Leaving Certificate as we know it. I would ask precisely whose agenda would that have best suited in the long term?

Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate

There is no doubt that changes to Senior Cycle will be the big item for us to deal with in the years to come. There have been a number of cycles of consultation. We ensured that we were well represented at all stakeholder events to which we were invited. We also commissioned a piece of research by Dr Brian Fleming on the approach so far by the NCCA to the consultation process. It identified that issues such as initiative overload, increasing workload and lack of capacity at school level must be addressed before major change at Senior Cycle can take place.

Schools reopening and vaccinations

For several months, both publicly and privately, we pushed hard for reprioritisation of teachers and others who work in schools in the context of the review of the vaccine rollout programme. Last week's revision of the prioritisation came as a hammer blow. It has been continuously stated that a key objective is to keep schools open. This decision undermines that objective completely. Let's be very clear: teachers and other school staff are frontline workers. It was

reprehensible that this change was made without consultation with us and our fellow trade union colleagues.

Right to disconnect

The ASTI has been active in asserting the right to disconnect from work-related contacts for some time now. You will be aware that a Workplace Relations Commission Code of Practice was launched recently, which gives guidance to organisations and their employees on the right to disconnect. As part of our membership of the ICTU, the ASTI was to the forefront of submissions to this process. Now that the guidance is issued, we will be to the forefront of efforts to secure the full application and implementation of the Code of Practice within the second-level education system.

Building Momentum – A New Public Service Agreement 2021-2022

An ASTI ballot of members on Building Momentum – A New Public Service Agreement 2021-2022 was conducted in February 2021. The proposals were resoundingly rejected by ASTI members. There can be no doubt about the overriding issue that led to that rejection. Unequal pay remains to be fully addressed. With this agreement, the largest pay discrimination still occurs in the early years of employment. Notwithstanding the rejection of the proposals by the ASTI, the aggregate vote in favour by ICTU affiliates means that ASTI members are encompassed by its terms.

Organisation

I now want to turn to an organisational matter. A number of years ago we endured a regrettable intervention in terms of membership recruitment by our sister union the TUI. We engaged in the appropriate process within the ICTU and we have been in receipt of a financial settlement of €280,000. It is time to move on from that now because it is important to maintain positive and constructive relations, and protecting and advancing the interests of teachers and of the education system is paramount.

The importance of unions in giving workers a collective voice in the workplace has been underscored in many ways during this pandemic. The Return-to-Work safely Protocol, the election of Lead Worker Representatives, the insistence on investment and enhanced safety measures and so on, have been driven by pressure applied by us within the second-level education sector.

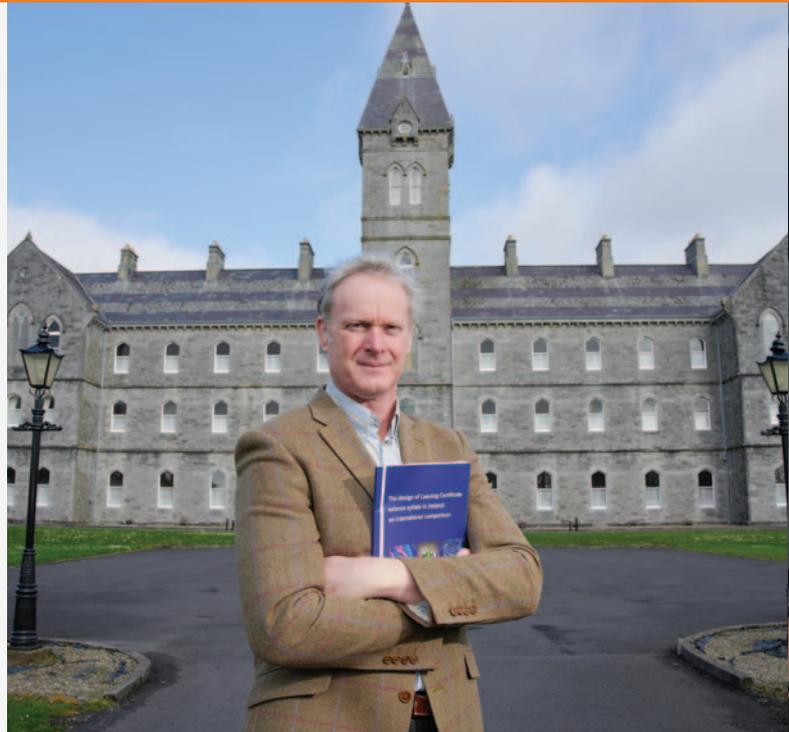
In 2020, the ASTI increased our membership more than any other public sector or private sector union in the Republic of Ireland. We now have more members than we have ever recorded. Clearly, we have been doing something right. I want to pay tribute to the work of school stewards, regional and national organisers, Standing Committee, our Central Executive Council and many others on committees and in roles within our union for this enormous achievement.

I also have one more very important thing to acknowledge. In March 2020, Head Office had to close its doors like everywhere else. Armed with no more than a laptop and a mobile phone, ASTI staff set about the task of maintaining the services the ASTI provides for its 18,000 plus members. Since then, through all the levels of restrictions, our staff stepped up to the challenge, not only maintaining our services but having played an enormous part in ensuring that our union is progressing and flourishing. I would like to put on record here today that it is my enormous privilege to lead this team of talented, hardworking professionals.

Read/watch the full speech on www.asti.ie

MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT WITH TEACHERS NEEDED ON SENIOR CYCLE REFORM

Significant debate time at this year's online Convention was devoted to educational issues.



*John Conneely (Clare Branch) outside his school, St Flannan's, in Ennis, Co. Clare.
Photo by John Kelly.*

Three separate motions addressed curriculum reform and the proposed review of Senior Cycle at this year's online Convention. Motion 77 called on the ASTI to demand that the NCCA include depth of treatment and range of knowledge in all future Leaving Certificate specifications. Speakers cited the inadequacy of the learning outcomes approach currently being proposed, and the lack of international evidence to support it.

Motion 81 demanded an assurance that no further reform of Senior Cycle would take place without a full and comprehensive review of the Junior Cycle Framework, while an amended motion 79 called on the ASTI to refuse to co-operate with any further Senior Cycle reform unless such a

review is completed and fully discussed. Delegates argued that implementing such reform without a review of what has worked and what has not in the Junior Cycle Framework, and without full involvement of teachers as key stakeholders, poses a significant threat to educational standards in Ireland.

Motion 65 called on the ASTI to approach the Department of Education with a view to providing adequate and meaningful training for all classroom teachers on the new special educational needs (SEN) model. Delegates said that teachers need meaningful training in order to be able to fully support the increasing numbers of students in their classrooms with a diverse range of additional needs.

Senior Cycle specification and depth of treatment

"For Leaving Certificate syllabus design to conform to international best practice, it should contain considerable detail on: the topics to be studied, depth of treatment of those topics, and subject-specific details such as does it allow practical work, field work or practical skills. It should also contain guidance for teachers and pupils to ensure that the syllabus is implemented effectively in the classroom, as well as information on how it will be assessed. The [learning outcomes only] template is fundamentally flawed. Our high-tech industries need to be underpinned by Leaving Cert. syllabi of evidence-based design and international standards. How can teachers, students and parents have confidence in a type of syllabus that doesn't work, and hasn't been tried anywhere else, a syllabus that will inevitably be vague and dumbed down? Make no mistake, this is a serious matter for Ireland".

John Conneely, Clare Branch, proposing the motion

"The new language of the framework, combined with a lack of clarity on learning outcomes, in units of learning in particular, has caused confusion and uncertainty for many teachers. It has also significantly added to their workload as they seek to unpack the relationship between these elements of the

new specifications. This development left many teachers unsure of exactly what areas of subject discipline should be covered. Achieving curriculum change takes time, and must be consistently supported at many levels.

When teachers experience change as rushed, lacking in joined-up approaches, inadequately supported by material resources, and where the curriculum is perceived as lacking in clarity, this contributes to a sense of demoralisation and disengagement."

Pauline Nagle, Clare Branch

"The Leaving Certificate is still a high-stakes exam. Teachers do not want to be spending their time unpacking any learning outcomes, be they clear or vague.

Most teachers want clarity so that they can adequately prepare students for the exam. We're in favour of teacher agency and autonomy in teaching and learning. But in my opinion, subject specifications should be specific, as the name implies."

Mary Mullaghy, Navan Branch



Edel Farrell (Cork South Paddy Mulcahy Branch) in her school, Coláiste Éamann Rís, in Cork. Photo by Clare Keogh.

Need for review of Junior Cycle Framework

“It clear from teachers, that is all of us working at the chalk face, that it is imperative that a comprehensive, forensic review of the Junior Cycle Framework is carried out. We are demanding this review because we are concerned about the students sitting in front of us.

We are concerned about aspects of the Junior Cycle Framework, which we believe have lessened the educational attainment of our students in subjects where they would have excelled in the past. In the last 13 months, second-level teachers have done everything asked of us out of concern for our students.

It is time that the DES and the NCCA took our concerns seriously and do what they are continuously asking us to do every day; that is, to reflect on what has worked and what may need to be changed. We need a Junior Cycle with depth, knowledge-based, a Junior Cycle which is a solid foundation for students as they progress into Senior Cycle. And in order to achieve this, we need an urgent and comprehensive review of the Junior Cycle Framework.”

Sarah Withero, Galway Branch

“A significant and objective evaluation needs to be conducted. All teachers need to be listened to. We’re the bedrock.

We’re the ones that can provide the first-hand accounts of the consequences of the change and I think the bodies mentioned in the motion, the NCCA, the DES, the SEC, they all need to listen to us. Change to the Senior Cycle needs to happen at a slow pace and requires an evolution, not a revolution. I urge you to support the motion.”

Edel Farrell, Cork South Paddy Mulcahy Branch



Special educational needs

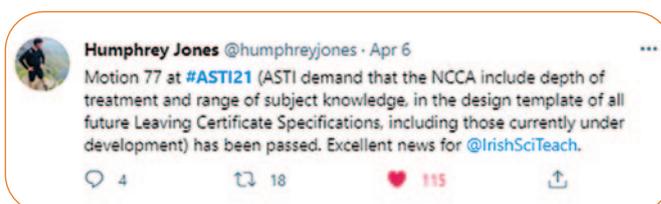
“The whole premise of the implementation of the new special educational needs model is that it should be a whole-school approach to foster an atmosphere of inclusivity for all students, which I agree with.

But what about the classroom teacher? Does she or he not have the right to have their skillset upgraded to meet the myriad of demands required of them to deliver this model? The opportunity to upskill should be a prerequisite if teachers are to provide adequately for these students.

Stillorgan Branch demands that the training provided be meaningful and specific, unlike the training that was provided for Junior Cycle reform.

In my opinion, this was substandard, inadequate and meaningless. At no stage of the rollout of the CPD, were students with SEN or the new SEN model ever mentioned. This lack of delivery of specific training is an absolute disgrace.”

Rosabelle Crampton, Stillorgan Branch, proposing the motion



“I have 25 students in my fifth-year home economics class. Of these 25, there are nine different difficulties or medical needs diagnosed, including four students who have a diagnosis of ASD, two with anxiety, five students with a specific learning difficulty, four with a specific speech and language disorder, a hearing impairment, ADHD and sensory processing difficulty.

This is just within one mainstream classroom. At times it is difficult to cater for all of the learning needs within this class, and I would benefit from some specific and targeted training in SEN. I have 11 other class groups that I also teach each week.

Adequate and meaningful training is needed for classroom teachers in the area of SEN to adequately meet the learning needs within our classes and to better serve all of our students.”

Helen O’Reilly, Stillorgan Branch

SMALLER CLASS SIZES BETTER FOR STUDENTS

Motions at Convention dealt with payment for student teachers, casualisation of the profession and posts of responsibility.

Motion 27 called for the ASTI to adopt a policy of maximum class size of 24 students for general subjects and a maximum class size of 20 students for all practical subjects. In recognition of the work done by student teachers on teaching placement, Motion 12 directed the ASTI to seek to negotiate payment for teaching work carried out by student teachers during their Postgraduate Master of Education. Delegates discussed the difficulty PME students faced, with many working part-time jobs in retail or hospitality while also completing their teaching placement. Motion 26 called for minimum contracts of 12 hours and 40 minutes for all part-time and newly qualified teachers, in order to combat the casualisation of the teaching profession. Delegates also debated Motion 17, which directed the ASTI to seek an immediate review of the current selection criteria for appointments to posts of responsibility, with a view to the reinstatement of seniority and experience as major determinants of suitability for appointment. Motion 23 asked that the union negotiate the restoration of the pension scheme for all teachers to pre-2004 levels, in the interests of equality.

Class size

“Effective teaching and learning is about establishing, developing and sustaining relationships. Establishing interpersonal relationships between students and teachers requires time for the teacher to get to know the students – their personalities, their foibles, their talents, their difficulties, and their individual learning styles. The difference between 24 and 36 people is huge, in getting to know them, in spotting who is following the lesson and who isn’t. Spending time with the individual student and making sure their talents are given the attention they deserve; whether it is the brightest or most-challenged student in the room, everyone needs their time and there is only so much time. That is why class size is such an important issue.”

Deirdre Mac Donald, Wexford Tony Boland Branch, proposing the motion

“From the health and safety perspective of a science teacher, I would like to support this motion. Currently when it comes to second year CBAs in particular in science, you could have students doing 12 different experiments at once. This comes with 12 different risk assessments, each with their own individual risks and dangers. I would urge members to support this motion based not only on student well-being and student learning outcomes, both of which are very important, but also on the grounds of health and safety because the current numbers we have doing CBAs are very high and the dangers that come with them are great.”

Christopher Davey, Carlow Branch



ASTI Immediate Past-President Deirdre Mac Donald. Photo credit: Dave Cullen.

“I’m not a strict teacher, it doesn’t work for me, but my relationships are super important. Establishing relationships is hard to do with a class of 30 unfortunately. I’ve always said the best thing we could do for our classrooms and for teaching is to have smaller classes. It’s important both academically and for mental health.”

Thérèse Glennon, Dublin North West Branch

Payment for student teachers

“The fundamental pillar on which trade unionism is based is that decent work deserves decent pay. In the case of student teachers on their teaching placement, work does not pay. There is no payment, no stipend, and no financial contribution for those undertaking student teacher placement programmes. The Government should have the decency to provide financial recognition for the work of student teachers, in keeping with the practice in other professions. School placement is a work placement but it is essentially free labour ... Student teachers are often spending up to 30-35 hours a week in school, not only teaching the required classes but being asked to take on the same duties as any other teacher. The experience of many student teachers is of having no financial support for travel, accommodation or basic living costs.”

Ciara Kinsella, Stillorgan Branch, proposing the motion

“The reality for student teachers is that they cannot cope with the financial burden the PME course is placing upon them ... There is blatant disregard to the teaching profession and for high professional standards when we consider that the majority of students have to engage in additional part-time work during their placement in order to survive ... It is imperative that we protect the future of education. It is time that PME students receive payment for their work and that we ensure that teaching remains an attractive option for our highly educated graduates.”

Stuart Delaney, Stillorgan Branch, seconding the motion

“Last June against the backdrop of the global Black Lives Matter movement was a demand that we cannot afford to ignore, for the teaching profession and the education system generally to become more reflective of the diverse ‘new Ireland’ that we have become. Ten years on from the imposition of inferior pay scales on post-2011 teachers, this union has the opportunity to send the message that we want to create the conditions for all of our talented students, from whatever socioeconomic or ethnic background, to join our profession and make it truly fit to serve the Ireland of the 21st century.”

Barry Hennessy, Dublin South 1 Branch

Casualisation of the teaching profession

“Why should the teacher be reduced to a fraction of an allocation? Why can our time be purchased in such small quantities? Why should teachers be expected to fill the gaps in a system presented by bureaucratic allocation models that leave schools with a fraction of a teacher? Why should teachers be expected to present themselves to a workplace sporadically over the course of a working week for a quarter of a wage packet, to wait around in staff rooms or their cars, in the hope of picking up an additional hour here and there?”

Eamon Ryan, Kildare Branch, Standing Committee Region 10, proposing the motion



“Casualisation of the teaching profession is a not a new issue; it has lingered for a long time and it is increasing. Along with unequal pay and the overall deterioration of working conditions, increased casualisation impacts on our members in the weakest position, our members without a voice. It is something that impacts on attracting the best candidates into teaching and obviously something that impacts on those people remaining. Attracting graduates into the profession continues to be a problem. Newly qualified teachers are leaving the profession and who could blame them? After the huge cost of qualifying, new teachers enter the profession without any security, with low pay and a demoralising sense that they are not wanted or just not worth it.”

Karl Whelan, Kildare Branch, seconding

Casualisation of the teaching profession is a not a new issue; it has lingered for a long time and it is increasing.

“I personally started off with five hours of teaching, then five went to six, six went to ten. This was over a very long period of time. I’ve only very recently got 22 hours after nearly ten years of teaching ... In terms of getting mortgages or being able to afford to have children, maternity leave, paternity leave, sick leave aren’t givens when you’re a new teacher. You work really hard for those privileges ... We need to pass this motion to show the Government, the Minister, the media, that we are worthy of getting proper working conditions.”

Karen Ryan, Wexford Tony Boland Branch

“The impact casualisation is having on teachers developing skills, on meeting Teaching Council requirements on minimum hours, on building up rapport with other teachers and building up connection with students, is huge. We’re preventing teachers who are abroad from coming back to meaningful contracts. We need to stop allowing people to have a pro rata life and actually treat them as whole human beings.”

Niall Daly, Dublin North East Branch

Posts of responsibility

“At the core of this motion is equality. What this motion is seeking to do is to protect the integrity of post allocation so that it is fair, transparent and impartial to ensure that every teacher can get a post at some stage in their career, if they want it. Seniority is not about age, it is about service and professional experience within a school. It has been phased out over the years and is no longer a criterion for the allocation of posts. Why is there no longer any regard for service or a teacher’s experience in a school? Surely experience should count for something – it certainly does in other professions. This has led to inconsistencies in the allocation of posts, which impacts negatively on our profession.”

Adrienne Healy, Dublin North West Branch

“As a lower-paid teacher, I feel that we have been discriminated against enough, in terms of pay, pension, contracts, etc., over the last ten years. An opportunity to apply for a post and to take on a post of responsibility shouldn’t be a rite of passage. It should be open to anybody who wants to apply for it. A post shouldn’t be about the financial aspect of it, it should be about giving back to the school community. When you look at the interview criteria, if you have the seniority and experience, you should be able to interview well for the post.”

Noreen Fleming, Navan Branch

Superannuation

“There was much discussion yesterday of pay inequality and casualisation of teaching, which disproportionately affects younger teachers in particular. However, I would like to highlight the fact that I and other NQTs are also on an inferior pension scheme compared to our colleagues who entered the profession prior to 2013. I’m part of a cohort of teachers who are far worse off financially compared to previous cohorts ... I do the same work as other teachers, for not only less pay but for a smaller pension, retiring most likely at the age of 68 in the year 2055. With life expectancy increasing, as is the cost of living, do we really want a situation of a cohort of retired teachers struggling financially in the future, considering many of them may be still paying off a mortgage in retirement?”

Daniel Howard, Dublin North West Branch



“As well as looking at comparing the post-2013 pension with the pre-2013 pension scheme, I think there should be a comparison of how teachers are affected by the post-2013 pension scheme in comparison to the other public sector professions. As the proposer said, we have a very long pay scale and so we are affected perhaps more adversely than others. It’s a single public service pension scheme, it applies right across the public service, it might be hard to change. In order to implement this motion, we might need to look at how we can enhance the single public service pension scheme to deliver for teachers, like earlier teacher schemes. We need to look to get pay pension parity for new entrants.”

Gloria Helen, Carbery Branch

FOCUS ON REDEPLOYMENT AND SLAR MEETINGS

A number of motions at Convention addressed redeployment, protected time for SLAR meetings, and supervision and substitution.

Motion 5 at this year's online ASTI Convention called on the union to negotiate with the Department of Education for full substitution cover for teachers attending Subject Learning and Assessment Review (SLAR) meetings. Delegates spoke of the practical and logistical difficulties involved in organising and attending these meetings, which have become a huge source of stress for many.

Motion 24 asked that a committee be formed to survey ASTI members on their commute, and on opportunities for redeployment, with the results to be used to support a demand for a nationwide voluntary redeployment scheme. Delegates spoke of their personal experience of long commutes, and the difficulty of balancing personal and professional life at the risk of losing CIDs or posts of responsibility. They spoke of the need for solid evidence to help establish an efficient and badly needed national redeployment scheme. Motions 44 and 45 addressed the topic of supervision and substitution, asking for an annual opt out of the scheme for all teachers after 15 years' service (motion 44), and an annual option to opt in or out of the scheme (motion 45).

Substitution for SLAR meetings

"Does the right to disconnect only apply to emails, texts or phone calls? Shouldn't we also have the right to physically disconnect at the scheduled end of the school day? Since the ASTI seems to be the only stakeholder committed to upholding the Joint Statement on Principles and Implementation of Junior Cycle Reform, and has directed its members to only attend SLAR meetings which are scheduled to start and end within the normal school tuition hours, it is imperative that we now fight for and insist on full paid substitution cover so that our teachers can attend these mandatory meetings and engage with the important professional collaboration and learning that occurs at them."

Sinéad Corkery, Dublin South Central Branch, proposing the motion

Redeployment

"This pilot scheme is so limited that it isn't useful in measuring how much use and/or value a fully rolled out scheme would actually be ... To form a committee to survey members, the purpose there is to move away from anecdotal evidence and gather solid evidence about the distances teachers cover. And for those who want to redeploy but haven't, what are the barriers that exist for them doing so? And if there was an effective redeployment

scheme, would there be sufficient interest and uptake to make it viable? Equipped with that information, we can present a strong case to the Department to give up on this perpetual pilot and finally implement a comprehensive and effective voluntary redeployment scheme that would result in a marked improvement in the quality of life for many teachers, offer the same flexibility to teachers as many other professions enjoy, and reduce the environmental impact of a large commuting workforce."

Richard Terry, Fermoy Branch, proposing the motion

"It's not just younger teachers that are affected by this, or newer teachers, or teachers on CID. We have had in our workplace a number of teachers, 20-odd years permanent, who have been travelling two and a half, three hours to work and home again every day, and have had to give up permanent jobs in order to have a better quality of life. So I do think there's a strong need for this sort of survey to be done and also for this sort of scheme to be put into place to give people the opportunity to improve their quality of life, not have to give up their permanent job, their post and everything else in order simply to have a better quality of life at home with their young families."

Marina Cusack, East Cork Branch

Supervision and substitution

"This motion [Motion 44] is about opening up that choice to teachers again to opt out if they so wish on reaching 15 years' service of the compulsory participation element of the scheme. The motion will enable to ASTI to seek to open up negotiations with the Department on this issue, thereby offering the same choice, fairness and equity to all teachers on reaching 15 years of service and not just those who fortuitously came of age in 2017."

Richard Egan, Tullamore Branch, proposing the motion

"The fact that this issue is on the clár twice indicates how big an issue it is with our teachers and with our members ... It is essential that people are given the option to opt out of this scheme. The money situation isn't the issue; it is about the time that people are committed to. The demand on teachers' time at this point is beyond breaking point. All this motion is doing is giving teachers an opt-out clause on an annual basis to pay for this scheme."

Murt Francis, Wexford Tony Boland Branch, seconding the motion

EMERGENCY MOTION ON VACCINATION

An emergency motion, backed by all three teacher unions, called for the reinstatement of teachers as at-risk workers in the vaccination schedule.

An emergency motion was debated at the conventions of all three teacher unions, which sought to commit the unions to work together to demand vaccine prioritisation for teachers. Should that fail, the motion mandated the unions to conduct ballots on industrial action, up to and including strike action.

“We are constantly being told to keep our distance and avoid crowds in order to prevent the spread of this dreadful virus. This advice is based on the fact that Covid-19 loves crowded, confined places. These are just the conditions we find ourselves in, in our schools, where there may be over 30 students with only one metre distance between them, and poor ventilation. It is difficult to see how the virus will not spread in such a setting. In spite of this, we have been told that all schools are safe and that teachers as a profession are not at greater risk from Covid-19 than any other group of workers, and should not be prioritised for vaccination. This view is not shared by the WHO, UNICEF, UNESCO or Education International, who

all call for the prioritising of teachers for the receipt of the Covid-19 vaccine. The ASTI has been strong on protecting teachers and school communities generally from this pandemic, and I hope we will continue to do so. This motion sees all three teacher unions working closely together in pursuit of a common goal for all teachers. This can only be a good development.

Eamon Dennehy, ASTI President-Elect, proposing the motion

“I’m teaching in a Portakabin with 26, 27 18-year-old men, fantastic, wonderful students working very hard. I don’t need Norma Foley to tell me that’s not a safe environment. I don’t need scientists to tell me that being inside a room with poor ventilation and 28-30 adults is dangerous. I know it’s dangerous. I’ll go back to school next week with very mixed emotions, delighted to see some of my students. But I’m scared, I’m scared I’ll contract this dreadful disease. I won’t go back in September unless I’ve been vaccinated.”

Siobhan O’Donovan, Desmond Branch



Holocaust Education Trust Ireland

The Crocus Project

An initiative of HETI

A project for young people aged ten years and over in primary and post-primary schools. Remembering all of the children who died in the Holocaust, learning about acceptance and respect for everyone.

PARTICIPATION IS FREE!

The Crocus Project is an Irish initiative introduced in 2005 to mark the establishment of Holocaust Education Trust Ireland. It started as a project for 5th and 6th Class in primary schools with 169 schools participating across the island of Ireland and by 2019/20 has welcomed 400 Irish schools and expanded into twelve European countries, with 93,000 school children participating in the project, altogether.

Engaging the children in planting the bulbs and watching them grow, provides a simple conduit for young people to learn about the Holocaust and the dangers of hatred and racism when they are allowed to fester. Crocuses bloom at the end of January, in time for International Holocaust Memorial Day. When people admire the yellow flowers, the young people explain why they planted them and what happened to the children.

As the crocus reproduces each year, we hope one day to have more than 1.5 million yellow crocuses growing across Ireland and Europe to remember all of the children who died in the Holocaust. In 2021 we would like to involve at least 1000 Irish schools.



An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills

www.hetireland.org

ELECTIONS AT ANNUAL CONVENTION 2021

Officers elected at Convention

President

Eamon Dennehy
(Aug. 2021/2022)



Honorary Treasurer
Pádraig Murphy

The election process for ASTI Vice President 2021-2022 was ongoing at the time of going to print.

Committees

Education Committee

- Richard Egan
- Edel Farrell
- Ciarán Kavanagh
- Deirdre Mac Donald
- Pauline Nagle
- Siobhán O'Donovan
- Geraldine O'Loughlin
- Seán O'Neill
- Sarah Withero

Steering Committee

- John Byrne
- Niall Duddy
- Susie Hall
- Máire G. Ní Chiarba
- Geraldine O'Brien

Sickness Benefit Committee

- David Briscoe
- Róisín Doyle
- Mary Lydon
- Margaret McGagh
- Tony McKernan
- Geraldine O'Brien
- Gerard O'Donoghue

Investment Committee

- Fiona Barry
- Patrick Collins
- Bernadette Normoyle
- Peter Quinn

Rules Committee

- Philip Irwin
- John McDonnell
- Michael McGrath
- Padraic McWeeney
- Geraldine O'Brien

Safety, Health and Welfare Committee

- Lorraine Finn
- Mary Lydon
- Deirdre Mac Donald
- Michael McGrath
- Geraldine O'Brien
- Eóin Ó hAodha

Pensions Sub-committee

- Gloria Helen
- Noelle Moran
- Pauline Nagle
- Geraldine O'Brien
- Bernadine O'Sullivan

Non-Permanent Teachers Committee

- Lorraine Finn
- Michael McGrath
- Órlagh Nic Eoin
- Cian O'Grady
- Michelle Ryan
- Kevin Wall

Redeployment Sub-committee

- Fiona Barry
- Niall Duddy
- Barry Hennessy
- Tony McGennis
- Richard Terry

Business of CEC Committee

(Only two nominees were received for the election of the Business of CEC Sub-Committee. As there are three to be elected, this matter will be dealt with at the May CEC meeting)

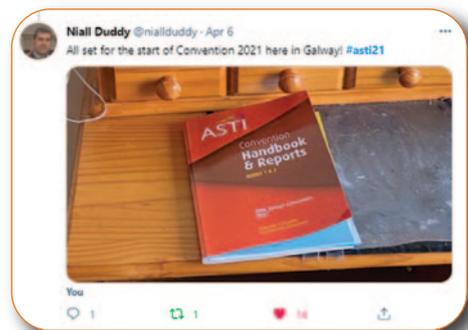
- John Byrne
- Richard Egan

Equality Committee

- John Byrne
- Maura Greaney
- Mary Lydon
- Tony McKernan
- Orla O'Callaghan
- John Sims

Trustees

- Michael Barry
- Gerard Breslin
- Bernadine O'Sullivan



MOTIONS DEBATED AT CONVENTION 2021

The following resolutions were adopted by Annual Convention 2021.

Motion 77 – Leaving Certificate Subject Specifications

That ASTI demand that the NCCA include depth of treatment and range of subject knowledge, in the design template of all future Leaving Certificate Specifications, including those currently under development. (Clare)

Motion 81 – Review of Junior Cycle Framework implementation

That the ASTI demand an assurance that a full and comprehensive review of the implementation of the Junior Cycle Framework be undertaken and published by an independent educational body prior to any further changes being proposed and/or implemented at Senior Cycle. (Dublin South Central, Galway, Mullingar)

Motion 79 – Co-operation with changes to Senior Cycle with Amendment

That the ASTI refuse to co-operate with any further changes to the Senior Cycle, until a full and comprehensive longitudinal report on the new Junior Cycle is compiled, completed and fully discussed in joint meetings involving the DES, SEC, NCCA, TUI and ASTI. (Cork South Paddy Mulcahy, Fingal)

Motion 27 – Class size

That the ASTI adopt a policy of maximum class size of 24 students for general subjects and a maximum class size of 20 students for all practical subjects. (Wexford Tony Boland)

Motion 12 – Student teachers' payment with Amendment

That, in keeping with the practice in other professions, the ASTI seek to negotiate payment for teaching work carried out by student teachers during their Postgraduate Master of Education course and seek to work with student unions and other relevant stakeholders in furtherance of this aim. (Stillorgan, Dublin South 1)

Motion 5 – Substitution for attendance at SLAR meetings

That the ASTI negotiate with the DES for the provision of full substitution cover for teachers attending SLAR meetings. (Dublin South Central)

Motion 26 – Casualisation of the teaching profession

To combat the increased casualisation of the teaching profession, that contracts for all part-time and newly qualified teachers should be for a minimum of 12 hours 40 minutes. (Kildare)

Motion 17 – Posts of responsibility

That the ASTI seek an immediate review of the current selection criteria for appointments to posts of responsibility, with a view to the reinstatement of seniority and experience as major determinants of suitability for appointment. (Dublin North West, Galway)

Motion 23 – Superannuation

That ASTI negotiate restoration of the pension scheme for all teachers to pre-2004 levels in the interest of equality. (Dublin North West)

Motion 24 – Redeployment

That a committee be formed to survey ASTI members regarding commuting, geographical proximity to their place of work and opportunities for redeployment.

The results of this survey to be used to support a demand to the DES for implementation of a nationwide voluntary redeployment scheme. (Fermoy)

Motion 44 – Supervision and Substitution

That the ASTI negotiate with the Department of Education and Skills an annual opt out from the Supervision and Substitution Scheme to be available to all teachers after 15 years' service. (Tullamore, Mullingar)

Motion 45 – Supervision and Substitution

That the ASTI negotiate with the Department of Education and Skills an opt in or opt out from the Supervision and Substitution Scheme on an annual basis. (Wexford Tony Boland, Kildare, Galway)

Motion 65 – Special Educational Needs

That, in the light of the introduction of the new Special Educational Needs (SEN) model, the ASTI approach the Department of Education and Skills (DES), with a view to providing adequate and meaningful training for all teachers without delay. (Stillorgan)

Urgent Motion from Standing Committee

Convention condemns the recent changes (issued on March 30, 2021) to the priority listing for teachers within the national vaccination programme, which were announced by Government without consultation with workers' representatives. Convention demands that the Government re-instates education staff as a priority group within the national vaccination programme, considering:

- the essential nature of their work which requires them to be in daily contact with a large number of people from a large number of households, and
- that social distancing is problematic and not assured given the crowded nature, structure and layout of our workplaces.

Convention further demands early vaccination within the overall cohort of education staff, of pregnant teachers, those in higher risk categories and those who work in special schools, special classes and home school community liaison teachers. In the event that Government does not agree to schedule by the end of the current school year, vaccinations on the basis demanded above, Convention mandates a ballot of members for industrial action, up to and including strike action.

Rule changes

Motions were debated at Convention that proposed changes to existing rules. Motion re. Rule 151: This motion amends Rule 151 of the ASTI Rules and Constitution. The motion clarifies that the ASTI Honorary National Organiser, who is elected by the Central Executive Council, holds office for one year and is eligible for re-election to serve in the role for a maximum of five consecutive years. For further details on the role of Honorary National Organiser, see ASTI Rules and Constitution. Convention passed two rule changes relating to equality. The first of these was an amendment to Rule 4 of the ASTI Rules and Constitution, which added the following as an object of the Association: "to promote equality in education and in society as a whole". The other amendments (to Rules 108 and 110) changed the name of the Equal Opportunities Committee to Equality Committee. This change was felt necessary as the concept of equality is deeper and more far-reaching than the term equal opportunities.

VOX POPS

This year, we asked some delegates to ASTI Convention:
 ‘What role should online platforms play in the ASTI post pandemic?’

Maura Greaney, Galway Branch



“A minimal role. I am writing this after the first day of our ASTI Annual Convention from an online platform. Despite best efforts it is awful. As humans we need the human interaction. We need to meet and greet and chat. The interpersonal chemistry that develops in face-to-face meetings can be lost in virtual meetings. A lot of the ‘getting to know’ takes place before and after the meeting, or just over lunch. This doesn't happen at virtual meetings. It can be more difficult to build trust and team spirit. Speakers can appear more cautious/nervous, and without the audience response it lacks spontaneity. When the camera is not used it is difficult to put a face to a name and contribution. An online platform will never provide the singsongs around Ollie on the piano...”

Helen O'Reilly, Stillorgan Branch

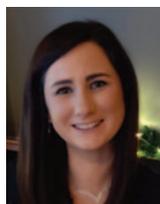


“Like so many others I am really missing the human connections that we were used to prior to this pandemic. We took for granted the chatting before and after branch meetings while we caught up with colleagues in other schools. While these branch meetings are now shorter and more efficient on Zoom, the flow of opinions and conversation can be a little curtailed. However, there are positives.

There is no need to drive home after a long meeting on a cold winter's evening if it has been a Zoom meeting, and there are members within my branch who have been able to attend the meetings this year as childcare isn't such a problem if attending virtually.

In fact, members have asked if we can take a dual approach by still providing a Zoom link-in whenever in-person branch meetings resume. This is something we will be looking into, to see if our usual meeting venue has good Wi-Fi and if it will be logistically possible.”

Jennifer Walsh, Cork South Paddy Mulcahy Branch



“I taught in Dublin for a number of years where I regularly attended branch meetings. Last summer, I returned home to Cork and secured a maths teacher position in Coláiste Éamann Rís. I was delighted to be able to attend the meetings of the Cork South Paddy Mulcahy Branch online via Zoom. These meetings were invaluable in terms of being able to discuss issues such as social distancing, the wearing of masks, Covid-19 protocols in schools and national ballots. However, it will be great to meet many of the faces in person when branch meetings can be held as normal in the future. During the year, I also attended the ASTI Leadership and Management in Post Primary School training seminar online. This was an excellent example of how relevant CPD can be delivered in a professional manner online from the comfort of one's own home, a definite plus for attending CPD on a Saturday. Online platforms can be hugely beneficial for the delivery of CPD and can open up many more opportunities for professional development when you no longer need to travel, but it is also very important that the personal interactions we experience at local branch meetings and at Convention can be restored fully in the near future.”

Fergal Canton, Kilkenny Branch



“In my opinion online platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram provide a great way to put our message into the pocket of a member. The internet allows us to work, rest and play anytime, from anywhere. If we want to engage and activate our newest colleagues, then the web's the way. It is also a channel of change, putting creativity and co-operation in the hands of the grassroots. Isn't that what a union is for? Surveys and feedback allow the union to hear what is happening on the ground in live time. So yes go for it! The union doesn't live in any one place; it flows around us and through us. Let the ASTI be with you NOW!”



Brandon Cogley, Wexford Tony Boland Branch



“Online platforms have really proven themselves during the Covid-19 pandemic as an effective way of delivering information and guidance to ASTI members. A lot of members get their information from social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter, and this push should really be continued post Covid. Also, Zoom has really shown how easy and effective it is to hold meetings or discussions virtually. Although the social element is missing, it is great to know going forward that there are still ways to connect with people and hold meetings, albeit remotely.”

Edel Farrell, Cork South Paddy Mulcahy Branch



“The Zoom platform ensured that union business could continue when committees were prevented from meeting in person. It allowed committees to meet ad hoc from the comfort and safety of their own homes. I am a member of one of the largest branches and with the introduction of online branch meetings we probably witnessed an increase in attendance. Meetings online were convenient and it meant that those who previously might not have been able to commit to being in attendance in person were now able to log on online. However, no more than Convention, you would miss the social interaction and the craic. It is good to meet colleagues and discuss issues face to face. A number of different webinars such as the LWR session, school leadership seminars, and school steward training were organised and facilitated by the ASTI over the course of the last year and again there were a number of new faces present. The online facility probably suited individual circumstances. Post pandemic, we should continue to use platforms for the purpose of webinars and information sessions, but I think for the conduct of union business it is important that an element of in-person meetings resume.”

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PROTECTING FRONTLINE WORKERS

In recent media contributions, ASTI officers and members expressed their grave concern at the decision to remove teachers and other frontline workers from the priority lists for vaccination.



ASTI General Secretary Kieran Christie interviewed by Aisling Ni Choisdealbha for Virgin Media News. Photo credit: Dave Cullen.

“Certainly, we were pressing because our members are frontline workers that they would receive early vaccination as were all other frontline worker groups at the time and the commitment we were given, we believe it should be honoured. We never made the case that we should be out in front of the medical care workers or those with vulnerabilities, but once that cohort was completed, logically other frontline workers should then have been prioritised and that’s the argument we made and that’s what we achieved and unfortunately the Government is now renegeing on that commitment. We had that in writing since February.”

Kieran Christie, ASTI General Secretary, *Morning Ireland*, RTÉ Radio 1, April 6, 2021

“Surely the prioritisation should be to get to those with higher risk of exposure.”

“Well, we would argue that we are more at risk and our members are at risk in classrooms of, say, 30 students, crowded places, compared to somebody who is working in an office. Take two 55 year olds – one in a classroom, one in an office or working from home in their bedroom – how could the risks be the same for both people? The point is very simple. A vaccination that goes into the arms of somebody who is 55 years of age working in their spare bedroom is denying one to someone working in a

crowded setting, whether it’s Gardaí working in riots or a teacher working in classrooms that are overcrowded or special needs assistants or carers. Surely the prioritisation should be to get to those with higher risk of exposure.”

Kieran Christie, ASTI General Secretary, *Six One News*, RTÉ 1, April 7, 2021

“We have pushed hard for a Leaving Cert written exam; we want that to go ahead. We will do all we can to help our students. But parents must also remember that if teachers are not vaccinated then this virus will spread in classrooms. It means the teachers will be at home self-isolating or will be very sick and that will endanger schools as well. The last thing we want to do is upset students and parents, but we do need to be put back on the list for vaccination, so it’s up to the Government, the Minister for Education, the Minister for Health to make sure that we are back on the list, not just teachers but also the Gardaí and other frontline workers.”

Ann Piggott, ASTI President, *Ireland AM*, Virgin Media Television, April 6, 2021

“Teachers have no way of controlling their environment with regard to the spread of the disease, in a similar way to medical workers. We have to go into our crowded classrooms. People who have to deal with the public should be prioritised if they are put in harm’s way. I do not think a teacher’s life is more valuable than anybody else’s, but it is just as valuable as anybody else’s. It is more at risk because of the proximity to our students ... We are reacting to a change in status regarding vaccines. That was the ‘bombshell’ that went off some days ago. We were under the impression that steps were going to be taken because of our proximity, and not just teachers: Gardaí, bus drivers, train drivers, anyone that has to be in close proximity with lots of people every day. The average teacher meets around 200 people every day.”

Eamon Dennehy, ASTI President-Elect, *The Pat Kenny Show*, Newstalk, April 6, 2021

“I am absolutely shocked and dismayed by the sudden announcement last week of the change in the vaccination schedule, where teachers have been totally downgraded from the position that had been expected, where they had expected they would be vaccinated for several months now. This has been really disturbing for teachers. We have had so many worried and anxious phone calls – this is a very serious issue for our members...We’re very unsure how safe our members are going in [to schools], because we’re meeting a large cohort of students every day for several hours. We’re not putting ourselves above and beyond anyone else who is an essential worker, but it has to be accepted that teachers are on the front line.”

Anne Loughnane, ASTI Standing Committee Representative Region 6, *RTÉ Radio News at One*, April 6, 2021



ASTI President Ann Piggott on Prime Time, RTÉ 1.

“Quand on enseigne, on ne reste pas assis devant la classe sans bouger. L’enseignement, c’est également circuler, aider les élèves. La taille des salles de classe varie énormément. Il est très difficile d’assurer la distanciation entre les enseignants et les élèves.”

“When we teach, we don’t stay in front of the class without moving. Teaching is also about moving around, helping students. The size of classrooms varies enormously. It is very difficult to keep social distancing between teachers and students.”

Barry Hennessy, ASTI member, on Radio France Internationale, April 6, 2021

“When we teach, we don’t stay in front of the class without moving ... It is very difficult to keep social distancing between teachers and students.”

“I think the vast majority of people in society are reasonable and when they think about it, they agree that you can’t ask people to stand in classrooms and not have them vaccinated. It’s not good for the teacher and it’s certainly not good for students.

I would say there is no need for action. I would say it’s a time for cool heads and smart people, and there are many smart people in our Government. Please God they’ll listen.”

Richard Bell, ASTI Standing Committee, RTÉ Radio News at One, April 6, 2021

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TEACHERS HAVE SHOWN COMMITMENT AND FLEXIBILITY

The latest news from the RSTA.

Summertime is here and the clocks have gone forward. The Covid-19 pandemic is still with us even though the vulnerable age group, including RSTA members, is currently being vaccinated, and positive results are evident. Schools are open and students are happy to be back meeting their friends. Teachers have shown commitment and flexibility in their frontline work, within the pandemic restrictions. Ongoing vigilance needs to continue as new variants develop and spread exponentially.

ASTI Convention

The RSTA was delighted to accept the invitation to address the ASTI Convention, via Zoom. It acknowledged the support of the union during the pandemic, including the work of the pensions subcommittee and negotiators in the pay talks. The inequalities within the Irish education system, which the pandemic has highlighted, were obvious from the motions discussed.

RSTA activities

With the anticipated easing of restrictions during the summer months, the RSTA intends to resume activities when permitted within the context of public health advice. Hopefully, under such circumstances, outdoor activities will commence followed by a gradual expansion of events.



Pat Younger (RSTA Treasurer, right) visits Micheál O'Neill (RSTA Secretary) and Margaret O'Neill (Wexford RSTA Branch member).

RSTA Conference

The May 2021 RSTA Annual Conference, which combines the business of the Association with a popular midweek break, has had to be postponed for the present. It remains under review and a final decision will be made by the National Committee in July, to keep within the constitutional guidelines.

The ARPS

The Alliance for Retired Public Servants (ARPS) has met regularly, via Zoom. Carmel Heneghan, the RSTA representative, has attended, and highlights RSTA interests. The committee has examined and supported Bríd Smith's Industrial Relations Bill, which is before the Oireachtas and aims to grant retired workers greater rights and representation in their pension schemes. Michael Smith, Minister for Public Service and Law Reform, has a Bill amending the Public Service and Pensions Act 2017 also before the Dáil. The ARPS is closely monitoring the progress of these Bills with the support of the RSTA.

Coinnigi slán sábháilte

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Mobile:

Email:

RSTA branch:

Annual subscription: €24
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Return to: Mrs Muriel McNicholas, Cordarragh, Kiltimagh, Claremorris, Co. Mayo.

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

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

Standing order set-up form

To: The Manager (Bank name and full address)

I hereby authorise and request you to DEBIT my account:

Account name/s:

IBAN

BIC

And to credit the account of:

RETIRED SECONDARY TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

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

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

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

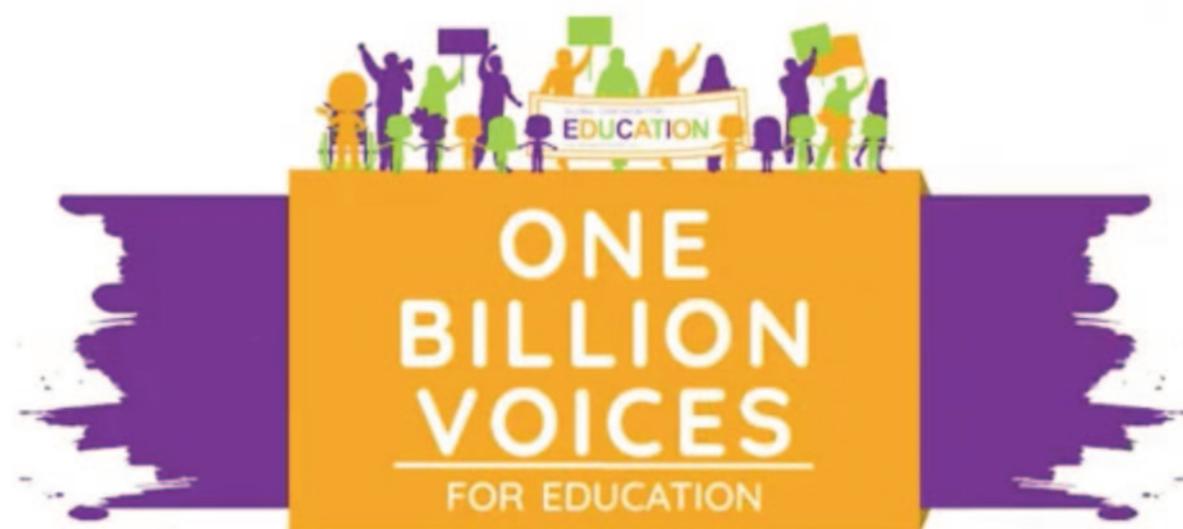
Reference: (To identify member's subscription on RSTA bank statement):

Member name

Signature: Date: ___/___/20___

ONE BILLION VOICES FOR EDUCATION

Global mobilisation to protect education is vital in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, says ASTI Assistant General Secretary, Education and Research, MOIRA LEYDON.



During the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic, an estimated 1.5 billion learners had their education stopped or interrupted. In the global south, education systems continue to face a devastating crisis, especially in those countries that were least able to mobilise resources to finance education, even in pre-pandemic times. While some students have returned to school, millions remain without access to the most rudimentary learning resources – not to mention the digital exclusion of millions of the most vulnerable children. Experts are agreed that the world faces a tipping point where a seismic reversal in education progress has begun. Thanks to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, slow but steady progress was being achieved to ensure access to equitable and quality education for all. The enrolment of girls in school had dramatically improved and millions of children were taken out of child labour and were able to attend schools. The momentum for progress has all but stalled and the consequences for individuals and communities will be life long and life changing. The prognosis post pandemic is bleak for most of the least-developed countries. The World Bank projects at least a 10% cut in education budgets due to Covid-19.

Time to mobilise for education

Notwithstanding this scenario, globally teachers are mobilising to insist that

education is protected during the recovery. Education International, the global education federation, of which the ASTI is a longstanding affiliate, is leading an alliance of education unions and civil society actors to advocate for increased financing for education. One Billion Voices for Education is the campaign name for this united global effort. The campaign is explicit on what must happen to protect education: more funding must be allocated to education – to reach at least 20% of public expenditure – and the quality of the teaching profession must be enhanced through adequate training, remuneration and respect for the work of educators.

In Ireland, the education unions have joined with leading development agencies such as Concern, Plan International, Aidlink, Global Schoolroom, and UNICEF to advocate for greater support to education. Under the umbrella body, the Irish Forum for Global Education, the ASTI, IFUT, INTO and TUI are lobbying for the Irish Government to live up to its international commitments and provide support for international education financing mechanisms. The Forum hosted a major event in January 2021 to mark the UNESCO International Day for Education. Lord David Puttnam, social entrepreneur and leading advocate for education, addressed this event. He stated that not only must education be protected in the recovery – it will shape the nature of the recovery: “Investing in education is a catalyst – not a cost. Governments cannot afford not to protect education”.

BER DEVANEY

A gentleman is one who puts more into the world than he takes out.

George Bernard Shaw



Ber Devaney with his wife Phil.

Our dear friend and colleague Ber Devaney (nó Diviney mar a glaodh air ina cheantar dúchais i nGaillimh) went to his eternal reward in March last year. He began teaching English and Irish in Patrician College Ballyfin in 1968, and taught there until he retired as Deputy Principal in 2006, having being appointed to that role in 1994.

Gaeilgeoir den chéad scoth ab ea é agus bhí scil iontach aige sa seomra ranga suim a spreagadh sna daltaí faoina chúram sa teanga. Chualathas é go minic ag labhairt í lena chomhghleacaithe sa Roinn Gaeilge agus b'álainn an fhuaim í guth ceolmhar bog Ber a chloisteáil agus a theanga dhúchais á labhairt aige. Bhí suim mhór aige i gcúrsaí Gaeilge ach níor bhrúigh sé an teanga ar aon duine – chuir sé í in aithne dó/di agus go minic, rinne an duine sin iarracht í a úsáid dá bhrí sin. Sin é an tionchar a bhí aige mar fhear agus mar mhúinteoir. Ber was originally from Forster Street in Galway City. His love of Galway and of socialising with dear friends in Liam Casey's of Portlaoise were noteworthy. He won two Galway Senior Hurling titles in 1968 and 1970, and his love of sport continued on his arrival in Laois, involving himself with Ballyfin GAA, Portlaoise Rugby and The Heath Golf Club, where he rose to become captain. Ber served as an English Examination Inspector for many years. He distinguished himself as Deputy Principal with common decency, evident in his dealings with teachers, students and parents alike. He was approachable, trustworthy and upfront in all aspects of management, and was instrumental in the maintenance and indeed strengthening of a longstanding academic and student-centred ethos there. Ber understood that he could get the very best out of his staff and students if the environment they worked in was positive and fair. He made it so by example, with the added gift of making people comfortable.

He was a devoted husband to Phil, proud father of Ronan and Aidan, and grandfather of Sam, Laura and Kate. Family always came first for Ber and he was rewarded for that with loyalty, love and admiration both inside and outside of it.

Ber's memory will endure in the hearts and minds of those who had the pleasure to know him.

Múinteoir agus Leas-Phríomhoide cneasta cineálta ceanúil; is boichte ár saol dá éagmais.

RAPHAEL SCOTT

La vie est une fleur dont l'amour est le miel.

Victor Hugo



Raphael Scott with his wife Bernie.

Every so often in life, one makes the acquaintance of someone whose character is such that it raises up those who are fortunate enough to find themselves in their orbit. So it was with our esteemed late colleague, Raphael Scott.

Raphael retired from Mountrath Community School in 2013, but will be widest remembered for his prodigious mastery of mathematics teaching from 1981 to 2009 in the renowned academic institution that was Patrician College Ballyfin. In both, he taught his enamoured maths students not only the importance of counting – but of what counted. Professional excellence was coupled with a most calm and pleasant demeanour both in and out of the classroom. He had it all.

Raphael personified student well-being and welfare long before those words entered the educational lexicon. Although soft-spoken and reserved, his instinct and ability to question authority in the sole interests of those he cared for was exemplary. He fearlessly spoke up for those who could not, driven by innate empathy and compassion.

Throughout his deserved retirement, he filled his many happy days with classical music, photography, gardening, Sliabh Bloom walks, and making cider with apples from his own orchard.

Raphael would go home for lunch every day from work while in Ballyfin where he also lived, but more for the cherished company of his beautiful, absolutely adored wife Bernie than any culinary concerns. Raphael and Bernie truly enjoyed their 43-year marriage, which was characterised by friendship, unity, respect and a deep, sincere love for each other. There was a romance surrounding the two of them that most couples could only wish for and it was ever so heart-warming to regularly see them in Portlaoise together having coffee and strolling along hand in hand. How lucky they were to find each other.

He was equally an outstanding father to his beloved Joanne and Claire. His pride at the former becoming a vet and the latter a national award-winning journalist was quiet but immense, but it was the content of their characters that most gratified him. Their successful adulthood, along with Joanne's first pregnancy, had Raphael in the 'Goldilocks' moment of his life – everything was just right. Their company and their smiles were his jouissance.

Our lives are richer for his being in them. Raphael's song may be ended but his melody will linger on.

NEW MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING RESOURCE FOR SCHOOLS

Jigsaw, the youth mental health charity, has launched the Jigsaw Schools Hub, a new resource offering schools across Ireland the latest tools and information to help them support young people's mental health and well-being.

At jigsaw.ie/schools, you will find a growing range of resources for school staff, created by the Jigsaw team in collaboration with young people, school staff, and parents. The charity recognises the demands faced by school staff during these extraordinary times, and wants to ensure that school staff have access to the resources they need to feel confident and comfortable exploring mental health and well-being with young people. The resources contribute to delivering a mental health and well-being programme as part of the school curriculum, and have been tailored to support school staff and students during the Covid-19 pandemic.

What you will find:

- an 'Introduction to youth mental health' toolkit to help school staff to explore mental health and well-being with young people in the classroom – young people will creatively learn about their mental health and well-being, including what can support and challenge mental health, ways to manage feelings, and how to seek help if and when it is needed
- ways to support and look after your own mental health – as you support young people, it is important to remember to take the time for self-care and to look after your own well-being too, and
- what school leaders can do to create a whole-school approach that supports staff and students with their mental health and well-being – you will look at what a whole-school approach to mental health means, and how can it help your school.

Find out more at jigsaw.ie/schools.

CREATIVE YOUTH CONFERENCE 2021

The Creative Youth Conference 2021 – Creativity: the connection to our future, now – is hosted online and discusses questions surrounding provision of opportunities for creative engagement by young people both within the school and their community. The main conference will be held on Thursday, May 13, from 12 noon to 2.00pm.

This event, which will be opened by An Taoiseach Micheál Martin TD, will also include contributions from the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, Catherine Martin TD, the Minister for Education, Norma Foley TD, and the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Roderic O'Gorman TD.

The main conference will also feature two panel discussions with contributions from national and international guests, including Andreas Schleicher (OECD), Michelle Cullen (Accenture), Arlene Forster (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment), Bo Stjerne Thomsen (The LEGO Foundation), author Roddy Doyle, Helene Hugel (Helium Arts), and Prof. Linda Doyle (TCD).

For more information and to register for tickets, visit <https://hopin.com/events/creativity-the-connection-to-our-future-now>.

FOOD SAFETY EDUCATION FOR SECOND-LEVEL STUDENTS

A new free e-learning education tool to teach young people basic food safety skills has been launched by safefood. Called 'safefood for life', the resource covers practical topics including basic food hygiene, food preparation, food allergens and cleaning. For those students who want to take their training further, there's also the option of an online exam, which enables successful students to receive certification recognised by the food industry.

Since 2005, more than 39,000 'safefood for life' exams have been completed, with students receiving a certificate in food hygiene endorsed by the Environmental Health Association of Ireland. This enables students to take part-time jobs in businesses where food is handled or served, and can also help as a stepping stone to a future career in the food industry. safefood has recently updated the resource to make it more suitable to remote learning at home and class-based learning in school. The design and navigation has also been refreshed to make it more engaging and informative for both teachers and students.

Designed for teachers of Home Economics, Transition Year and Youthreach, schools can access the free 'safefood for life' education resource by visiting www.safefood.net/safefoodforlife.

APPRENTICESHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science Simon Harris TD has announced plans to expand apprenticeship opportunities to reach 10,000 new apprentices registering per year by 2025, and the launch of a new Apprenticeship Action Plan.

The Apprenticeship Incentivisation Scheme, which was introduced late last year, and provides an employer grant of €3,000 payable over two years to support employers who take on and retain apprentices, has supported the recovery of apprentice registrations, which had slowed during the Covid-19 response measures. The latest figures available show that 1,941 claims have been submitted online in respect of 3,300 apprentices.

Further information on these apprenticeship opportunities, among other opportunities, may be accessed on www.gov.ie/therightcourse.

MIC THURLES – FREE SUMMER SCHOOL

Mary Immaculate College, Thurles, is hosting an online free summer school from June 15-17 as part of its postgraduate programmes in middle leadership and mentoring. Speakers will include experts on education policy and reform Michael Fullan and Pasi Sahlberg.

For more information see <https://www.mic.ul.ie/faculty-of-education/programme/graduate-certificate-diploma-m-ed-in-middle-leadership-and-mentoring>.

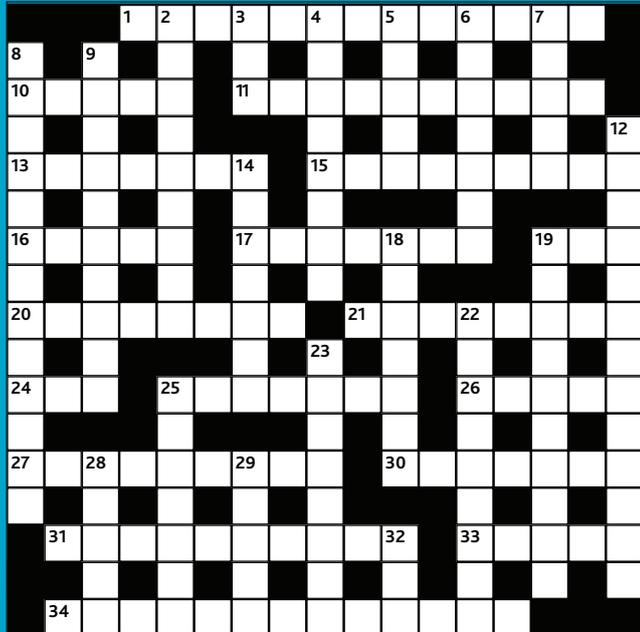


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School

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ASTI Branch

Entries to: ASTIR Crossword No. 2103,
Think Media, The Malthouse, 537 NCR, Dublin 1.

To arrive by: Friday, June 25, 2021.

ACROSS

- 1. Ferocious O. (7, 6)
- 10. Stringed instrument on the Persian Gulf, so we hear (5)
- 11. Wholesome, nourishing, sustaining (10)
- 13. A man on a mission in early Palestine (7)
- 15. Greens tie up African plane (9)
- 16. Living abroad from Essex patient (5)
- 17. Poultry, salad or people may be this for dinner (7)
- 19. Homer Simpson's exclamation (3)
- 20. Bottlewasher blew out electronic device (8)
- 21. Small South American monkey (8)
- 24. Wait in line for board game, we hear (3)
- 25. Overtum cinders to overturn law (7)
- 26. The taste of monosodium glutamate (5)
- 27. Well organised, methodical, systematic (9)
- 30. Valiant Riga native (7)
- 31. Rehydrate or saturate (10)
- 33. Could be front, back or pub (5)
- 34. Angry marine animals, we hear (5,8)

DOWN

- 2. Arteritis gets on ones nerves! (9)
- 3. Charged electric particle (3)
- 4. Might describe recipient of calculated grades! (8)
- 5. Court official who makes public announcements (5)
- 6. What Queen Victoria did in wet weather, or so we hear (7)
- 7. Small parasitic insect (5)
- 8. Uncool shelf support (6,7)
- 9. Gaseous envelope of celestial body (10)
- 12. Percussion instrument used by Pythagoras (5,8)
- 14. Causes to be loved or liked (7)
- 18. Any gated situation (7)
- 19. Economic treatise penned by Karl Marx (3,7)
- 22. Have to run, we hear, for facial hair (9)
- 23. Dirtier, muddier, nastier (8)
- 25. Challenges a judge due to a potential conflict of interest (7)
- 28. Could be factory, dance or pelvic (5)
- 29. Supply with the necessary items for a particular purpose (5)
- 32. English musician Brian ... (3)

Réiteach do Chrosfhocal No. 2102

Trasna	Síos
1. Buamáil	1. Bosa
5. Folláin	2. Andromeda
9. Sodhéanta	3. Aneas
10. Aisti	4. Languedoc
11. Honshu	5. Franc
12. Campari	6. Léanmhar
14. Alec	7. Aosta
15. Adhmhaidin	8. Naisiunach
19. Tuarascail	13. Laithreach
20. Bunc	16. Mairseáil
21. Rascail	17. Drumadoir
24. Scread	18. Banaoire
27. Aindí	22. Sinai
28. Glacadoir	23. Lágar
29. Huicear	25. Riasc
30. Locarno	26. Argo

Did you miss?

ASTI survey 12
Convention 2021 14

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