

ASTIR

ASSOCIATION OF SECONDARY TEACHERS, IRELAND

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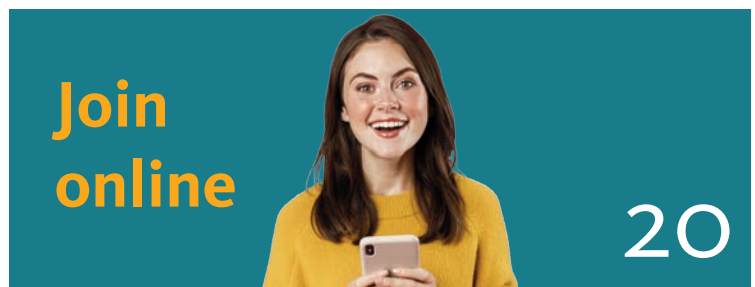
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The *ASTIR* Editorial Board is interested in receiving feedback on *ASTIR*.

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

Make teaching attractive

How to solve the teacher supply crisis in Ireland? Make teaching an attractive career – for potential teachers and serving teachers. As schools prepared to re-open this September, the ASTI revealed that there were 416 unfilled second-level teaching positions on educationposts.ie. Earlier this year, an ASTI/RedC survey found that three-quarters of school leaders received no applications for advertised posts and that half of second-level schools had unfilled vacancies.

The ASTI has outlined what is needed to tackle teacher shortages. This includes: permanent posts in place of temporary/part-time posts; reducing the length of the teachers' pay scale; addressing teacher workload; and, doubling the number of posts of responsibility in schools. In recent years, a number of measures have been introduced to alleviate teacher shortages, including extra places in teaching colleges, changes to teacher placement arrangements, changes to substitution arrangements for teachers on leave schemes and retired teachers, and a scheme to allow teachers to teach for additional hours (above the 22 hours). However, these measures do not address the attractiveness of teaching as a career and the need to retain teachers from graduation through to retirement.

The European Trade Union Committee on Education (ETUCE) campaign 'Making Teaching Attractive' highlights 10 steps to ensure that young people are attracted to, and remain in, teaching: deliver decent, competitive salaries; support an effective career start to ensure retention; ensure workload control and work-life balance; sustain safe, secure working conditions; promote professional autonomy; ensure quality professional development; embed equality and diversity; create democratic school cultures; ensure social dialogue; and, value, respect and empower the teaching profession. The above demands will resonate with second-level teachers in Ireland. Decent, competitive salaries are vital in the context of increased living costs, housing/rental difficulties, etc. Teacher workload and initiative overload have damaged morale over a number of years.

Professional autonomy and ensuring social dialogue are also highlighted by the ETUCE. This must include teachers' involvement in subject/curricula development. This is not what happened in March 2022 when the Minister for Education, Norma Foley TD, announced proposals for Senior Cycle. The ASTI has serious concerns in relation to aspects of the Minister's plan, including her intention to change the final Leaving Cert assessment procedure by introducing new teacher-based assessment.

Another proposal – that this year's students sit Leaving Cert Paper 1 in English and Irish at the end of fifth year – was deferred by the Minister following strong opposition by the ASTI and TUI. The ASTI continues its campaign to ensure that the collective voice of teachers is heard. Only practising teachers can fully appreciate what will and will not work in the classroom.

Finally, I wish to highlight our tribute to 2022/23 ASTI President Miriam Duggan RIP on page 16 of this edition of *ASTIR*. Miriam, who sadly passed away in June, demonstrated remarkable courage and grace in standing up for teachers, students and education.



Geraldine O'Brien

ASTI President

Public sector pay agreement

There is an expectation that formal engagement between the public service unions and the Government will commence in September to negotiate a replacement for the extended Building Momentum public sector pay agreement, which concludes at the end of this year. Preliminary engagements have been taking place in recent months between the negotiating team for the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) public services committee and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER). I understand that these largely concentrated on seeking to achieve a 'local bargaining' arrangement in any future public service agreement to replace the complete ban on cost-increasing claims that has been part of agreements for a considerable number of years. I understand that the public service unions have informed the DPER that they will not negotiate a new public service agreement if it contains such a restriction. This would allow for the prospect of dealing with some of the smaller but significant matters that have developed for teachers over time.

However, the enormous inflationary pressures that have undermined the living standards of all workers, including teachers, are set to dominate the discussions. The necessity to secure a pay increase for teachers to counter the increasing cost of living will be top of the list of the ASTI's objectives. Others include the end of unpaid work under the Croke Park and Haddington Road agreements, and maintaining pension parity between retired and serving teachers.

It has been widely signalled that the Government is likely to approach these negotiations by offering a mixed bag of salary increases together with the provision of budgetary supports and taxation measures. As always, ASTI members will have to consider the outcome carefully in a subsequent ballot.

Following the Minister for Education's Senior Cycle redevelopment announcement in March 2022 there have been some developments. Significantly, two groups – the Senior Cycle Redevelopment Partners' Forum and the Programme Delivery Board – have been put in place. Preparation is also taking place within the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and the State Examinations Commission (SEC). For our part we have been busy developing policy positions regarding the various elements of the Minister's announcement and forging alliances with other organisations, most particularly the TUI. We have also engaged with academia with the objective of advancing our opposition to some of the proposals. We reject the learning outcomes without depth of treatment approach to syllabus development that is in place at Junior Cycle. It has been entirely discredited at this stage and does not enjoy the confidence of teachers. And of course, we make no apology for saying that State examinations must be externally assessed. The integrity of the process must always be seen to be above reproach.

Research commissioned and published by the ASTI, undertaken by Dr Brian Fleming, clarified that issues such as initiative overload, workload and lack of capacity at school level must be addressed before major change at Senior Cycle can take place. It looks like we could be entering very interesting times.



Kieran Christie

ASTI General Secretary

ASTI autumn training 2023/24



The ASTI is offering a range of training and seminars for our members over the coming year. These events will allow members to learn from experienced ASTI officials and to engage with teaching colleagues from around the country on key issues affecting them.

School steward training

This is training for new or experienced school stewards. Participants will receive comprehensive e-packs in advance, with links to information on key aspects of the role. The emphasis in the training is on responding to current issues in your school and how best to represent your colleagues. This training is open to all school stewards.

Board of Management training

These are one-day training seminars for teacher

representatives on Boards of Management. The role of ASTI representatives on Boards of Management is a very important one and we would urge you to encourage your representatives to attend this training day, where they can hear their union's interpretation of their role and duties.

Retirement seminars

Retirement seminars are for members who are considering retirement. This two-evening programme is for members considering retirement during 2023/24. Attendance is required on both evenings. Session 1 is presented by the ASTI and Session 2 is presented by Cornmarket.

Health and safety training

This is an online evening seminar for school health and safety representatives. Training and seminars usually take place in a variety of venues around the country or online, on a number of different dates.

To find the dates and locations of the training or seminar you are interested in that best suits you, visit <https://www.asti.ie/member-benefits/events/>

Spirit of Mother Jones Festival



Pictured at the Spirit of Mother Jones Festival in Cork (from left): Anne Taylor, Ann Piggott, Mick Lynch (Secretary-General, RMT), Donal Cremin (ASTI Vice President), and Anne Loughnane (ASTI Standing Committee Regional Representative).

The Spirit of Mother Jones Festival is an annual festival and summer school dedicated to the memory of Mary Harris/Mother Jones and to inspirational people everywhere who fight for social justice.

For more information about the festival, see www.motherjonescork.com

Dublin North 1 Branch retirement event



Pictured at the recent Dublin North 1 Branch retirement event:

President of the Retired Secondary Teachers' Association: Susie Hall.

Rosmini Community School: Philip McElwee, Philomena Cherry, Jane Kelly, and Liam Bairéad.

Mount Temple Comprehensive School: Bernie Roche, Francis Hutchinson, and Jacinta Corrigan.

O'Connell Secondary School: Sean Patterson, Michael Kilbride, Mick Finnucane, Joe Rice, Brendan Greene, Larry Lohan, Sean McCarrick, Joe Costelloe, Mickey Scott, Eamon O'Dwyer, John O'Keefe, Sean Conlon, Mairead Fitzsimons, and Arthur Briscoe.

Ardsoil Rís Secondary School: Tony Daly, Anthony Daly, and Áine Ni Cheide.

Dublin North 1 Branch: Clodagh Mackle (Chairperson), Derek Hobbs (Treasurer), and Maria Markey-Greene (Standing Committee Representative).

ASTI Head Office: Miriam Duggan (then ASTI President and Dublin North 1 Branch Member), Geraldine O'Brien (then ASTI Vice President), Desmond O'Toole (ASTI IR Official), and Diarmaid de Paor (ASTI Deputy General Secretary).

Former ASTI President re-appointed to HSA board



Deirdre Mac Donald (pictured left), former ASTI President, has been re-appointed to the Board of the Health & Safety Authority (HSA). Deirdre will be Chairperson of the Board's Legislative and

Guidance Committee for the next three years.

Deirdre has a BSc and HDipEd from UCD, a MA (Health Promotion) from the University of Wales specialising in mental health, and a Postgraduate Higher Diploma in Conflict and Dispute Resolution from TCD. Her expertise and experience in occupational health and workplace health promotion have involved her in national and European research initiatives and work in this area. She has presented at national and European

level on mental health in the workplace. She has worked with a number of national organisations in training in mental health promotion and education. Deirdre's experience in the trade union movement, including working with other national stakeholders at the highest level, has informed her approach to collaboration, strategy development and implementation. Deirdre is Chairperson of the ASTI Health, Safety and Welfare Committee, a member of the ICTU Health & Safety Committee, and co-chairs its Mental Health sub-committee. Her aim is to see that all workplaces, including schools, are healthy places to work, with a particular reference to mental health and compliance with the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005.

Deirdre is also an ASTI nominee to the Council of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

ASTI attends Pride



Pictured are members of the ASTI Equality Committee, ASTI LGBTQI+ group and other union colleagues at Dublin Pride 2023.

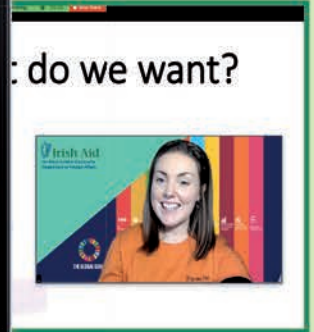
The ASTI attended the Dublin Pride parade in June, marching alongside our colleagues from other teacher unions. Anyone interested in joining the ASTI LGBTQI+ group should email lgbtqi@asti.ie.

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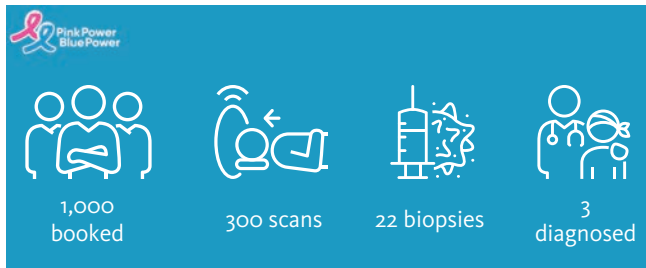
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Pink and Blue Power Programme final results



In early 2022, the ASTI teamed up with Breast Cancer Ireland and Cornmarket to launch a second Pink and Blue Power Programme for members of the ASTI Salary Protection Scheme.

Over 1,000 ASTI members booked a GP appointment for a physical assessment and education on the signs and symptoms of breast and prostate cancer. Hundreds were referred to a participating private clinic for further investigation and almost 300 scans took place (mammograms, ultrasounds, MRIs, CT scans). In addition, 22 biopsies were performed.

Unfortunately, cancer was diagnosed in three members during the latest programme (two prostate cancer cases and one breast cancer case). That is in addition to six members who

were diagnosed during the 2017 programme. As always, members were supported and guided through their journey by the Programme's consultants.

A participant in the Pink Power programme said: "I got a very surprising diagnosis of early-stage breast cancer. I was only 45. I had no symptoms at all. Only because of Pink Power it was spotted. All is clear now, thank God. My outcome could have been very different. I feel so lucky and thankful".

The aim of the Programme was to increase awareness of signs and symptoms. In the post-programme survey, 88% said they were confident to self-check after their Pink Power appointment, compared to only 36% before. In the same survey, 99% said they would recommend Pink/Blue Power to a friend.

Testimonials from participants

"Very well organised. GP was very thorough in her check and in providing information about

what to look for in terms of changes to the breast."

"It was a learning experience from start to finish."

"Brilliant initiative, something I wouldn't have got done only for how easy it was to book."

"Thankfully I got good news and results after being sent for further tests. Everything was so prompt and everyone I dealt with was so supportive."

"The appointment was timely, location was convenient and the service was professional and friendly."

"Excellent programme. I'm relatively young (46) but with family history was recommended for yearly check-up."

The Programme is now complete. Due to the volume of clinical resources required, booking was only open for a limited period. If a new campaign launches again in the coming years, eligible members will be notified directly by Cornmarket.

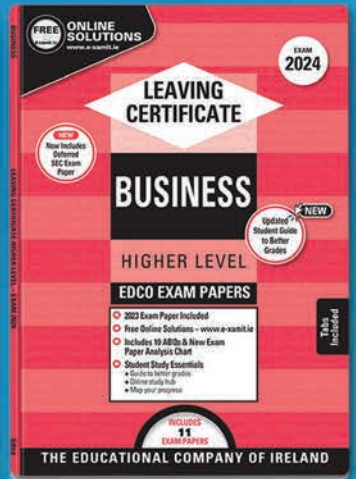
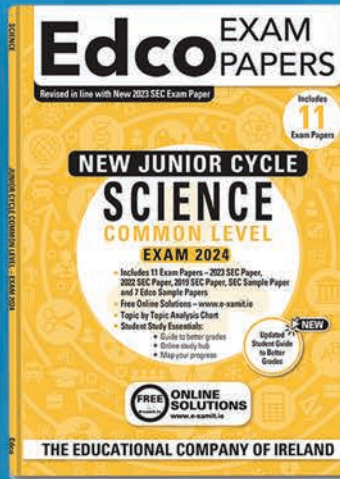
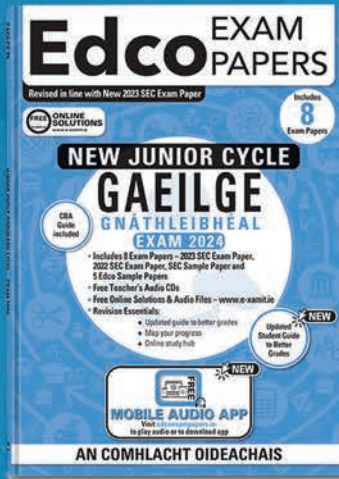
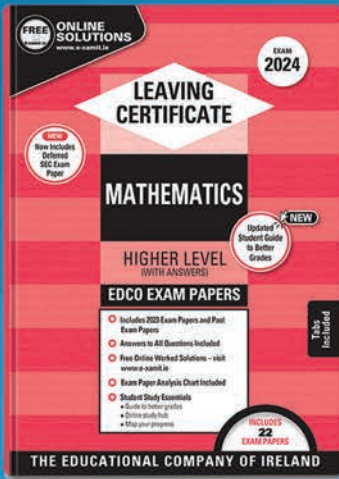
For more on breast and prostate health, visit breastcancerireland.com/cancer.ie

Kildare Branch retirement function



The ASTI Kildare Branch recently held a function for retiring members. Back row (from left): Anne Behan, Martin Healy, Paula Carbury, Olive MhicDonnacha, Geraldine O'Brien (then ASTI President Elect), Orlagh McDonnell, Ann Boyle, Lloyd Bracken, Dominica Green, Gaye McDonnell, Martha Daly, Sean Breen, David Nelson, Geraldine McDermott, Seamus Aherne, Ann Egan, Tony Haberton, Donal Mulally, Paul Marron, Adrienne Gill, and Pdraig Murphy (ASTI Honorary Treasurer). Front row (from left): Eileen Murray Cleary, Declan O'Keefe, Ann Marie McIntyre, Jennifer Little, Máire Mannion, Agnes Holmes, and Denis Dennehy. Inset: Maria Leech.

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ICTU adopts ASTI pension policy



The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) is to seek an end to anomalies in pension arrangements for Class A PRSI workers in the public sector who choose to work after retirement.

At the ICTU Biennial Conference in July, an ASTI motion calling for changes to pension arrangements for Class A PRSI workers was adopted. Currently, Class D PRSI workers who retire before 66 can resume working without their pension being affected, while Class A workers experience a reduced pension income. The ASTI motion states:

“ICTU negotiate with the relevant Government departments that changes be made to pensions arrangements for workers paying Class A PRSI who wish to work in retirement prior to reaching State Pension age, in order to bring them in line

with the pension rights of retired workers in the Class D PRSI scheme working before reaching State Pension age”.

Proposing the motion, ASTI member Noelle Moran said that many teachers who retire before 66 need to supplement their pension. “One set of retirees can work with their pensions unaffected and the other set are ‘penalised’ and lose some pension if they do the same work,” said Noelle. “Retired teachers are receiving pamphlets with their pension slips advertising teaching and new pension concessions. What is the call to Class A retirees? Please come back, but you will be financially penalised?”

Seconding the motion, ASTI President-Elect Geraldine O’Brien said: “Those workers who are unfairly impacted as a result of paying Class A PRSI contributions are aggrieved. They feel it is an injustice that needs to be urgently addressed”. ASTI delegates to the ICTU Biennial Conference spoke on a range of additional issues, including motions calling for:

- more support and protection for workplace safety representatives,
- a citizens’ assembly on the right to engage in collective bargaining, and
- the development of ICTU policy on the use of AI in workplaces.

Keeping track of absences

A reminder that all members should keep a copy of all documentation submitted in relation to sick leave, including medical certificates and social welfare certificates. It is important to maintain these records for your own reference in case of clerical errors or discrepancies that may need to be rectified at a later date.

For more information on sick leave, see <https://www.asti.ie/your-employment/terms-and-conditions/sick-leave/>

Irish Labour History Society



Moira Leydon, ASTI Assistant General Secretary and Irish Labour History Society Vice-President, photographed with President Michael D. Higgins at the 50th anniversary of the Irish Labour History Society in Áras an Uachtaráin.

West Limerick retirement event



Pictured at a recent West Limerick Branch retirement event were (from left): retiree Bernadette Normoyle, Donal Cremin (ASTI Vice President), Matthew O’Connor, and Joan Collins.



Pictured at the recent West Limerick retirement event were (from left): Matthew O’Connor, Joan Collins, Geraldine O’Brien (then ASTI President-Elect), and retiree Michael Fitzgerald.



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PENSIONS AND BREAKS IN SERVICE

Breaks in service can have a detrimental impact on a teacher's pension entitlements, says **DESMOND O'TOOLE**, ASTI Industrial Relations Official.



There has been renewed interest as of late in the role that 'continuity of service' plays in determining pension entitlements for post-primary teachers. This follows a High Court decision in 2020 concerning the preservation of continuity of service in a fee-paying school. This article examines why continuity of service is important for ASTI members and how to address the impact that breaks in service can have on a teacher's pension benefits.

Continuity of service

There are two main pension schemes for ASTI members, namely a teacher-specific scheme (the Secondary Teachers Superannuation Scheme) and, since 2013, the Single Public Service Pension Scheme, which applies across the public service and to newly appointed teachers. Teachers who are currently members of the Secondary Teachers Superannuation Scheme and its Education and Training Board (ETB) equivalent are required to maintain continuity of service within that Scheme in order to protect the value of their eventual pension benefits. This means that a member of the teachers' pension scheme cannot allow more than 26 consecutive calendar weeks to go by without making a contribution to their pension scheme from a salary paid to them by the Department of Education or an ETB. The only exception to this rule is where a teacher is on an unpaid leave of absence with the prior approval of their employer, such as a career break, parental leave, unpaid sick leave or similar.

Challenges

If a member of the teachers' pension scheme does allow more than 26 calendar weeks to go by without making a pension contribution, they risk being transferred to the Single Public Service Pension Scheme on their return to teaching. Such circumstances typically arise where a teacher moves between schools or ETBs and leaves a gap of 26 calendar weeks or more in their paid employment, or leaves teaching altogether for more than six months, for example to return to college, travel or raise a family. Such a break in service can also occur in fee-paying schools where teachers employed on temporary contracts find themselves repeatedly moved from Department pay to being paid directly by the school and back again. Any such teachers who began their teaching career before January 2013 are especially vulnerable to falling foul of the '26-week rule'. The 2020 court case mentioned above provides some protection for such teachers, including those

who started teaching in a fee-paying school before 2013, but later found themselves switched to the Single Public Service Pension Scheme.

Does this affect you?

If you are a teacher who was originally a member of a teachers' pension scheme, but are currently enrolled in the Single Public Service Pension Scheme, and think you may have been affected by the 26-week rule, please get in touch with ASTI Head Office, where we can review your employment history to see if the recent High Court decision might restore your membership of the teachers' pension scheme. Similarly, please contact Head Office if you are currently a member of the teachers' pension scheme, but are considering taking a break from teaching (other than an approved leave of absence) for more than a few months, or moving to a fee-paying school.

Your pension benefits are a vital part of the total benefits package you earn as a teacher, and preserving the value of these benefits makes a real difference to your income security in retirement. The ASTI can help to ensure that you secure the pension benefits to which you are entitled. Let us know if we can help.

An advertisement for CNB.ie Summer Colleges 2024. The top part features the CNB.ie logo in purple and white. Below it, the text 'COLÁISTE NA BHFIANN' is written in large, bold, purple letters. Underneath that, 'ROS MUC | RÁTH CHAIRN | GAOTH DOBHAIR | DROIM RÍ' is written in smaller purple letters. The word 'SAMHRADH' is written in very large, bold, purple letters. Below that, '2024' is written in large, bold, purple letters. At the bottom, there is a black banner with white text that reads 'Irish Summer Colleges 2024 now open for bookings!'. Below the banner, the text 'BOOK ONLINE AT WWW.CNB.IE' is written in bold, black letters. The bottom part of the advertisement shows a group of four young people (three women and one man) smiling and posing for a photo. They are wearing casual clothing and hats.



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HIGHLIGHTING THE ISSUES

The following opinion piece by ASTI President Geraldine O'Brien was published in *The Irish Sun* on August 13, 2023.

Teacher shortage

The Government must now get real about addressing the teacher shortage. This crisis in our schools is undermining children and young people's education, and must be addressed urgently.

The problem has been allowed to grow and expand for too long without the strong and substantive interventions necessary. A Teacher Supply Steering Group was set up at the Department of Education in March 2018. Since then, a minimalist approach has been adopted. Measures have been introduced that fall far short of addressing the problem.

Research carried out by the ASTI indicates that the impact is being felt in most second-level schools in the State. Those impacts can be very real and detrimental to the cause of providing a proper education for our young people. ASTI members have been aghast to watch the diversion of resources away from special education in some schools to plug gaps in the wider timetable. In an ASTI/RedC survey earlier this year, three-quarters of school leaders reported that they had received no applications for an advertised teaching post in the 2022/23 school year, and 81% said they had to employ at least one unqualified teacher. Other strategies used to deal with supply issues included delegating additional work to teachers in the school and reassigning special education needs teachers to mainstream classes.

Curriculum cuts

Almost a fifth of schools were forced to remove a subject or subjects from the curriculum.

And recruitment problems were compounded by the non-availability of substitute teachers, the survey found.

Since September 2022, almost nine in ten schools have had situations where no substitute teachers were available to fill teacher absences due to sick leave and other short-term absences. The ASTI represents more than 18,000 second-level teachers. The factors that are making teaching in Ireland unattractive are varied. Housing difficulties, teachers' workload, too many fixed-term contracts, the lack of promotional opportunities for teachers and the fact that

schools are starved of essential resources are all part of the mix. The Government must get to grips with housing issues affecting young workers.

Working conditions

Teachers' working conditions must be also tackled through proper investment in schools and in the teaching profession. The OECD report, *Education At A Glance 2022*, ranked Ireland 36th out of 36 countries in terms of investment in second-level education, as a percentage of GDP.

What this means is under-staffed and under-funded schools, leading to burnout and demoralisation among teachers. The failure to consult and collaborate with teachers on proposed changes to the Senior Cycle is also having an impact on teacher morale.

Norma Foley TD, the Minister for Education, announced a set of far-reaching proposals in a press release on March 29, 2022. That teachers and other stakeholders across the country found out the essentials of the forthcoming Senior Cycle redevelopment proposals in such a fashion was reprehensible.

Drive change

What other group of workers would have substantial changes to their terms and conditions of employment addressed in this way? The 2023/24 school year is an important one for the future of the teaching profession and for education in Ireland.

My objective is to follow in the footsteps of our 2022/23 President Miriam Duggan, during my term as ASTI President. Miriam, who sadly passed away in June, demonstrated tenacity and courage in standing up for teachers, students and education.

The ASTI has always accepted that education must continuously evolve and we have a long track record in the vanguard of the introduction of change. But it is teachers who best understand what will work in the classroom. It must be meaningful. It is teachers who drive change in the classroom. The deliberate side-lining of teachers can only have negative implications.

Bursary for children of ASTI members attending undergraduate courses

The ASTI will award five bursaries to the value of €1,000 each to assist students who have a parent who is an ASTI member or an ASTI staff member, in undertaking an undergraduate course in third-level education. Applications are invited from children of ASTI members or ASTI staff members currently attending or commencing full-time undergraduate third-level courses. The successful applicants will be picked by lot, which means that all entries have an equal chance of winning. The draw is open in respect of any student who:

- has a parent(s) who is a member of the ASTI or a staff member of the ASTI, and
- is commencing or has already commenced a full-time undergraduate third-level course – proof of course acceptance will be required.

How do I apply?

Entries for the bursary will open in September 2023. An application form can be downloaded from the ASTI website.

Closing date

Entries for the bursary will be open until September 30, 2023. It shall be the sole responsibility of the applicant to ensure that the completed application will be received by the due time and date.

For more information and to download the application form, visit <https://www.asti.ie/member-benefits/awardsgrants/>

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TRIBUTE TO ASTI PRESIDENT MIRIAM DUGGAN 1960-2023

ASTI members and colleagues from all parts of the education sector were joined in mourning the passing of ASTI President Miriam Duggan this June.

It was with profound sadness that the ASTI announced the passing of ASTI President Miriam Duggan in June, following a short illness bravely borne. Miriam was a teacher of English, Religion and SPHE at Rosmini Community School, Dublin. Before being elected ASTI President, Miriam was ASTI Vice President (2021/22). In recent years Miriam served as Standing Committee Regional Representative for Region 16 (Dublin North 1 and Dublin North Central branches) and was a member of the ASTI Equality Committee, the ASTI Health, Safety and Welfare Committee, and the ASTI Community and Comprehensive Schools Committee.

A true trade union stalwart, Miriam held a wide variety of roles at branch and school level including Chair, Secretary, and Organiser of Dublin North 1 Branch, and School Steward at Rosmini Community School. She also served as staff representative on the school Board of Management.

Miriam represented the ASTI on the NCCA as SPHE Subject Representative. She acquired a Masters' Degree in Leadership and Management in Education. Miriam was dedicated to serving the teachers she represented at school, regional and national level. She was involved in a number of ASTI initiatives over the years, including activities to highlight and address unequal pay and teacher workload. During her Presidency, Miriam worked tirelessly to ensure that the professional voice of teachers was heard in relation to Senior Cycle change.

Miriam was known to be courageous, fair and always kind.

Miriam is pre-deceased by her partner Desmond Fennell. We express our deepest sympathies to Miriam's family, including her loving brother Jim, sister-in-law Carol, extended family, and her many close friends, her colleagues and her many ASTI friends.

Statement by the Minister for Education, Norma Foley TD, on the death of Miriam Duggan, ASTI President:

"As Minister for Education I would like to express my heartfelt sympathies to the family, friends and colleagues of Miriam Duggan (RIP), President of the ASTI. I last met Miriam at the ASTI conference in Wexford in April, where her lifelong dedication to and passion for education and inclusion was apparent to all who attended. Miriam displayed an enormous commitment to students, to her colleagues and the work of the ASTI. She was a strong leader and a tireless advocate for the education community. The thoughts of all involved in education are with her family, friends and colleagues at this time. Rest in peace Miriam."

Statement by the INTO:

The INTO's leadership team expresses deep sorrow on the passing of our friend and colleague, ASTI President Miriam Duggan. In recent years, we met Miriam regularly and worked closely with her as the Irish education unions strived to improve the education system and to progress issues for our members. Although Miriam was unwell during her Presidential year, she continued to devote time and energy to her representative role until her final passing. On behalf of all our members, we extend our deepest sympathies to Miriam's family, friends and colleagues.

Suaimhneas síoraí dá hanam uasal.

Statement by the TUI:

It is with profound sadness that we write today to express our regret on the passing of our indomitable, formidable friend and colleague, ASTI President Miriam Duggan.

Miriam worked closely with all of us in the TUI, advocating always and vigorously to shape and drive educational reform. "As the TUI President, Miriam has been a true friend to me. As we navigated our new positions

together Miriam was always at the end of the phone to assist, advise and provide light-hearted relief when required," said TUI President Liz Farrell. "Similarly, as General Secretary it has been a privilege for me to work closely alongside Miriam. She was inspirational in her approach, and dedicated and determined in her resolve to serve post-primary teachers," said TUI General Secretary Michael Gillespie.

She bore her illness with tremendous courage and continued to work on behalf of the ASTI, and by extension all those involved in education, until her final passing. Her legacy, however, remains, and on behalf of the TUI we would like to extend our deepest sympathies to Miriam's family, friends and colleagues, and will continue to strive to carry out her wishes.

Statement by the Irish Second-Level Students' Union:

The Irish Second-Level Students' Union (ISSU) would like to pay tribute to ASTI President Miriam Duggan following her passing. Miriam was a kind and helpful friend to the ISSU and was always a pleasure to work with. Her warm personality filled any room she was in. Miriam bravely fought her illness while continuing to strongly represent and lead the ASTI with the utmost resilience and passion. She will be remembered as a strong trade unionist and advocate for teachers. We would like to extend our heartfelt condolences to her family, friends and colleagues in the ASTI. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a hanam dílis.

Statement by Fórsa President Michael Smyth:

"I was lucky to have been in attendance at the ASTI conference in Wexford only a few weeks ago, when Miriam Duggan gave her presidential address to Conference. She was inspirational and passionate. She was amazing. I was so sorry to hear about Miriam's death. I offer our heartfelt condolences to Miriam's family, friends, students and work colleagues at Rosmini Community School, and to her friends and colleagues in the ASTI. May she rest in peace."



Media coverage

The Minister for Education has paid tribute to the president of the Association of Secondary Teachers’ of Ireland (ASTI) who has died following a short illness.

Norma Foley said she met Ms Duggan at the ASTI’s conference in Wexford in April, where her “lifelong dedication and passion for education and inclusion was apparent to all who attended”.

The Irish Times, June 2, 2023

Miriam Duggan, the president of ASTI, a national secondary school teachers’ union, has died, the union announced today. Tributes were led by the Minister for Education and she was joined by the Teachers’ Union of Ireland, the Irish Second-Level Students’ Union and her school, in Rosmini, Co. Dublin, where she worked since 1982.

TheJournal.ie, June 2, 2023

Second-level teacher union the ASTI has paid tribute to its president Miriam Duggan who has died. Describing her as “a true trade union stalwart”, the union said she had held a variety of roles on ASTI committees, including serving as ASTI vice president before being elected president last year.

RTÉ News, June 2, 2023

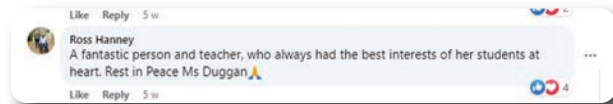
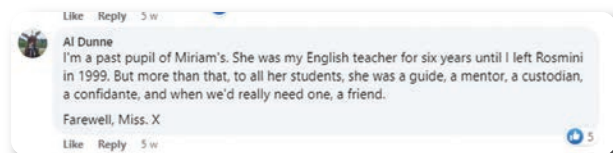
Tributes have been paid to the President of second-level teachers’ union Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland (ASTI) following her passing... During her presidency, Ms Duggan “worked tirelessly” to ensure the professional voice of teachers was heard in relation to Senior Cycle change.

Irish Examiner, June 2, 2023

She was described as “a true trade union stalwart” who was known to be “courageous, fair and always kind” in a tribute shared by the ASTI this morning.

Irish Independent, June 2, 2023

Social media





ADDRESSING PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARDS

Excessive work-related stress is a growing concern in Irish post-primary schools, as psychosocial hazards take a toll on educators' well-being and demand urgent attention, says EÓIN Ó HAODHA, Vice Chairperson, ASTI Safety, Health and Welfare Committee.

Safety, health and welfare

The ASTI has a number of important committees that contribute to the overall policy and governance of the organisation. One of these committees is the Safety, Health and Welfare Committee (SH&W).¹ We are a 10-person committee that deals with safety, health and welfare issues for teachers in their place of employment (i.e., school buildings) and we are guided by relevant legislation. The most important piece of guiding legislation is the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005.²

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 states that “hazards” in the workplace must be “identified and controlled”. This means that employers must be proactive in managing dangers to employees or hazards in their place of work. The Act prescribes the role of the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) as follows:

“the National Authority for Occupational Safety and Health shall continue in being and shall from the commencement of this Act be known as the Health and Safety Authority”.³

Guidelines

The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) has, in collaboration with the Department of Education (DOE), the State Claims Agency and the School Development Planning Initiative, issued specific guidelines for post-primary schools called *Guidelines on Managing Safety, Health and Welfare in Post-Primary Schools*.⁴ These guidelines state that a school should use the following three-step process when assessing risk:

1. Identify the hazard.
2. Assess the risk in proportion to the hazard.
3. Identify and implement the appropriate control measures to eliminate the hazard or reduce the risk.⁵

Meanwhile, hazards are identified under the following five categories:

- physical hazards, e.g., manual handling, slips, trips and falls, electricity, fire
- health hazards, e.g., noise, harmful dust, unsuitable lighting levels, vibration
- chemical hazards, e.g., glues, solvents, dyes, cleaning agents
- biological hazards, e.g., viruses, bacteria, and
- human factor hazards, e.g., work-related stress, bullying, violence.⁶

Work-related stress

When health and safety is mentioned, often the things that come to mind are “manual handling, slips, trips and falls” as listed under “physical hazards” above. However, a 2021 Primary Illness Overview by Medmark, the occupational healthcare provider for the Department and hence all post-primary teachers in Ireland, lists mental health/stress as representing 40% of all reported illnesses, while musculoskeletal illness (resulting from physical hazards) represented only 18% of illnesses. The remaining 42% were classified under ‘general’.⁷

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) describes work-related stress as being the result of psychosocial hazards in the workplace. Psychosocial hazards are defined by the ILO as the “interactions between and among work environment, job content, organisational conditions and workers’ capacities, needs, culture, personal extra job considerations that may, through perceptions and experience, influence health, work performance and job satisfaction”.⁸ Furthermore, the ILO states that: “50-60% of all lost working days [in Europe] are attributed to work-related stress and the number of people suffering from stress-related conditions caused or made worse by work is likely to increase. This represents a huge cost in terms of both human distress and impaired economic performance”.⁹

The ASTI’s guide to Safety, Health and Welfare for second-level teachers in Ireland states: “It is important to remember that psychosocial hazards (such as stress) are workplace hazards. Stress has been identified as the top workplace health issue in Ireland”.¹⁰

Experiences from the Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic brought teachers' safety, health and welfare to a new level. The Safety Health and Welfare Committee, first of all, had to grapple with the enormity of the pandemic and try to consider the challenge that it posed to our members. We also had to try and make sense of the options available to best protect and support our members in their determination to carry out their teaching during lockdowns, so that they could support their students. While remote teaching happened for a period, its limitations in terms of communication and hence education became very apparent.¹¹

Upon returning to the classroom, exceptional efforts were made by teachers to manage the quality of air, but this was at the expense of a comfortable classroom temperature.¹² In order to contend with the coldness and draughts, staff and students had to wear supplementary clothing and schools were beginning to resemble tuberculous sanatoria from a century ago! Open windows also brought about other issues in relation to noise, such as street noise in urban schools and noise from other classes and school activities.¹³ Also, constantly monitoring and physically adjusting windows that were sometimes old and stiff provided unwelcome disruption to teaching and the flow of a class.

For any inhabited building, including a school, it is particularly important to look at air quality in the context of a comfortable room temperature. The issue of room temperature is more than a guideline. Room temperature is covered in law through Statutory Instrument No. 299/2007 – Safety, Health, and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007 Section 7, which states that an employer shall ensure that: "(c) for other sedentary work, at every workstation where a substantial proportion of the work is done sitting and does not involve physical effort, a serious minimum temperature of 16°C is, so far as is reasonably practicable, achieved and maintained after the first hour's work".¹⁴

The Covid pandemic presented a circumstance whereby air quality was of greater importance than room temperature. With the pandemic behind us, it is clear that adequate air quality (not legislated for) together with adequate room temperature (legislated for) is very difficult to achieve in most Irish secondary school buildings. We cannot be certain that the SARS-CoV2/Covid-19 pandemic or a version of it will not return. A different serious viral infection could also present itself in the future.¹⁵ Viral infections present themselves during mid-winter in Ireland and consistently put the Irish health system under severe pressure. This was very noticeable in the run-up to Christmas 2022.¹⁶

During the pandemic, teachers were issued with confusing and perhaps impossible objectives. They were asked to balance air quality with adequate heating while simultaneously carrying out their teaching duties. This was a clear example of a workplace stressor or 'psychosocial hazard'. This past winter, it would appear that the CO₂ air quality monitors were forgotten about and we went back to prioritising heat in our classrooms. In the run-up to Christmas 2022, the economic cost in terms of lost teaching days from teachers and lost learning days from students became very apparent to teachers because of this situation. The ASTI and its SH&W Committee are hopeful that the laws will change to afford all workers a legal right to fresh air in their workplaces in future.

Assessment of work conditions

While it is one thing to have laws and legislation in place, these are of no use if inspections and oversight are lacking. As set out in the Education Act

1998,¹⁷ the education system in Ireland is organised as follows: Irish schools are funded by the Oireachtas, managed by individual Boards of Management and operated by teachers, while the curriculum is set and reviewed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). The link between these bodies is the Inspectorate:

"(3) The functions of an inspector shall be:

(a) to support and advise recognised schools, centres for education and teachers on matters relating to the provision of education"

"...evaluate the organisation and operation of those schools and centres and the quality and effectiveness of the education provided in those schools or centres, including the quality of teaching and effectiveness of individual teachers;"¹⁸

Teachers are always wary of an inspection, and especially because the main focus appears to be on "the quality of teaching and effectiveness of individual teachers". Arguably, the context in which teaching takes place and certain "matters relating to the provision of education" play a minor role. Issues such as air quality and physical infrastructure are not assessed by the Inspectorate against any measurable criteria, if at all. As has been demonstrated above, the quality of the physical infrastructure is the context in which teaching takes place, and when this is inadequate it creates psychosocial hazards that make the job of teaching very stressful.

The Inspectorate is staffed almost entirely by former teachers. While teachers are very skilled in a broad range of topics, there are limits to their expertise on some matters. However, the Inspectorate may also include "persons who hold qualifications as psychologists or who have other expertise, including expertise in the education of students with special educational needs".¹⁹

There are many areas in which measurable criteria can be established for the purposes of inspection in school buildings. For instance, the Department of Education has set out physical specifications for post-primary classrooms.²⁰ Schools are regularly inspected by fire safety specialists to identify fire hazards and ensure compliance with established fire safety criteria to "eliminate the hazards or reduce the risk".

We outlined at the start of this article that 40% of all reported illness among post-primary teachers in Ireland falls into the category of mental health/stress, yet there is no attempt made to identify, assess, and eliminate the hazard or reduce the risk. The old adage states that 'what's measured matters'. While our competence as teachers is frequently measured, assessed and inspected by such bodies as the National Framework of Qualifications (www.qqi.ie), the Teaching Council (www.teachingcouncil.ie) and the Inspectorate, the context in which teaching takes place – that which teaching and learning depend upon – must also be measured, assessed and inspected.

All whole-school inspections need to report upon safety in the school. There needs to be more frequent inspections of the education sector by the statutory agency that has responsibility for the workplace – the Health and Safety Authority. This will protect teachers from hazards, including psychosocial hazards.

Footnoted numbers above refer to references. A full reference list is available on the ASTI website: <https://www.asti.ie/member-benefits/publications/astir/>.

NEW TO TEACHING – JOIN ONLINE

For new entrants to teaching this year, joining a union has never been more important.

Welcome to the teaching profession! As you begin your teaching career, the ASTI is here to support you. Membership of the ASTI offers you a say in the development of education and teaching, as well as a career-long support network.

What the ASTI does

The ASTI is a registered trade union with over 18,000 members, which promotes the interests of second-level teachers, seeks to improve their salaries and conditions of employment, and regulates relations between members, their employers and the Department of Education. ASTI members are represented on educational boards, committees and public bodies. As a member, you will have access to the ASTI's professional information and advice service.

What are the benefits of joining the ASTI?

Make sure your voice is heard

ASTI members decide on the policies of the union through its democratic structures, which begin at branch level. You can express your opinions by being active at branch level. Each ASTI member is a member of a branch operating in the area in which they work or live. Members are encouraged to attend branch meetings to discuss professional, educational and trade union issues.

The 56 branches of the union are organised into 18 regions. Representatives from each branch are elected to the Central Executive Council (CEC) and serve as delegates to Annual Convention. Representatives from each region are elected to Standing Committee. CEC meets at least twice a year and is the governing body of the ASTI when Annual Convention is not in session. When CEC is not in session, the Standing Committee meets on a monthly basis to look after the business of the union.

Professional information and advice

Members can contact ASTI Head Office, based on Winetavern Street in Dublin, for information and expert advice from industrial relations specialists with understanding and experience of the second-level education sector. These specialists can offer professional representation if necessary. The ASTI can provide access to expert legal advice on matters arising out of their duties. Contact should be made with ASTI Head Office before taking legal steps.



Representation and negotiation

The ASTI represents its members on a range of bodies and negotiates on their behalf at national, regional and school level.

Training and seminars

The ASTI holds regular training courses and seminars to support its members. Regular seminars on topics such as starting out in teaching, leadership, special education needs and retirement, assist members at all stages of their careers. Regular trade union training supports ASTI representatives, including school stewards, Board of Management representatives, health and safety representatives, and branch officers.

Financial benefits

As an ASTI member, you may be entitled to grants for optical, dental or illness treatment, subject to certain conditions, through the ASTI Sickness Benefit Fund. Optional financial services for ASTI members are also available from Cornmarket, such as the ASTI Salary Protection Scheme, the Teachers' Car Insurance Scheme, home insurance discounts and benefits, and the Cornmarket Financial Planning Service.*

Understanding your terms and conditions of employment as a new teacher

As a new teacher, there are some key terms it is important to be aware of as you begin your career. If you have any questions, you can call the ASTI for further information and advice.

Contracts

Before signing a contract, teachers are advised to carefully examine the contract and to consult with their school steward and/or ASTI Head Office. The nature of the contract being offered should be made clear and in writing to the teacher, including the status of the contract (permanent/fixed-term), duration, subjects, number of hours and reasons for a fixed term. Full-time teachers are contracted to teach up to 22 hours per week.

There are many different types of teaching contract and it is important that you understand what type of contract you have.

Non-permanent/part-time teacher

As a non-permanent or part-time teacher, you may be a casual part-time teacher, a non-casual part-time teacher, a regular part-time teacher or a fixed-term whole-time teacher.

Contract of indefinite duration (CID)

A CID gives a teacher the same job security as other permanent teachers. However, a CID holder's salary is based on the numbers of hours spent teaching (which can be less than full hours).

For more information about the types of contracts, visit <https://www.asti.ie/your-employment/terms-and-conditions/contracts/>

School-paid teachers

Some schools are in a position to employ teachers privately. All queries regarding contracts should be referred to ASTI Head Office.

Salary scales

Teachers are paid according to an incremental salary scale and may be entitled to extra allowances. Since 2010, two salary scales operate for teachers in second-level schools in Ireland. Through our Equal Pay for Equal Work campaign, the ASTI has vigorously sought to reinstate parity for lesser paid teachers and has reduced the disparity considerably.

For more information on teachers' salary scales, go to the ASTI website at www.asti.ie/your-employment/pay/salary-scales

Employee Assistance Service

Teachers paid by the Department of Education have access to a free, confidential service, which provides telephone and direct one-to-one counselling on a nationwide basis. The service can also be used by teachers' spouses, partners or parents, and by their children aged 16-23 or until conclusion of full-time education, whichever is earlier.

The freephone number is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year at: 1800 411 057. Alternatively, you can WhatsApp or SMS 'Hi' to 087-369 0010, or contact: eap@spectrumlife.ie.

Contacting the ASTI

The most immediate point of contact for ASTI members is your elected ASTI representative in your school, the school steward. Make sure to approach your school steward in the first instance if you want any advice or have any concerns. If you need to contact your industrial relations official in ASTI Head Office, you can call 01-604 0160 or email info@asti.ie.

MyUnion

ASTI members have access to a section of the ASTI website called MyUnion. This area gives you convenient access to information about your ASTI membership, including contact details for your local and national elected representatives and Head Office staff. You can also edit your personal information and choose to receive key publications digitally.

*The ASTI has no responsibility for these schemes or their administration. All enquiries about them should be made directly to Cornmarket.

How to join the ASTI online

Go to: <https://www.asti.ie/join/>

Department of Education-paid teachers, ETBI-paid teachers and school-paid teachers

Before you begin the 'join online' process, make sure you have the following to hand:

- payroll number,
- Teaching Council registration number,
- names of ASTI proposer and seconder (ideally your proposer and seconder will be from your local branch, e.g., school colleagues), and
- membership numbers of proposer and seconder (this is not essential, but having these numbers helps us to process your application more quickly).

Student teachers – for PME students or students in a teacher training college/university

Before you begin your 'join online' process, make sure you have the following to hand:

- name of degree qualification,
- name of third-level institution and year of graduation, and
- teaching practice – school name (if known).

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WHY SHOULD TEACHERS JOIN A UNION?

Experienced teachers and trade unionists explain why they think membership of your trade union is so important.



I realised very early in my career that the ASTI would be a support to my practice as a teacher. In my own Clare Branch, a compelling reason for joining the ASTI today would be its active involvement in curriculum development. I think every teacher in the country recognises how issues relating to the new outcome-based Junior Certificate affect us and our students. Through the local branches, these issues are being brought directly to the NCCA [National Council for Curriculum and Assessment] and to the Minister's [Minister for Education] attention.

The ASTI has stood firmly in protecting its members for decades; it has fought for and succeeded in gaining CIDs [contracts of indefinite duration], it has protected our work conditions and salaries, and

continues to prioritise the fight for equal pay.

I have found over the years that if I avail of opportunities created at branch level for subject practitioners to analyse and discuss developments in their subject, it's been both socially and professionally a huge benefit. As an Art teacher, and sometimes a CSPE teacher, it's always good to have opportunities for these conversations and to see how things are done in other schools, sharing ideas and resources.

Through being school steward in my early career and attending ASTI Convention for many years, I have formed friendships in schools across the country with people I can call for objective advice or support. This is an added bonus of being an active member.

As an NQT [newly qualified teacher] becoming a part of the ASTI community, you can contribute to shaping the future of education in Ireland while enhancing your own professional journey.

Mary Moran, St Joseph's Secondary School, Tulla, Co. Clare



Welcome to your career in teaching! Being a teacher is a fabulous job. There are not many other occupations that can offer the same sense of purpose, challenge and variety. But you are joining the profession at a difficult time. There are many developments in the world that at first sight may seem far away from your work, but they come directly into your classroom every day. From global conflicts, to the climate crisis, to AI, your classroom looks different as a result. And as a teacher, you have to respond, to make sure every child gets the quality of education you came into teaching to provide. It isn't easy.

At the same time difficult economic conditions also shape your world – determining the resources you have in your classroom, the value of your salary at the end of

the month, and whether or not you can afford the home you need to rent or buy. These are just some of the challenges every new teacher has to face today. There are many others. As individuals the issues can appear daunting, and we can feel powerless. But you never have to face these things on your own, when you are a member of the union.

Your union is your voice. It makes sure that the collective voice of the teaching profession is heard on all the important issues that shape your work – from working conditions in your school to Government policy on key education matters. By joining together with your colleagues your voice is amplified – and you can make change happen. It is the only way to make real change happen. Every teacher needs a voice that is independent, democratic and collective. The union gives you that voice. Join the union and make sure your voice is heard.

Prof. Howard Stevenson, University of Nottingham UCU Branch President and ASTI Annual Convention 2023 guest speaker



Recognising that newly qualified teachers face many challenges in their first years of employment, including short-term or low-hours contracts, and very high rents or long commutes, paying for ASTI membership can be low down on their priority list.

However, I strongly recommend that every teacher that stands in a classroom today should ensure that they have the protection afforded by trade union membership from day one of their teaching careers. Society has changed dramatically in recent times and the risk of frivolous or vexatious allegations against teachers has increased. If such a complaint is made against you, you will be very glad of the support and advice provided by the very experienced and capable industrial relations officials in ASTI Head Office. They

have years of experience in dealing with principals, Boards of Management and the Teaching Council. The fact that parents, if unhappy with the response of a school principal, can complain directly to the Teaching Council, is of huge concern to practising teachers. Membership of the ASTI is of immense benefit should such a complaint be made against a teacher. The ASTI has a tremendous success rate of getting such complaints dismissed. For the small number of cases that are deemed sufficiently serious to require disciplinary sanctions, the ASTI provides legal assistance to its members for such disciplinary hearings. The annual membership subscription for a full-time teacher of up to €405, which equates to €7.78 per week, is money very well spent. I strongly advise all teachers to join the ASTI, which offers a dedicated professional service solely to post-primary teachers. The first year of membership as a qualified teacher is free of charge.

Michael McGrath, ASTI Honorary National Organiser

GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT



“President of the Association of Secondary School Teachers Ireland (ASTI) Geraldine O’Brien has congratulated students receiving their Leaving Cert results, calling it ‘a day to celebrate the beginning of the next phase of their lives’.

Ms O’Brien said a key learning from the pandemic is that the integrity of the Leaving Cert must be protected and that any changes must be built upon fairness for students and trust in the system.”

Geraldine O’Brien, ASTI President,
RTE.ie, August 25, 2023

“While the idea of a ‘Dublin allowance’ may sound good on paper, it introduces a third tier in the salary scale. If teachers were paid adequately there wouldn’t be a problem. While housing may be the issue in Dublin, commuting is also very expensive for teachers in rural areas. They often have very long commutes to and from work. Their costs are also increasing. Instead of giving a Dublin allowance, why not increase the pay of all teachers? Different geographic areas will face different challenges.”

Geraldine O’Brien, ASTI President,
The Last Word with Matt Cooper, Today FM, August 1, 2023

“I would point out that there are about 120,000 teachers registered with the Teaching Council and only 70,000 teachers are required in the public education system. So there are 50,000 people who are qualified, and they’re not all in Dublin, they’re not all in Canada. Many of them are still in this country but are opting to take on another career. Teaching as a career needs to be looked at and rebuilt and rebalanced. And I’m talking there about things like rebuilding of the promotional opportunity within teaching, and the length of the pay scale needs to be addressed.”

Kieran Christie, ASTI General Secretary,
This Week, RTE Radio 1, August 20, 2023

“Yesterday, of the 400+ teaching positions advertised on the educationposts.ie website, only two were permanent. They’re full-time, but they’re not permanent. We’ve been scathing of Minister Foley in relation to that, because Minister Foley could have taken action in relation to that. She could have sat down with the teaching unions and set up some incentive for teachers abroad in Canada or in Dubai to return to a permanent teaching post. She didn’t step up to the mark with that, a grave error in our view.”

Kieran Christie, ASTI General Secretary,
Ireland AM, Virgin Media One, August 16, 2023



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ASTI CELEBRATES OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTIONS

Each year, the ASTI Awards celebrate the achievements and contributions of ASTI members around the country.



Mary Dowling Maher receiving the Honorary Life Membership Award, pictured with then ASTI President-Elect Geraldine O'Brien (left) and ASTI General Secretary Kieran Christie.

Teachers from all over the country were honoured by the ASTI in May for their outstanding contributions both inside and outside the classroom. The annual ASTI awards ceremony, held in the Gresham Hotel, Dublin, celebrated those who have provided invaluable service to the teaching profession and the union.

Honorary Life Membership

This award is given in recognition of a member who has given exceptional service to the ASTI, displayed outstanding leadership and served as an inspirational role model. This year's recipient was Mary Dowling Maher.

Mary Dowling Maher was ASTI President from 1993-94. At this time, Mary was the sixth woman to take up the role of President since the foundation of the union in 1909. As a mother of two young children, Mary was keen to advance equal opportunities for women within the union, and in education and society. Indeed, a job-sharing scheme for teachers, which Mary championed, was introduced into schools shortly after she took over the presidency. The ASTI, with Mary at the helm, then fought and won a case for a teacher who was denied her post of responsibility because she opted to job share. Mary would later run 'Women in Leadership' courses on behalf of the Department of



Recipients of the PJ Kennedy Award. From left: James Breslin, Geraldine O'Brien (then ASTI President-Elect), PJ Kennedy Award recipients Dan Maloney and Rosemary Flynn, Kieran Christie (ASTI General Secretary), and Breda Lynch (ASTI Executive Officer: Industrial Relations).

Education, using her own experience as a union leader and school principal.

As President, Mary represented teachers at a time when the Irish education landscape was experiencing significant change. Mary was the voice of the classroom teacher calling for suitable school buildings, improved staffing levels, greater investment in education, and proper promotional structures in schools. Mary was ahead of her time in putting teachers' health, safety and welfare on the public agenda. During her time as President, she called for a teacher welfare service. Despite commitments from Government, it wasn't until 2006 that the Employee Assistance Service for Teachers was finally established.

As a science teacher, Mary helped to secure new arrangements for the safe disposal of hazardous chemicals in schools. She campaigned for the pension rights of 5,000 ASTI members who had no pensions, and ensured that second-level teachers were able to access the same early retirement options as primary school teachers.

PJ Kennedy Award

The PJ Kennedy Award is awarded to retired members who have given valuable service to their branch or to members of their branch, such as a long-serving and diligent service as a school steward or branch officer.

This Award recognises the work of the particularly committed branch-level activists who do this work year after year to an exceptional standard. This year's recipients of the PJ Kennedy Award were: Oliver Burns, Michael Casey O'Donovan, Marcella Dillon, Rosemary Flynn, Michael Horgan, Mary Hussey-Shee, Dan Maloney, Mark O'Sullivan, and Mary Quinn.

Thomas MacDonagh Award

The Thomas MacDonagh Award is awarded to members who have given distinguished service to the ASTI. This outstanding service should include representing members either within the structures of the ASTI or on an outside body, and taking an action or position that generates significant benefits for other ASTI members. The award recognises the outstanding service of activists who devote their time to representing their colleagues and standing up for teachers' working conditions. This year's Thomas MacDonagh Award recipient was Chris Hind.

For more information on the ASTI Awards, see <https://www.asti.ie/member-benefits/awardsgrants/>. Further awards, including the ASTI Achievement Awards and Bursary recipients, will be profiled in future issues of *ASTIR*.



Chris Hind (centre) receiving the Thomas MacDonagh Award, pictured with then ASTI President Elect Geraldine O'Brien and ASTI General Secretary Kieran Christie.



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MEET THE NEW ASTI PRESIDENT

New ASTI President Geraldine O'Brien says that she has always wanted to be a teacher, and wishes to prioritise improving the attractiveness of teaching as a profession during her presidency.

Where do you teach?

I teach Home Economics, Computing, CSPE, and SPHE in St Joseph's Community College, Kilkee, Co. Clare.

Where did you go to second-level school?

I went to primary and second-level school in Drumkeeran, Co. Leitrim, and I had a very happy time in both primary and secondary school. The teachers who taught me were absolutely fantastic. In second year, in January, I had a burst appendix and I was out of school for the remainder of second year. The following year I was also out of school from October to January as I needed to have further surgery. When I returned to school to do the Intermediate Certificate, in third year, the teachers could not have been more helpful or more accommodating; they helped and supported me in every way.

I initially didn't have a high enough grade in Irish when I did my Leaving Certificate so I repeated in the Ursuline in Sligo. I also have many happy memories from my time there. I was very lucky in my experiences with school.

Did you always want to be a teacher?

I always wanted to be a teacher. However, initially I wanted to do primary school teaching and a requirement was a very high grade in Irish for entry to primary school teacher training. While I got good points in my first Leaving Cert, I didn't have the grade in Irish, so I went to the Gaeltacht that summer. It was the best thing that ever happened to me because I then realised that primary teaching wasn't for me. I preferred second level, teaching students at an older age.

Why did you become involved in the ASTI?

I became involved in the ASTI at the start of my career as a very young teacher when my school was involved in an amalgamation with another school in the town. As luck would have it, I was school steward at the time of the amalgamation. I was so impressed by the industrial relations official who attended a number of ASTI staff meetings and I learned so much from her that I got very involved at branch level and quickly realised the importance of the ASTI at school, branch and national level.

As I became more involved, I saw more benefits of membership: meeting up with my colleagues, meeting teachers teaching the same subjects, attending events about the future of education, and having a say about the future of education. All of this has benefited me personally and professionally.



What would you say to teachers starting their career this September?

I would strongly advise all teachers starting their career this September to join the ASTI as soon as possible. Teachers can be assured that their union membership provides them with advice, support and guidance at all times.

The ASTI has been to the forefront in protecting and advancing teachers' conditions. For example, we took strike action on new entrant pay and there has been much progress as a result. We sought and achieved non-class contact time for the new Junior Cycle curriculum.

Teaching is a highly unionised profession. You will find that being a member of the ASTI means you will have a network in your school and colleagues who will support and guide you as you begin your teaching career.

Teaching is a highly unionised profession. You will find that being a member of the ASTI means you will have a network in your school and colleagues who will support and guide you.

What are your priorities for your year as ASTI President?

My three priorities are addressing the decrease in the attractiveness of teaching, which is fuelling teacher shortages, workload, and Senior Cycle change.

The Government must get real about addressing the factors that are making teaching in Ireland unattractive. While the teacher shortage problem goes back several years, it is now at its worst. Housing difficulties, the cost of living, teachers' workload, and the fact that schools are starved of essential resources are key reasons behind this.

Excessive workload has a huge impact on teachers' health, safety and well-being, and undermines teachers in their roles. In Ireland, we have large class sizes and teachers spend more time in their classrooms teaching than the OECD and EU average. Teachers need smaller classes and reduced class contact time. The Government must invest in education by reducing class size. Ireland is bottom of the league when it comes to spending on second-level education.

A major issue for the next school year is the proposed changes to the Senior

Cycle. Teachers best understand what will work and what will not work in the classroom. It is teachers, not policymakers, who drive change in the classroom. Teachers are the agents of change. It is vital that the Minister collaborates with the teaching profession on changing Senior Cycle, so that students can really benefit.

The Government must invest in education by reducing class size. Ireland is bottom of the league when it comes to spending on second-level education.

What positions have you held in the ASTI?

As a member of the ASTI for over 30 years, I have held many positions within the union. I have been school steward and served in all of the positions in my branch apart from treasurer.

What advice would you give to school stewards about asking new members to join the ASTI?

My advice would be the same as I do with any new teachers joining our school. Initially, I ask them if they would like to join. I outline the benefits of joining the

ASTI and give them an application form. If they don't say yes right away, that's no problem. However, I make sure that I continue to help them, and invest time in them. I help them with any queries they have and every few weeks, I check if they've thought any more about joining the ASTI. After a couple of weeks, or even months, they will know from the help I have given them that the ASTI can offer so much guidance, support and solidarity. We really do want to help and support teachers starting out in their careers. They want to have access to even more of that, so they join the ASTI.

What is your proudest moment to date as an ASTI member?

It was assisting a member in securing their CID. Working in solidarity with others in your union is an empowering experience.

What are your interests outside of teaching?

I enjoy travel. I've done quite a bit of international travel. I enjoy visiting museums, particularly art museums. I wouldn't be good at art but I find it fascinating: the techniques used, the light and dark and shading. Maybe it's because my brother was very, very good at art and I loved to watch him draw, to see his ability to capture someone so well in a quick sketch. I also love a long hike and a good long walk. It's very beneficial to clear the head. I like reading too, but time for leisure reading is scarce at the moment of course.



SparkED
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SparkED TY Programme

SparkED is a youth leadership programme that empowers young people by teaching them valuable life skills. Our online platform allows the students to access all our workshops and extra resources remotely. Students will be able to complete interactive workshops on our website sparked.ie, in areas such as CV Skills, Presentation Skills, Interview Skills, Time Management and Study skills, Computer/ IT Skills and Volunteering.

Our programme includes:

- Access to all pre-recorded workshops and resources through creation of a personal account
- Access to multiple zoom live workshops throughout the year
- Access to our expanding career guidance section which includes college course guides from college students, career advice, videos from professionals in different careers, Leaving Cert subject guides and 'how to' guides

■ Interactive segments for the students including feedback on their CV

We hope to give a fresh, student perspective on life after secondary school. SparkED is coordinated by college students volunteering with Enactus UL, which is a social entrepreneurship society based in the Kemmy Business School, University of Limerick.

The programme costs just 5 euro per student. We have also partnered with Uber this year to sponsor DEIS schools to receive our programme free of charge.

If your school want to get involved email us at sparkednactus@gmail.com and check out our website at <https://sparked.ie/>

A warm welcome to all retired second-level teachers



My dear friends,

I hope you all had a wonderful summer as we look forward to returning to the meetings and social activities of our RSTA branches all around the country. No doubt every staffroom will be missing former colleagues, who have now embarked on a well-deserved retirement. We would like to extend a really warm welcome to all retired second-level teachers to join the RSTA. I would also appeal to their former colleagues, who may still be in contact with them, to encourage them to do so. Due to the strictures imposed by the General Data Protection

Regulation (GDPR), schools cannot share information on retirements with us, so we are really dependent on teachers who have friends and colleagues who are retiring to spread the good news that the RSTA represents retired second-level teachers and works tirelessly to defend their pensions and interests. I would also like to wish all serving teachers a fulfilling and successful year as they return to the classroom.



Susie Hall (RSTA President).

Susie Hall
RSTA President

RSTA membership application/renewal

Name:

Address:

Home phone:

Mobile:

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RSTA branch:

Annual subscription: €24
Annual renewal date: September 1

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

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

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

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

Standing order set-up form

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

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

Member name

Signature: Date: ___/___/20___

FÉILTE 2023 – a celebration of education and teaching excellence



FÉILTE 2023, the Teaching Council's annual Festival of Education in Learning and Teaching Excellence, will be held in Holy Family Junior and Senior Schools in Portlaoise on Saturday, October 7.

The theme for FÉILTE 2023 is 'Creativity in Action', which will be explored through various workshops, showcases, panel discussions and other activities led by fellow teachers.

The programme of events will be available on www.teachingcouncil.ie. Updates will also be available on the Teaching Council's Facebook, Instagram and X (formerly known as Twitter) pages.

Tickets can be purchased online. There is a fee of €10, which is refunded upon attendance at the event. This fee is charged to allow the organisers to manage attendance numbers on the day for health and safety reasons.

To purchase tickets, visit <https://www.eventbrite.ie/e/feilte-2023-tickets-679296162107?aff=oddtcreator>

For more information, contact communications@teachingcouncil.ie

Resources on co-operative societies

Formed in 1977, the Society of Co-operative Studies in Ireland (SCSI) is a Friendly Society whose aim is to promote co-operatives in Ireland. The SCSI has developed a set of materials to promote awareness of co-operatives among secondary students. The content includes:

1. An overview of the impact of co-operatives in addressing issues facing Irish society.
2. An examination of the different categories of co-operatives, e.g., worker, community, producer, and multi-stakeholder. This examination will examine the key distinguishing factors between each of the categories.
3. The distinguishing features of a co-operative compared to an investor-owned business.
4. An overview of the key steps in establishing a co-operative.
5. The reasons for establishing co-operatives will be examined.

The content can be delivered employing an interactive approach using a number of group exercises and videos. The manual and videos can be used across a wide range of subjects, and highlights the role of co-operatives in contributing to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The manual can be accessed at <https://tinyurl.com/4ytet8bs>. For further information, contact gerard.doyle@tudublin.ie.

New Junior Cycle short course in creative dance

The Irish Ballet Teachers Association (IBTA) has launched a Junior Cycle short course in creative dance and movement.

This course has been designed to address the holistic well-being of young learners and will enable students to appreciate the importance of regular health-enhancing physical and creative activities. Students will learn to make informed choices about incorporating these activities into their daily lives, promoting lifelong habits of well-being. The course places a strong emphasis on student-centred teaching and learning, granting students creative control and empowering them to develop their own individual and team-based dance activities. The course comprises four strands: dance and movement basics, dance and music appreciation, creative choreography, and a creative team project. These strands align to learning outcomes and support goals of developing an inclusive and accessible course. A pilot programme commences in September 2023 with full implementation into the Junior Cycle in September 2024.

For more information, please contact the IBTA Education Officer at education@ibta.ie

New resources on the Famine

The Department of Education has announced the development of a new resource for primary and post-primary schools, which provides access to curriculum-linked resources and guidance to support teaching of the Great Irish Famine.

The resource is an interactive website, linked to Scoilnet, which aims to encourage learners to engage with existing online materials relating to the Irish Famine and diaspora, and to empower young people from primary and post-primary schools to interact with the events of the Great Irish Famine in the same way that historians would.

The online resource will contain the following:

- activities to engage students with the Great Irish Famine in primary school, and Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle History,
- suggestions on how to research the impact of the Famine on a student's local area,
- a repository of podcasts, documentaries and articles on the Famine and Irish Famine diaspora,
- opportunities to consider the Famine from different perspectives at the time, and
- student- and teacher-friendly guide to using the Great Irish Famine online resource.

The website will be accompanied by a live webinar, with an expert panel discussion on how the events of the Great Famine can be explored. Further information with links to the website and the webinar has been emailed directly to schools at the start of the school year.

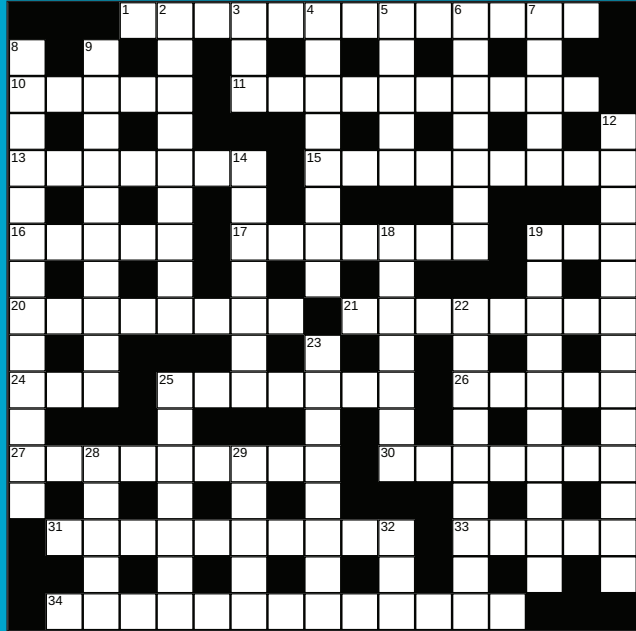


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School

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ASTI Branch

Entries to: ASTIR Crossword No. 2304,
Think Media, The Malthouse, 537 NCR, Dublin 1.

To arrive by: Friday, September 29, 2023.

ACROSS

1. 2021 action film starring Gary Dourdan and Andy Garcia (10,3)
10. Leers strangely at spools or bobbins (5)
11. Railing, parapet, banister (10)
13. Tracey Emin entirely distinguished (7)
15. Push around. It's a guy thing! (9)
16. Sighed gently to layoff bet (5)
17. Mouthiness! No one with water on both sides (7)
19. Slippery type from the banks of the Lee (3)
20. Stanchions for 11 across (8)
21. Watch phones without pen with Patrick Kiely (4,4)
24. Muslim feast to die for (3)
25. Herb often used with tomato dishes (7)
26. Outer Hebrides could provide fixed path (5)
27. Musical score in author's own handwriting (9)
30. Relating to the sex organs (7)
31. Tropical jungle as frontier (10)
33. The two long bones of the human forearm (5)
34. US musical group featuring will.i.am (5,4,4)

DOWN

2. Segregate chocolate treat (6,3)
3. When the tide goes out in Entebbe (3)
4. Person of wide knowledge or learning (8)
5. Henrik, Norwegian playwright (5)
6. Typical short answer from invaders! (7)
7. Attached, totted, built on (5)
8. Fuel used to heat conservatory? (10,3)
9. Perplexed, confused, puzzled (10)
12. The Wexford people (13)
14. Flower of Scotland (7)
18. Chinese game played with 144 tiles (7)
19. Former German house chime could be demanding (10)
22. Large hairy spider (9)
23. Fine, expensive wool material (8)
25. Of or containing carbon compounds (7)
28. Footpath between Tramore and Brazil (5)
29. Ryan O'Neal, all by himself (5)
32. Highest one gone to pot (3)

Solutions to ASTIR Crossword No. 2303

ACROSS	DOWN
1. At first glance	2. Therefore
10. Elite	3. IRB
11. Blabbering	4. Standard
13. Overeat	5. Gibes
15. Dishcloth	6. African
16. Dingo	7. Congo
17. Puritan	8. Second opinion
19. Rot	9. Hibernated
20. Patience	12. The Third Reich
21. Graffiti	14. Topical
24. Ned	18. Tyranny
25. Dolphin	19. Rhinestone
26. Yield	22. Frying pan
27. Oppressor	23. Sheraton
30. Yangtze	25. Dreamer
31. Enumerator	28. Panto
33. Panic	29. Sarah
34. Fourth and vine	32. Rev

Did you miss?

- Pensions and breaks in service 12
- Tribute to Miriam Duggan 16

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to the winner of
Crossword No. 2303:
Anne McGrath, Kildare Town
Community School, Dunmurry
Road, Co. Kildare. Kildare
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