

ASTIR

ASSOCIATION OF SECONDARY TEACHERS, IRELAND

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Teachers' professionalism helps students top the ranks



- | Senior Cycle update
- | What do school stewards do?



ASTI



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

Teachers rose to the challenge

The OECD PISA study provides overwhelming evidence that teachers in Ireland rose to the challenges presented by the global pandemic, ensuring that students' education was prioritised and protected. The study – undertaken in 2022 and published in December 2023 – shows that 15-year-olds in Ireland rank first out of 37 OECD countries in reading literacy. Ireland ranks 7th out of 37 countries when it comes to performance in maths and 8th for science.

This latest PISA report is the first large-scale study of student performance since Covid-19 – PISA was last carried out in 2018. While many countries saw an unprecedented drop in performance between 2022 and 2018, Irish performance in reading remained stable, and it increased in science. A decline in maths for Ireland was much less than the OECD country average.

In March 2020, teachers transformed how they worked almost overnight, ensuring that their students' education was supported and shielded insofar as possible. When schools re-opened, teachers prioritised making up for the disruption of school closures and helping students to get their lives back on track. For many teachers, the pandemic years were the most difficult and traumatic of their careers to date. Students also experienced significant disturbance and stress at an important stage in their lives, and demonstrated extraordinary resilience. These efforts are reflected by Ireland's scores in PISA 2022.

Ireland's performance in PISA contrasts with another OECD study, Education at a Glance 2023, where we came last of 36 countries for investment in education as a percentage of GDP – a ranking we have held for many years. School communities go to extraordinary lengths to ensure access to inclusive, high-quality education. The Government must support this by adequately funding schools.

Senior Cycle

Last December I expressed my dismay at the shock announcement by the Minister for Education that the 2024 Leaving Certificate oral exams will take place during Easter break. Teachers and students always understood that holding oral exams at Easter during the pandemic was due to a public health emergency. Student representatives had called for a return to pre-pandemic arrangements. The ASTI was given a commitment that research commissioned by the State Examinations Commission would underpin any future decision. Despite this, an announcement was made without consultation with the teacher unions, and in the absence of the publication of the commissioned research. No education-based reason has been presented. I am extremely concerned about the impact on students, many of whom will be doing more than one exam during Easter. Students deserve to have their break at Easter before their final written exams. In the context of the Minister's plans for Senior Cycle re-development, this decision is ill judged. International research demonstrates that effective curriculum change requires collaboration and consultation with teachers as well as teachers' trust in the change process. The Government is failing to grasp the importance of developing a trust relationship with teachers.



Geraldine O'Brien

ASTI President

AI in education

In 2023, Education International, of which the ASTI is an affiliate, and the OECD jointly developed a document entitled 'Opportunities, Guidelines and Guardrails for Effective and Equitable use of AI in Education'. The Guidelines aim to help in navigating fast-moving developments in AI. The use of digital technologies in education holds significant promise. It would be wrong to be unduly negative. It has the potential to improve quality of learning, free teachers' time to focus on teaching, and provide students with greater equity, and new routes to learning.

There are also risks. Inequalities can result from unequal access to technology, and concerns include privacy, security, and the use of learners' and teachers' personal data. AI-enabled tools could also add to teachers' workload. Addressing the risks and opportunities will require a co-ordinated effort including: investing in digital infrastructure and equipment; developing sound regulations on issues such as cyber security, data protection and privacy; supporting teachers' digital competencies; and, meaningful integration of technologies in curricula.

The rise of AI and other technologies highlights the importance of using them in an ethical way, based on human and labour rights. The Guidelines, which aim to support a constructive dialogue to harness the opportunities offered by AI and mitigate its risks, include:

1. Equitable access to affordable high-quality connectivity.
2. Equitable access to and equitable use of digital learning resources.
3. The critical and pedagogical uses of up-to-date digital learning resources should become an integral part of teacher agency and professional learning.
4. Use and development of AI-enabled technology should put student and teacher well-being front and centre.
5. Involvement of teachers and their students as co-designers in the research and development process of technology.
6. Data protection policies to protect students' and teachers' privacy.
7. Teachers and students should receive timely human support and, when appropriate, a human alternative to an AI-enabled tool.
8. All matters related to terms and conditions, including the ethical use of data about teachers, should be negotiated with teacher unions.

Full agenda

There are key items that are likely to dominate the agenda for 2024. The prospect of local, European and perhaps national elections looms. Talks on a successor agreement to Building Momentum have been inconclusive and are about to recommence. The outcome is sure to shape the foreseeable future. The Minister for Education has stated a determination to forge ahead with her programme of Senior Cycle redevelopment. Challenges there are a foregone conclusion. Other challenges are ongoing, be they examinations, workload and so on, and will undoubtedly ensure another interesting year ahead. Rest assured: the ASTI will continue to work hard to achieve the best possible outcomes for members.



Kieran Christie

ASTI General Secretary

Teaching Council elections – important dates

Representation of ASTI members on the Teaching Council is important to ensure that your concerns are considered and that your voice is heard.

Teaching Council elections are held every four years. The next election for teacher members will be held in February/March 2024.

The Teaching Council is made up of 37 members. Twenty-two places are reserved on the Teaching Council for registered teachers. Seven teachers are elected directly by second-level teachers, nine are elected by primary teachers, and the remaining six places are filled by two nominees from each of the three teacher unions. All on the electoral roll are eligible to run. This includes every teacher on the Teaching Council register at 5.00pm on September 30, 2023. The electoral roll is available now for inspection on the Teaching Council website.

The Teaching Council will be accepting nominations from teachers from January 8-30, 2024 (nominations close at 11.00am on January

30). Teachers who wish to run for election must return their completed nomination paper (including signatures of 15 teachers who are electors within the category and constituency of the nominee) to the Teaching Council.

ASTI endorsement

ASTI members running in the Teaching Council election who wish to have their candidature endorsed by the ASTI must submit an application to the ASTI by 5.00pm on January 16, 2024. Please note, this is a separate process to the Teaching Council nomination process.

All members

The Teaching Council election will run from February 22 to noon on March 12, 2024. Voting will take place online. Registered teachers will be notified of voting instructions via email in February 2024. We encourage all members to vote

in the elections and support the ASTI candidates. Voting for ASTI-endorsed candidates ensures your voice is heard on the Teaching Council.

Important dates

- Closing date for receipt of nominations by the Teaching Council: 11.00am, January 30, 2024
- Closing date for applications for ASTI endorsement: 5.00pm, January 16, 2024
- Teaching Council election dates: February 22, 2024, to noon on March 12, 2024

For further details on the application process for ASTI endorsement, visit

<https://www.asti.ie/news-campaigns/latest-news/teaching-council-elections-2024>

For further information on Teaching Council elections, visit <https://www.teachingcouncil.ie/about/council-elections-2024/>

ASTI health and safety training



Frank Vaughan, former Head of Health and Safety with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

Access to health and safety training is one of the entitlements of school health and safety representatives, a recent ASTI online seminar heard. The seminar was attended by ASTI members who are the health and safety reps in their school or are interested in taking on the role. The training opened with an overview of the legislation, referring to the 2005 Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act. It was explained that workers have a right to work in a workplace that is safe, that it is the employer's responsibility to ensure that that is the case, and that there is a right to safety consultation and information for workers. Frank Vaughan, former Head of Health and Safety with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, told the seminar: "When we speak about health and safety, we are doing so specifically in a work context, and occupational safety and health (OSH) is generally defined as the science of anticipation, recognition, evaluation and control



Conor McDonald, ASTI Industrial Relations Officer.

of hazards arising in and from the workplace that could impair the health and well-being of workers".

It was also noted that the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) is the agency responsible for Health and Safety in Ireland, and provides advice, guidance, and promotion of safety in the workplace.

Health and safety in schools is the responsibility of the board of management. All teaching and other staff are employees of the school and so have the responsibilities and rights of employees as described in the Act.

It was explained that proper practice is that a workplace safety officer is appointed by the employer, and in schools this is usually the principal. All school employees are further entitled to select a safety representative to represent them. The distinction between the roles was made, and it was emphasised that

safety representatives are not safety advisors or safety managers. They represent the workers. "It's generally acknowledged that you can only have effective health and safety management systems if that involves the active engagement of workers," said Frank Vaughan.

The expectations of school safety representatives were explained; they should be proactive, doing inspections, reviewing safety documents and reporting physical and psychosocial hazards to the safety officer. The employer is required to share safety information with the safety representative.

The entitlements of the safety representative were also outlined. These included time off to fulfil the role, adequate training, no loss of earnings, and no unfair treatment. It was clarified that taking on the role of safety representative does not impose any legal duties. This training was organised by Conor McDonald, ASTI Industrial Relations Officer.

Further information:

<https://www.hsa.ie/eng/education/>

https://www.hsa.ie/eng/publications_and_forms/publications/occupational_health/managing_psychosocial_hazards_in_the_workplace_2023.pdf

<https://www.asti.ie/your-employment/terms-and-conditions/staff-safety-representatives/>

Domestic violence leave

Teachers are now entitled to paid domestic violence leave. Ireland has become one of the first countries in the EU to introduce this leave. It is now a legal requirement for employers to offer up to five days of paid leave over a period of 12 months to employees affected by domestic violence.

The issue of domestic violence leave had been consistently raised by the teacher unions, including the ASTI, at the Teachers Conciliation Council (TCC), supporting a safe working environment for all union members.

The ASTI notes the publication of Circular 59/2023 'Domestic Violence Leave for Registered Teachers', which outlines the terms and conditions of this leave for teachers. The introduction of this leave follows a new regulation introduced under the Work Life Balance Act 2023.

This leave is available to any teacher who is experiencing domestic violence, or who is

It is now a legal requirement for employers to offer up to five days of paid leave over a period of 12 months to employees affected by domestic violence.

providing support to another relevant person who is experiencing domestic violence. A relevant person for whom this leave may be taken is defined in the circular.

The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth has also developed policy guidance for employees around issues such as eligibility and supports available for those affected by domestic violence.

The ASTI reminds any members who might experience domestic abuse that the Employee Assistance Service (EAS; Spectrum Life)

provides free counselling to members at 1800 411 057.

Women's Aid is the leading voluntary organisation responding to domestic abuse and can be contacted at 1800 341 900.

Men's Aid Ireland is a national service supporting men and their families experiencing domestic abuse in Ireland, and can be contacted at 01-554 3811.

To view Circular 59/2023, visit <https://www.asti.ie/your-employment/circulars/>

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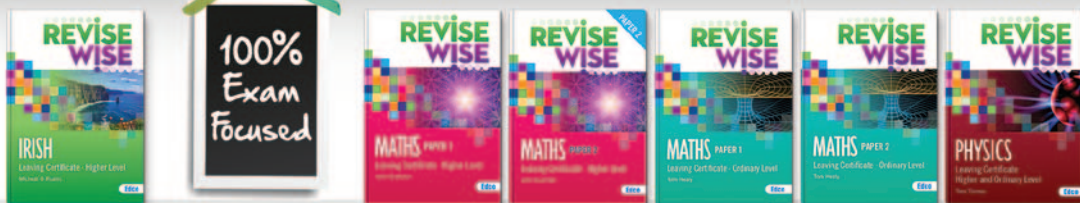
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Teachers most trustworthy professionals

A recent poll by the Irish Medical Council found that teachers ranked highest as the most trustworthy profession.

Teachers finished ahead of doctors in a survey ranking the most trusted professionals in Ireland. The findings of the poll were that teachers are the most trusted “to tell the truth”, at 91%.

Trust is one of the core values of teaching. Teachers’ relationships with pupils/students, colleagues, parents, school management and the public are based on trust as stated in the Teaching Council’s Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers.

Comparing the ranking of trustworthiness of other professionals, doctors are second in the

Irish Medical Council poll at 89%, followed by judges, the Gardaí, solicitors and barristers. Then come civil servants, trade union officials, business leaders and journalists. TDs are the least trusted at 36%.

The poll reflects consistently strong results for teachers in public opinion polls on trust levels in Ireland.

ASTI centenary scholarship

The ASTI inaugurated an annual scholarship for members in its centenary year of 2009. The scholarship is awarded to assist an ASTI member undertaking further third-level education on a full-time or part-time basis, and two scholarships of €2,000 are awarded each year. ASTI members undertaking further studies can apply at any stage during the school year. The closing date for submission of applications


for next year is April 30, 2024. Applications will be reviewed by a Selection Committee comprised of the 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 research to enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

You can apply at any time, even if you have already commenced your studies. For details on how to apply, visit <https://www.asti.ie/member-benefits/awardsgrants/>



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- Leadership and Policy
- Maths Education
- Music in Education
- Psychology of Education
- Science Education
- Teaching and Learning (Higher Education)
- The Psychology of Living with Life Events: Grief-informed Education in the classroom*

*Subject to Approval.
Please note that not all specialisms run in every academic year and are subject to minimum student numbers.

Admissions

The closing date for applications for the academic year 2024/25 is **30th June, 2024 (31st May for Drama in Education and Music in Education)**. Applications for all specialisms 2024/25 must be made online at: www.tcd.ie/courses/postgraduate/faculty/subjects.php

Applicants to the 1-year full-time M.Ed. must submit a 'Description of Area of Research Interest' as part of the application process. For further details, and an outline of the format required, please contact MASTERED@tcd.ie

Fees and Further Information

We are reducing the (M.Ed.) fees to support teachers returning to education. For further information please visit <https://www.tcd.ie/education/courses/postgraduate/masters-in-education/>. For all other enquiries please contact the Admin Team at MASTERED@tcd.ie

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ASTI/TUI unity discussions

The ASTI and TUI have been engaging in discussions on the prospect of forming a single member-focused union for ASTI and TUI members.

The ASTI represents second-level teachers and the TUI represents second-level teachers and teachers/lecturers employed in Further Education settings, Youthreach, Colleges of Education, Institutes of Technology and Technological Universities.

ASTI President Geraldine O'Brien and TUI President David Waters issued a joint statement in recent weeks saying that the unification of the two unions would be a seismic moment in education: "Both unions have engaged constructively and in good faith. We have examined both unions' rule books and a potential structure for a new education union. The aim is to create a new union that at its heart is member focused. It must both acknowledge and respect the traditions of each union, while

"We have examined both unions' rule books and a potential structure for a new education union. The aim is to create a new union that at its heart is member focused. It must both acknowledge and respect the traditions of each union, while also creating a new union that is able to face the challenges of today's industrial relations landscape."

also creating a new union that is able to face the challenges of today's industrial relations landscape".

The two teacher union presidents also stated: "There is potential for one coherent teacher voice on all topics across the entire breadth of the education sector. Representing almost 40,000 members in the Republic of Ireland, we would no longer be able to be pitted against each other and

we would have a stronger voice as a member of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions' Public Services Committee".

The presidents said that much work remains to be done and that any outcome of discussions will require comprehensive and substantial membership consultation within both unions, and will ultimately be decided upon by the members of each union in ballots.



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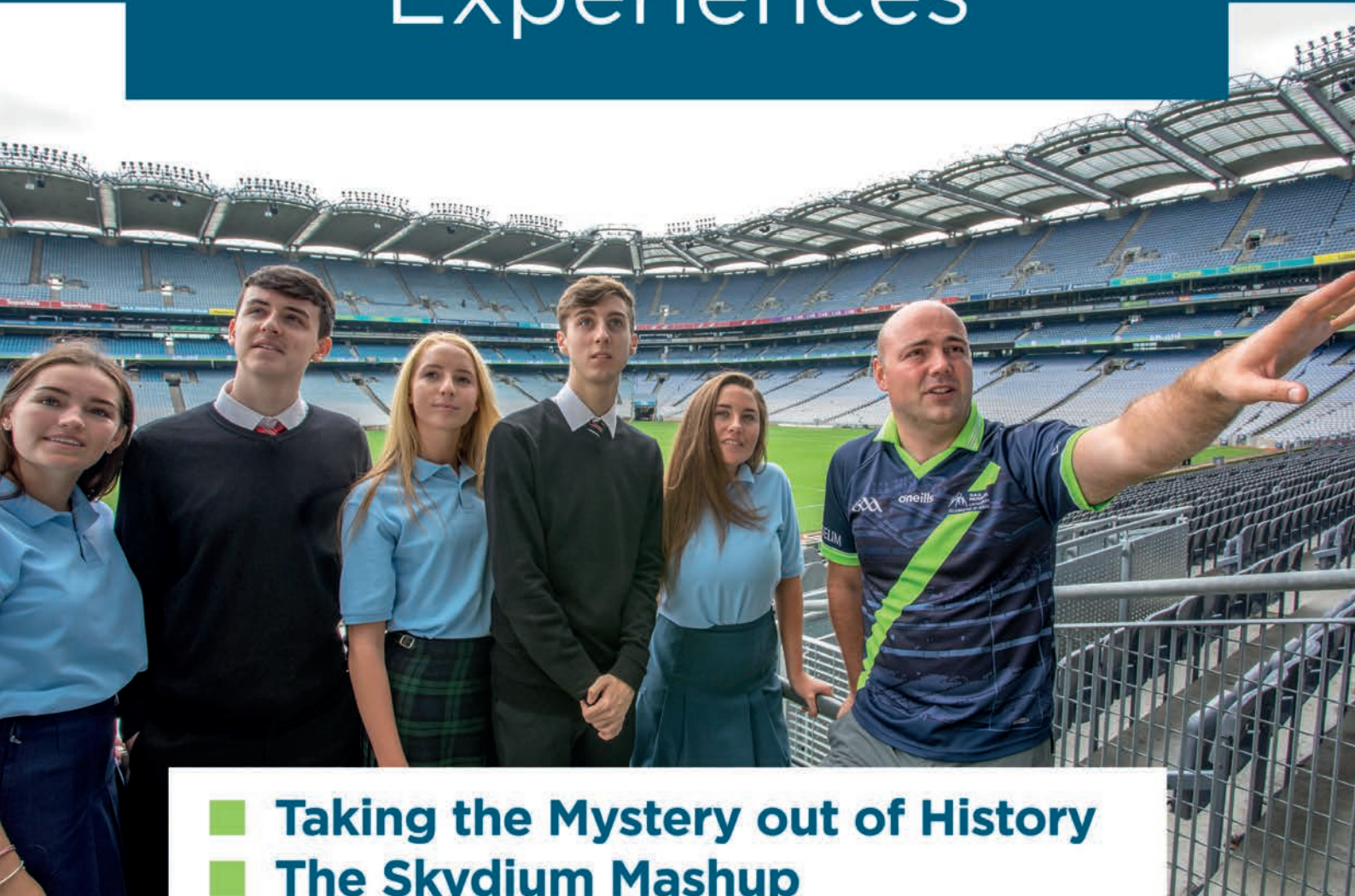


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ASTI membership Increases

ASTI membership has increased by over 700 members over the past year, from 18,157 at the end of 2022 to 18,872 at the end of 2023. The union now has its highest number of members since its foundation in 1909.

50 years of education support



Pictured at an Education Support Centres Ireland (ESCI) event to celebrate 50 years of education support centres in Ireland, were Amy O’Keeffe (left – Carlow Branch member and Chairperson of the Board of Management of Carlow Education Centre), and Geraldine O’Brien (ASTI President).

Award-winning graduates



ASTI President Geraldine O’Brien presenting MIC Limerick graduate Emily O’Shaughnessy with the ASTI Medal, which is awarded to the graduate who excels in education and school placement on their post-primary teaching programme.



Ffion Elizabeth O’Connell, TCD student, is pictured with Geraldine O’Brien, ASTI President, receiving the ASTI prize for the student with the highest school placement result.

ASTI retirement events



Pictured at a recent Tullamore Branch retirement event were (from left): Tommy Godley, Geraldine Osborne, Mary Droogan, Breda Stewart, Angela Wall, Caitríona McDonnell, Anne Barry, Maria Molyneaux, Chris Mohan, Catherine Heraty, Ailish Jones, Kathleen Moylan, Geraldine O’Brien (ASTI President), Henry Gunning, Fiona Flanagan, and Aideen Potterton.



The Drogheda Sean Higgins Branch were joined by Susie Hall (RSTA President – front row, third from right), and Geraldine O’Brien (ASTI President – front row, second from right) at their retirement event.

School leadership training



ASTI members pictured at school leadership training in the Ashling Hotel in October with Dr Pauline Egan (far left), Director of Schools, Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board, and ASTI Assistant General Secretary Moira Leydon (third from right).

Manorhamilton visit



ASTI President Geraldine O'Brien recently visited St Clare's Comprehensive School, Manorhamilton, Co. Leitrim, and spoke with first-year students on careers in teaching and the functions of a trade union. Geraldine is pictured with James Martin, school steward, and the pupils from St Clare's.

ASTI representatives on the ICTU Retired Workers Committee 2023-2025



Denis O'Boyle (West Mayo Branch) and Ger O'Donoghue (Limerick South Branch) were recently reselected by the ASTI Standing Committee to represent the ASTI on the ICTU Retired Workers Committee for 2023 to 2025, and recently attended the first meeting of the new committee. Pictured at the meeting were (from left): Denis O'Boyle, Ger O'Donoghue, Ann Sweeney (Secretary, ICTU Retired Workers Committee), Dr Laura Bambrick (ICTU Secretariat to the Retired Workers Committee), and Jimmy Whelan (Chairperson, ICTU Retired Workers Committee).



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Más maith leat cur le do shaineolas ar an oideachas trí mheán na Gaeilge, cuir iarratas isteach ar an M.Oid. san Oideachas Lán-Ghaeilge agus Gaeltachta

Tugann an cúrsa seo an deis do rannpháirtithe ardchaighdeán feabhais a bhaint amach ina gcleachtais oideachais agus ina n-inniúlacht teanga. Tá an cúrsa M.Oid. nua seo i gColáiste na Tríonóide á mhaoiniú ag An Roinn Oideachais, rud a fhágann nach mbíonn ach €650 in aghaidh na bliana le n-íoc ag rannpháirtithe an chúrsa.

Struchtúr

Cúrsa solúbtha páirt-aimseartha é an M.Oid. agus dearadh an sceideal le dul in oiriúint do mhúinteoirí atá ag obair go lán-aimseartha. Beidh idir léachtaí ar líne (40%) agus ar an láthair (60%) i gceist, sna tráthnóintí, ar an Satharn agus le linn laethanta saoire scoile.

Na Modúil

Bliain 1

- An tumoideachas agus an dátheangachas
- An dea-chleachtas i suíomhanna Gaeltachta agus lán-Ghaeilge
- An teagasc agus an fhoghlaim i suíomhanna scoile lán-Ghaeilge agus Gaeltachta
- An cleachtas pleanála agus measúnaithe
- An cheannasaíocht agus an bhainistíocht
- Múinteoirí lán-Ghaeilge agus Gaeltachta mar thaighdeoirí

Bliain 2

- Inniúlacht teanga sa Ghaeilge
- An tráchtas

Riachtanais iontrála faoi leith

Ní mór cáilíocht mar mhúinteoir bunscóile nó iarbhunscóile a bheith ag iarrthóirí agus inniúlacht sa Ghaeilge ag leibhéal B1 ar a laghad ar an bhFráma Tagartha Comónta Eorpach do Theangacha.

Tuilleadh Eolais

Chun níos mó eolais a fháil ar an gcúrsa nó chun iarratas a chur isteach, téigh chuig: <https://www.tcd.ie/education/courses/postgraduate/m-oid-san-oideachas-lan-ghaeilge-agus-gaeltachta/>

Tuilleadh eolais maidir le cúrsaí iarchéime – Teastais, Dioplómaí, an PME, an D.Ed. agus an PhD san áireamh – ar fáil ar ár suíomh idirlín.

Coláiste na Tríonóide | Baile Átha Cliath

www.tcd.ie

EDUCATION KEY TO CIVIC AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Research from the ESRI points to the importance of education in encouraging young people to volunteer and engage with their communities.



New research published by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) shows that volunteering can improve young people’s life outcomes. The report provides detailed insights into what factors drive volunteering and political engagement at age 20, and found that education and schooling play a key role. The findings show that 20 year olds who volunteer are more satisfied with their lives and are more confident of themselves as adults. Volunteering can also protect young people’s mental health from the negative effects of living in socially disadvantaged communities.

Those who took part in Transition Year, who liked school and got on well there, and who went on to higher education, were more civically and politically engaged at age 20. This is in keeping with international research that highlights the importance of school-based citizenship education, particularly for more disadvantaged groups.

Transition Year

Emer Smyth, co-author of the report, said: “Transition Year emerges as having a strong effect on becoming involved in volunteering and political activities. However, not all young people take the programme. Therefore, there are lessons to be learned for the rest of Senior Cycle from the success of Transition Year in promoting civic and political engagement”. The report points out that although CSPE is available to all Junior Cycle students, there is no comparable provision at Senior Cycle and the study findings suggest the importance of such provision, particularly for more socio-economically disadvantaged and migrant-origin youth. It also says that continuous professional development of teachers is crucial in providing an engaging experience of the subject. The report refers positively to Politics and Society as a Leaving Cert subject but

highlights the fact that it is optional. By 2022, the subject was not available in all schools and had only been taken by 4% of the Leaving Cert cohort.

Extracurricular

Young people who were more involved in after-school activities as children and teenagers were also more civically and politically engaged later on in life. Irish schools have a particularly strong tradition of providing extracurricular activities, and it is clear that such provision scaffolds many young people’s integration into their communities and enables them to develop friendships outside their immediate peer group.

Commenting on the report, ASTI President Geraldine O’Brien said: “From the ASTI viewpoint, the union is very concerned about the impact of teachers’ workload on their ability or motivation to get involved in extracurricular activities. This issue is increasingly pressing, as teacher supply problems are impacting on all areas of school life, including extracurricular activities”.

Public services

The report also highlights the importance of public services in supporting young people to have opportunities for civic engagement. Poor public transport in rural areas and the lack of youth clubs and youth centres across both urban and rural areas are shown to negatively impact on young people’s opportunities for volunteering, and participating in sport and other social activities.

To view the report, visit: <https://www.esri.ie/publications/civic-and-political-engagement-among-young-adults-in-ireland>

INDOOR AIR QUALITY

A new Code of Practice for Indoor Air Quality should be part of health and safety assessments in schools.



The Health and Safety Authority's Code of Practice for Indoor Air Quality came into operation on May 26, 2023. This Code of Practice aims to provide practical guidance on managing indoor air quality (IAQ) in the workplace. It also provides information on ventilation, air filtration and CO₂ monitors. The Code states: "It is important that when making improvements to an area such as ventilation, other environmental comfort factors are not compromised. For example, it would not be acceptable to open doors and windows to achieve adequate ventilation if this would result in a breach of recommended minimum working temperatures".

Temperature

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007 state that the legal lower limit to observe for sedentary office work is 17.5°C. This minimum temperature should, as far as is reasonably practicable, be achieved and maintained at every workstation after the first hour of work.

Fresh air

Regulation 6 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007 (S.I. No. 299 of 2007) (as amended), requires employers to make sure sufficient fresh air is provided in enclosed places of work. Employers must give consideration to the working methods used and the physical demands placed on the employees.

Ventilation

The new Code provides that in most occupied spaces, a CO₂ concentration consistently below 1,000 parts per million (ppm) is likely to indicate that an indoor space is adequately ventilated. A CO₂ concentration consistently

higher than 1,400ppm indicates poor ventilation. As was evident during the Covid-19 pandemic, sufficient ventilation and air filtration is an important factor in reducing the risk of aerosol transmission of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARSCoV-2), the virus that causes Covid-19.

Maintaining standards

This Code of Practice is relevant to all places of work. Employers should use this Code to develop policies, conduct risk assessments and implement control measures to address IAQ and ventilation in the workplace. Any standards or sector-specific advice on IAQ and ventilation should be utilised in conjunction with this Code of Practice in order to ensure that best practice IAQ techniques are applied. The new Code references the Department of Education's 2021 guidelines on ventilation in schools. The ASTI intends to liaise with the Department to ensure that the Code of Practice is tailored so as to clearly encompass schools as work environments.

Further information

Health and Safety Authority Code of Practice for Indoor Air Quality – https://www.hsa.ie/eng/publications_and_forms/publications/codes_of_practice/code_of_practice_for_indoor_air_quality.html
 Guidance on Ventilation in Schools - Department of Education publication – <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ad236-guidance-on-ventilation-in-schools/>
 Advice for second-level teachers in Ireland. Temperature in classroom – <https://www.asti.ie/your-employment/terms-and-conditions/temperature-in-classroom/>

SENIOR CYCLE CAMPAIGN UPDATE

There have been a number of developments in relation to Senior Cycle change, and the ASTI's campaign on this issue.

On September 20, 2023, the Minister for Education Norma Foley TD revised a key pillar of her proposals for Senior Cycle redevelopment when she confirmed that all additional and practical components of Leaving Certificate subjects will continue to be externally assessed.

Related to this decision, the Minister has asked the State Exams Commission (SEC) that further research be commissioned on the potential role and impact of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in teacher-based assessment in particular.

Curriculum developments

In September, the Minister also announced an accelerated process of redevelopment of Senior Cycle curriculum as follows:

Tranche 1 subjects

From September 2025, nine new and redeveloped subjects will commence in schools for fifth year students. They are:

- Arabic,
- Classical languages/Greek and Latin,
- Biology,
- Physics,
- Chemistry,
- Business,
- Drama, film and theatre studies, and
- Climate action and sustainable development.

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) Subject Development Groups have finalised or are in the process of finalising draft specifications for these subjects, which will be submitted to public consultation. The ASTI encourages its members to engage with public consultations via the NCCA website.

Tranche 2 subjects

From September 2026, seven redeveloped subjects will commence in schools for fifth year students. They are:

- Accounting,
- Construction studies,
- Engineering,
- English,
- Geography,
- Physical education, and
- Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) link modules.

The NCCA is currently establishing Subject Development Groups to develop background papers for public consultation. The ASTI has been invited to nominate two ASTI representatives per development group. ASTI representatives work to ensure that ASTI policies are brought to the fore at Subject Development Group meetings and during decision-making processes.

Other developments

A revised SPHE curriculum for Senior Cycle was submitted for public consultation in late 2023. The ASTI made a submission during the consultation period. A report on the consultation will be published in 2024. The public consultation on a revised Transition Year Programme Statement took place last autumn. The ASTI made a submission during the consultation period. It is expected that the revised Programme Statement will be introduced in 2024.

ASTI campaign – timeline

In March 2022, the Minister for Education announced her proposals for Senior Cycle redevelopment. The ASTI began an internal process of consultation, including:

- consultation with members via the ASTI branch network,
- in October 2022, the ASTI Central Executive Council was addressed by Áine Hyland, Irish educationalist and Emeritus Professor of Education, UCC,
- a number of collaborative activities with the TUI have been organised, including meetings of the ASTI and TUI subject representatives,
- the ASTI and TUI undertook a joint campaign of opposition to the Minister's proposal to move Leaving Cert Paper 1 in English and Irish to the end of fifth year for those entering fifth year in September 2023,
- the ASTI hosted an education conference on curriculum change in March 2023,
- the ASTI adopted a range of policy positions in relation to the Minister's plans as announced in March 2022,
- in February 2023, following a campaign of opposition by the ASTI/TUI regarding the Minister's plan to move Leaving Cert Paper 1 in English and Irish to the end of fifth year from 2024, the Minister announced the deferral of this proposal,
- in April 2023, the ASTI and TUI adopted motions (Annual Convention/Congress) demanding that at least 12 months before any future Leaving Cert syllabi/specifications are implemented, a full range of documentation be made available including the rationale and research-based evidence for the introduction of the syllabus, a detailed syllabus document (embedding depth of treatment and comprehensive syllabus guidelines for teachers), sample exam papers, and sample marking scheme,
- in September 2023, the Minister revised her proposal regarding teacher-based assessment, and
- in November 2023, the ASTI and TUI issued a statement supporting calls from the Irish Secondary Students' Union (ISSU) and the Irish language teachers' association An Gréasán that Leaving Cert oral exams take place prior to the Easter break as normal, to ensure that students' Easter break is not disrupted.

Keep up to date with the ASTI's Senior Cycle campaign, including developments across a range of Leaving Certificate subjects, at www.asti.ie

SPEAKING OUT

ASTI members and officers have been speaking about the decision to continue to hold oral exams at Easter, the results of PISA 2022, and continuing cost of living challenges for teachers.

“Well, we are caught by surprise here because the State Exams Commission commissioned research into the timing of the orals at Easter and we were told no decision would be taken on those orals until the research was published. That research has not been published.”

Geraldine O'Brien, ASTI President

Drivetime, RTÉ Radio 1, December 15, 2023

“The Easter break is an important time for students to take a step back and take stock of where they are in their preparations for the Leaving Certificate Examinations. They also need a break before the final push to June and we support their call for a restoration of that break. The ASTI has been consistent in its position that, rather than alleviate pressure on students, the holding of oral examinations at Easter time increases pressure, particularly for those taking more than one oral in this short period.”

Geraldine O'Brien, ASTI President

Irish Examiner, November 29, 2023

“When students are in school, the procedures around their safety are very clear, ASTI General Secretary Kieran Christie said. ‘There is a greater level of consciousness of safety within schools that has been informed by a range of factors in recent decades. I imagine many boards of management will have school safety on the agenda for their next meetings so they can have a conversation about what procedures are in place.’”

Kieran Christie, ASTI General Secretary

Irish Independent, November 28, 2023

“Sinéad Corkery, the deputy principal at St Patrick’s Cathedral Grammar School in Dublin, told how each day was ‘a juggling act’ to ensure each class had a teacher and many schools were ‘stretched to the limit. In certain areas it’s harder than others – the languages, science subjects, maths, Irish. The teachers just don’t exist. You’re holding your breath all summer and you’re a nervous wreck when you come back wondering who is going to show up to that staff meeting on the first day because it’s totally understandable if a teacher gets something more suited to their lifestyle outside Dublin: you can’t fault them for taking that position’.”

Sinéad Corkery, Dublin South and South-Central Standing Committee Representative

Irish Independent, November 15, 2023

“Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland president Geraldine O’Brien said ‘despite chronic under investment’, the findings [of the OECD PISA study on 15-year-olds’ performance in maths, reading and science] are a testament to the dedication and commitment of school communities’.”

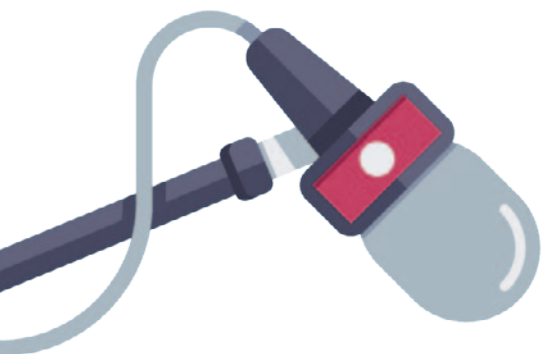
Geraldine O'Brien, ASTI President

Irish Examiner, December 5, 2023

“I’m 33 years old, I’m still renting, still struggling to save, it’s getting more difficult as time passes. I find the rate at which the money in the savings account rises slowing and getting dangerously close to stagnation; it’s more often the case towards the end of the month. I need to dip into that savings account in order to make it to the end of the month so things are getting worse and it is concerning.”

Conall O’Dufaigh, ASTI member

Prime Time, RTÉ One, December 7, 2023





SECOND-LEVEL STUDENTS TOP PERFORMERS IN INTERNATIONAL STUDY

Irish second-level schools have demonstrated excellence and resilience in the 2022 OECD PISA study, despite underinvestment and the challenges of Covid-19.

Fifteen-year-olds in Ireland rank first out of 37 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries for reading literacy and come 7th and 8th, respectively, in maths and science, according to the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 study.

The study, published in December 2023, is the first PISA assessment of second-level students all over the world since the Covid-19 pandemic severely disrupted education globally. The study has found that while many countries saw a drop in performance, in Ireland performance in reading remained stable and performance in science actually increased. A decline in performance in maths for Ireland was much less than the OECD country average.

The results of PISA 2022 provide insight into how well countries' education systems are preparing students for real-life challenges and future success. Over the most recent PISA testing period (2018-2022), the gap between the 10% of students with the highest test scores and the 10% with the lowest test scores in Ireland did not change significantly for reading, maths and science. In addition, a similar number of students in

Ireland were top performers (categorised as level 5 or 6) compared to the OECD average, while a larger proportion of students in Ireland achieved a minimum level of proficiency (categorised as level 2 or higher) in all three subjects compared to the OECD average.

Maths

While PISA 2022 assesses reading, science and maths, it's main research focus is maths. In Ireland, 81% of students attained at least level 2 proficiency in maths, significantly more than the OECD average of 69%. At a minimum, these students can interpret and recognise, without direct instructions, how a simple situation can be represented mathematically (e.g., comparing the total distance across two alternative routes, or converting prices into a different currency). Some 7% of students in Ireland were top performers in maths, meaning that they attained level 5 or 6 in the PISA maths test (OECD average: 9%). In comparison, in 16 out of 81 countries and economies participating in PISA 2022, more than 10% of students attained level 5 or 6 proficiency; in six Asian countries/economies, 23-41% of students attained level 5 or 6.

Top 10 OECD countries in reading, science and maths

Reading

Ireland	516
Japan	516
Korea	515
Estonia	511
Canada	507
New Zealand	501
Australia	498
United Kingdom	494
Finland	490
Denmark	489

Science

Japan	547
Korea	528
Estonia	526
Canada	515
Finland	511
Australia	507
New Zealand	504
Ireland	504
Switzerland	503
United Kingdom	500

Maths

Japan	536
Korea	527
Estonia	510
Switzerland	508
Canada	497
Netherlands	493
Ireland	492
Belgium	489
Denmark	489
United Kingdom	489

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Equity

Ireland is one of 10 countries highlighted in the OECD PISA report for high levels of equity for students. Equity is described as “high levels of inclusion and fairness” as demonstrated in country data. For example, while internationally, socio-economically advantaged students outperform disadvantaged students in maths, the performance gap is significantly less in Ireland.

Satisfaction with school life

In 2022, 81% of students in Ireland reported that they make friends easily at school (OECD average: 76%) and 71% felt that they belong at school (OECD average: 75%). Three per cent of students in Ireland reported not feeling safe on their way to school (OECD average: 8%), 4% reported not feeling safe in their classrooms (OECD average 7%), and 7% reported not feeling safe at other places at school (OECD average: 10%). Some 13% of girls and 19% of boys in Ireland reported being the victim of bullying acts at least a few times a month (OECD average: 20% of girls and 21% of boys).

Global drop in performance

Mean performance in OECD countries fell by 15 points in maths compared to 8 points in Ireland, and by 10 score points in reading compared to 2.1 points in Ireland. Average performance in science across the OECD did not alter significantly; in Ireland, it increased by 7.7 points.

What is PISA?

PISA is a project led and developed by the OECD in order to assess the abilities of 15-year-old students in the following three key areas of study: mathematics, science, and reading. Since 2015, PISA has become a computer-based assessment. In the past, PISA was administered to students at regular

three-year intervals, with the most recent session due to take place in 2021. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic testing was pushed back by an additional year. Each cycle of PISA focuses on one particular ‘domain’, which is the main focus of the assessment, with the other two domains being of lesser importance. The 2022 PISA study focused on assessing students’ mathematical skills and abilities.

PISA uses a form of assessment that is tailored for each individual candidate, with questions adapting progressively based on the student’s ability and skill level. This ensures a fair and accurate evaluation. Known as ‘adaptive testing’, this feature was introduced for the first time in 2018 in the reading component. 2022 was the first year in which the feature was introduced into the mathematics component, and it is expected to be introduced for the science component in the next PISA cycle. The objective of this feature is twofold: firstly, that it reflects the abilities of students accurately; and, secondly, the test adapts to the skills level of the particular student in order to ensure fair testing for all.

Overall, over 600,000 15-year-olds across 81 countries took part in the study. Thirty-seven out of the 81 participating states were OECD members, including 26 out of the 27 European Union member states (Luxembourg declined to take part in the study). Out of the 81 participating countries, 77 chose to complete the tests online, including Ireland, with the remaining four states choosing to complete the paper version of the tests.

More information on the PISA 2022 results

‘PISA 2022 Results (Volume I): The State of Learning and Equity in Education’ is available from

<https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/53f23881-en.pdf?expires=1703087725&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=DA45E734C96AD447FE02794ECF104D75>

‘PISA 2022 Results (Volume II): Learning during – and from – disruption’ is available from <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/a97db61c-en.pdf?expires=1703089051&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=CB6B1E456C39870A0FBCD940724CB24E>

The Ireland Fact Sheet on PISA 2022 is available from

<https://www.oecd.org/publication/pisa-2022-results/country-notes/ireland-01173012/>

RECOGNISING OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTIONS

The ASTI Awards celebrate those who have provided invaluable service to the teaching profession and the union, those who excel in their own right and provide a valuable example to their students.



Outstanding Teacher Achievement Award winner Scott Gaynor was recognised for his role in the resurgence of soccer in his school. Photo by Piaras Ó Midheach.



Outstanding Individual Achievement Award winner Mary Corless. Photo by Gerge Reid.

We continue our profiles of the 2023 winners in this edition of *ASTIR*, highlighting the Outstanding Teacher and Outstanding Individual Award recipients, and the winner of one of the two 2023 ASTI centenary scholarship bursaries.

Outstanding Teacher Achievement Award

A teacher in Wexford is a 2023 ASTI Outstanding Teacher Achievement Award winner for his role in the resurgence of soccer in a girls' school, with multiple age groups and teams now competing and achieving success.

Scott Gaynor is an English and history teacher in Presentation Secondary School in Wexford Town. Working alongside his colleagues, Scott restarted the school's soccer teams and there are now four active teams within the school: first year, under-15s, under-17s, and senior.

It is through his passion and commitment to the sport and to his students that there are now over 100 students in the school training, playing, and representing their school in soccer. The teams have been very successful, with the first year, under-15 and senior teams all winning their respective Leinster Girls Leagues in 2022.

Scott recognises the importance of acknowledging student participation. He initiated awarding graduating students who played for the school a pennant, which students take great pride in. He has also worked to provide opportunities to play outside of the school. Presentation has now officially partnered with Wexford FC's women's team and Scott is involved with school soccer at all levels in Wexford, Leinster and nationwide.

Scott has organised trips to see both the Irish men's and women's teams play. Students have even travelled to see teams like Manchester United and

Manchester City play, and to attend a week-long training camp in Barcelona. Seren Ward, a former student who recently signed with Sligo Rovers, said: "I think Mr Gaynor's dedication to promoting the women's game and sport in general is outstanding. Personally, Mr Gaynor helped me to improve as a player while I played with the school, and his enthusiasm and support was always evident."

Outstanding Individual Achievement Award

Mary Corless is a 2023 ASTI Outstanding Individual Achievement Award winner for her athletic exploits. She is a past pupil of Scoil Bhríde, Mercy Secondary School in Tuam, Co. Galway, where she now teaches science. She has been a competitive swimmer from a young age, and won five national swimming titles as a teenager. Her more recent achievements include finishing second in her age group in a 2019 Cork Ironman event and qualifying for the 2019 Ironman World Championship in Kona, Hawaii, where she was the fastest Irish woman home.

At the 2022 Connacht Cycling Awards she was named the Female Rider of the Year (all disciplines) after winning the Connacht Road Race Championship and the first ever National eRacing Championships. Mary is also a volunteer coach and was a guide for a para triathlete in the TriLakes Triathlon Club in 2022.

Mary is not one to shy away from new challenges. Having worked in clinical diagnostics, she only recently changed careers to become a teacher, and achieved the highest mark in her class for her research project in her PME. Her colleagues say that she is an excellent role model for her students, demonstrating what can be achieved through consistent effort and hard work.



From left: Geraldine O'Brien (ASTI President), Teresa Gallagher (ASTI Bursary recipient), and Kieran Christie (ASTI General Secretary).

Bursary Award

To mark our centenary in 2009, the ASTI inaugurated an annual scholarship scheme for ASTI members. The aim of the scheme is to assist members in

undertaking further studies relating to teaching, education or trade unionism. There is no shortage of research on teaching and education, but the difference with teacher-led research is that it is embedded in the day to-day realities of the classroom. This offers a richer evidence base for the purposes of developing sound education policy.

Teresa Gallagher is a teacher at Pobalscoil Ghaoth Dobhair, Co. Donegal, and is a recipient of an ASTI Bursary. Teresa is undertaking a PhD in Education at Dublin City University. Her research aims to explore inclusivity challenges relating to students with additional educational needs in second-level schools in Gaeltacht DEIS regions.

This study will add an under-examined perspective – that of the Gaeltacht DEIS post-primary teacher – to professional conversations on second-level education. It will also provide evidence that will inform policy-making pertaining to minority languages. Her research aims to explore challenges in achieving inclusion as they exist at the intersection of Irish medium education and disadvantaged status.

ASTI scholarships are determined by a Selection Committee whose criteria include relevance of the proposed course of study to the professional lives of teachers and second-level education, potential for the 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.

<https://www.asti.ie/member-benefits/awardsgrants/>

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Let's make a difference together!

WHAT DO SCHOOL STEWARDS DO?

Schools are asked to nominate a school steward each year by May 1. BREEDA SLEVIN speaks to two teachers who work together as a School Union Committee about their experience and what advice they would give to members considering the role.



Eóin Tallon and Jenny Lanigan. Photo by Ciaran Conneely.

The role

The ASTI represents over 18,000 teachers and the school steward plays a vital role in ensuring that each member's voice is heard. The role of school steward is crucial within the ASTI as they are the key point of contact between a member and their union. Key duties include distributing ASTI publications, holding meetings, and helping members with issues around their working terms and conditions. The school steward also has responsibility for distributing and collecting ASTI ballot material in their school, ensuring the integrity of democratic decision-making within the ASTI.

Jenny Lanigan and Eóin Tallon are experienced school stewards at De La Salle College in Waterford. They share the workload on a school union committee. This is a very beneficial system in schools with a large ASTI membership. Jenny says: "De La Salle is a very large secondary school, so to be honest I wouldn't see myself, or any individual, doing the role on their own".

Eóin agrees: "There's a lot of involvement in this school. There's a large

membership, close to 80. We're kept very busy. And definitely you need two if not three people in the role with a school steward committee structure".

Recruitment

The start of the school year is a particularly important time for recruitment, says Jenny: "The first port of call in September would be to see if we can increase membership with any new staff that have joined the school. We usually call a meeting to communicate with the members and to encourage new members to join".

Eóin explains that the day-to-day aspect of the role involves: "Listening to the concerns of our members and dealing with queries that they bring forward to us, often requesting clarification from management on issues that may emerge. So, there is a lot of communication with management and head office officials".

There is a preference for in-person meetings, says Jenny: "Members have told us the in-person meetings are more beneficial". However, she explains that scheduling in a busy school with large membership has become a real challenge: "We now have split lunch breaks here, and with rota obligations on most people as well, it's really, really difficult to find a convenient time for everyone to meet".

Eóin adds: "We often do them online in the evening time at 7.00pm or 8.00pm and then the branch meetings are on in the evenings too". He explains that he is also a branch organiser and so attends branch meetings: "I bring information back and forth between the local membership here in the school and the branch in Waterford City. We liaise, share our concerns and talk about ongoing matters in the union".

Jenny says, therefore: "We try to limit the evening meetings to be honest; unless it's something important and unless it requires feedback, Eóin would put a lot of the branch information in an email to the members".

Communication

Jenny is keen to emphasise the importance of good communication in her position: "Clear, concise communication is everything in this role. Without

that and especially with a school this size, things get very complicated and issues can arise very quickly if everything is not tied down properly”.

Email is often their preferred communication method for distribution of ASTI information and literature, says Jenny: “Before it would have been on the staffroom noticeboard but it’s now shared on both the noticeboard and through email”.

Promoting union membership

The importance of framing union membership as a positive is highlighted by Eóin and Jenny, and they are both enthusiastic about the fulfilling aspects of the role. Eóin says: “Personally, I get enjoyment from upholding and promoting ASTI values and policy in the workplace. It’s an enjoyable aspect on the ground here to know we’re responsible for upholding the values of the ASTI in the workplace”.

Jenny adds: “It’s nice to try to get a resolution. To be able to help somebody with a problem they might have and if we can’t help them ourselves, get some advice from head office. You can alleviate people’s stress by being able to listen to their problem and maybe guide them in the right direction”.

While agreeing that the role is hard work and challenging, Jenny would advise new school stewards to focus on the benefits of ASTI membership. She says: “I suppose try to foster a positive element and we’re doing that at this school at the moment so that the ASTI can come across as positive force for change”.

Eóin agrees: “Sometimes younger or maybe newer members of staff might come in and it’s important that they can see that it’s not always about them challenging management, that there’s also positive initiatives that we’re working on, just to try and have a balanced approach”.

Clear concise communication is everything in this role.

Experienced advice

Another piece of advice they would offer is to attend ASTI training for school stewards at the start of the school year. Eóin says: “I think it’s good to keep on top of the training so you’re continually networking with school stewards on a regular basis, and to keep on top of new directives and keep people up to date on emerging issues”.

The importance of drawing on past members’ experience is emphasised by Jenny: “I personally found past colleagues in the school here a wealth of knowledge and experience. They definitely gave me the appetite to learn more and become involved. So, I would soak them for any knowledge that you can”. Jenny also adds: “Our ASTI Head Office Industrial Relations Official Breda Lynch is excellent. She’s been a rock of knowledge and advice for us. Máire Collins too was always helpful to us here in De La Salle in the past”.

Eóin agrees: “Breda’s been fantastic and other officials at Head Office that we’ve been dealing with over the years as well have been fantastic, and the General Secretary Kieran Christie has been very helpful to us over the course of the last few years”.

Eóin concludes that trust and a good team is vital in this role: “I think one of the important things is to have people you can trust to work with, building a team around you both internally in your school and externally, liaising

with your industrial relations official in Head Office, building up some connections locally through your Standing Committee representative, the local branch and maybe attending Annual Convention. All those different things can help keep the school moving forward in a positive sense in terms of a union sense. I do think building a team around you is very important internally and externally within the ASTI”.

It’s an enjoyable aspect to know we’re responsible for upholding the values of the ASTI in the workplace.

Duties and responsibilities of school stewards

1. Each ASTI school staff group shall elect a school steward to be their official union representative.
2. The election shall take place on or before May 1 each year and the newly elected school steward shall, as soon as possible, notify ASTI Head Office of his/her election.
3. The school steward shall be the official representative of the ASTI in the school. He/she shall be responsible to the Association for the conduct of the affairs of the Association within the school.
4. The school steward shall endeavour to ensure that all eligible teachers employed in the school become and remain members of the Association.
5. The school steward should arrange the distribution to members of ASTI literature and information.
6. The school steward shall forward to Head Office information on ASTI membership in the school if requested by the General Secretary.
7. The school steward shall act in consultation with and on behalf of the ASTI members in the school.
8. The school steward shall convene at least one school ASTI meeting per term.
9. On receipt of an agenda and a request for a meeting signed by at least half of the ASTI members in the school, the school steward shall convene a meeting of ASTI members.
10. Necessary expenses of the school steward may be reimbursed by the local ASTI Branch.
11. The school steward may, if he/she sees fit, arrange for the election of a School Union Committee, this Committee to consist of three members including the school steward. The school steward may delegate some duties to the other members of the School Union Committee. Where deemed appropriate by the school steward, this committee may act on behalf of the ASTI staff.
12. The school steward has responsibility for distributing ASTI ballot documentation to members, ensuring that the electoral register is correctly signed and returning the completed ballots to ASTI Head Office.

For further information about the role of school steward, visit www.asti.ie/about-asti/structure/school-stewards/

PARTIAL ABSENCES

A new Department circular finally provides some clarification on the issue of partial absences from school, explains DIARMAID de PAOR, ASTI Deputy General Secretary.

The issue of partial absences from school and how they are dealt with by the Department of Education, by Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and by schools has long been a thorny one for teachers and for the ASTI. For many years, if a teacher was absent from school for less than a school day, for example for a medical appointment, they were marked down as absent for the whole day. This had an obvious and detrimental effect on the calculation of their sick leave.

While the ASTI first raised this issue with the Department of Education at least 15 years ago, it wasn't until the introduction of the Public Service Sick Leave Scheme in 2014 that it became a burning issue for many ASTI members. The new scheme greatly reduced the sick leave entitlements of teachers and, as a consequence, every day counted as sick leave became critical.

Fighting for change

The ASTI vigorously pursued this issue at the Teachers' Conciliation Council and eventually obtained an agreement that partial absences from school should not be counted as full days. It was determined that a full day consisted of four hours and 24 minutes (one-fifth of the 22 hours' teaching time then required of full-time teachers). However, the Department informed the ASTI that their payroll system was not capable of calculating partial absences and would continue to record any absence recorded on the system as a full day's absence. It is important to point out here that schools are required to record all absences, and that the Department is perfectly capable of paying substitutes while calculating the time they have worked in the school to the minute.

To overcome the difficulty with the Department's computers, it was stated that the school, as the employer, should keep a record of any partial absences and that, if and when a teacher was coming close to a situation where they had used up their sick leave entitlements, the situation could be corrected by reference to this record. However, while an information note went out to the system explaining these measures, no circular letter was issued. The ASTI raised the absence of a circular constantly and in 2017 a draft circular was issued by the Department but agreement could not be reached on its content.

Circular 0037/2023

Finally, this year a circular dealing with partial absences was agreed and published. Circular 0037/2023 sets out the agreed approach dealing with instances where a post-primary teacher needs to take a brief, medical-



related absence during class contact time. The circular came into effect at the beginning of the 2023/2024 school year. The main provisions of the circular are:

- partial absences apply only in respect of appointments for medical-related services and will be subject to a maximum time permitted of two school days,
- partial absences apply only in respect of appointments for medical-related services for the teacher concerned, i.e., not for accompanying others such as relatives,
- the duration of the absence will be calculated by reference to the amount of tuition/class contact time missed (using the four hours and 24 minutes equals one day formula),
- where the partial absence has been approved by the employer, the teacher must attend for duty prior to and/or following the medical-related service appointment on the day in question – for the avoidance of doubt, a teacher must attend the school prior to and/or after the medical-related service if there is a commitment to compulsory school duties, such as timetabled classes, supervision and substitution duties, Croke Park hours, etc.,
- partial absences will be covered using the Supervision and Substitution Scheme, and
- partial absences, up to a maximum of two days (i.e., eight hours and 48 minutes), will not count towards a teacher's accumulated sick leave total.

Future developments

While the provisions of this new circular do not by any means meet all that the ASTI has been seeking in this matter, it is a major improvement. In particular, the fact that a teacher can have several appointments with their doctor, dentist, optician, etc., without it affecting their accumulated sick leave is a major step forward.

The Department of Education has committed to developing a system whereby partial absences can be recorded on its payroll system. However, this may take some time. The ASTI will continue to press for this development and for other improvements in sick leave arrangements for members.

Circular 0037/2023 is available from <https://www.asti.ie/document-library/circular-00372023-partial-absences-for-medical-related-service/>

ASTI ANNUAL CONVENTION 2024

ASTI Annual Convention is an opportunity for members to have their say and vote on union policy.



Every Easter, approximately 500 ASTI members attend Annual Convention to discuss and vote on the Association's policies for the year ahead. This year, Annual Convention will take place in the Clayton Whites Hotel, Wexford, on April 2-4, 2024.

Where can I get information about Convention?

The ASTI website – www.asti.ie – is where you will find all of the information you need about Convention 2024. Go to the Events section of the website, where you will find the Convention 2024 page.

Attending Convention

Delegates to Convention are selected at branch meetings, usually in January. Each branch is entitled to send a number of delegates to Convention depending on the number of members in their branch. Branches must submit the names of their chosen branch delegates to ASTI Head Office not later than January 31. In addition to branch delegates, members of the ASTI Central Executive Council and Standing Committee also attend Convention as delegates.

If you wish to attend Convention 2024, you should go along to your next branch meeting. If you are unsure about when or where your branch meets, ask your school steward for your branch's meeting schedule.

When attending Annual Convention you must be either a delegate or an observer. Please note that only delegates are allowed to speak on and vote on Convention motions.

Costs involved

The cost of travel and an overnight allowance is paid to all delegates attending Convention. There is also a registration fee of €30, which is paid directly to Head Office by delegates' branches.

Where to stay

Convention 2024 is being held in the Clayton Whites Hotel, Wexford. Accommodation for delegates will be available at the Clayton Whites Hotel. Delegates book their own accommodation. Please be advised that Clayton Whites Hotel's Convention accommodation is limited and is allocated on a first come, first served basis, so book early. To reserve a room, contact the hotel at 053-912 2311 or info.whites@claytonhotels.com quoting the promo code that you will find on the Convention 2024 webpage of asti.ie – scan the QR code to go directly to this page.

Teachers in the spotlight

Key debates on education, teachers' terms and conditions, and the ASTI's role as a trade union take place during Convention. The ASTI Annual Convention attracts significant media attention and provides opportunities to highlight some of the key issues for second-level teachers, for example, conditions for recently qualified teachers. Coverage focuses on key speeches made during Convention, including the President's address on Tuesday evening, and on key debates throughout the conference.

Topics for debate

Topics for debate are dictated by motions, which are submitted and selected at ASTI branch meetings. In other words, ASTI members get to decide what is debated at Annual Convention. Motions are presented to Convention and delegates speak to these motions.

Branches normally decide on the topics they would like to see discussed at Annual Convention at their November branch meetings.

A Convention Steering Committee, which consists of classroom teachers elected by Annual Convention each year, prepares a list of motions received from branches. The list is circulated to all branches before January 7. Branches are asked to prioritise motions for inclusion on the Convention agenda not later than January 31. They can also propose amendments to any of the motions circulated. Motions and amendments are considered again by Steering Committee in early February and a final agenda is drawn up.

Connect at Convention

The ASTI encourages the use of social media during Convention. Social media platforms such as X (formerly known as Twitter) and Facebook allow the ASTI and delegates attending Convention to spread the news to their colleagues who cannot attend, and to highlight important Convention issues to their followers.

For more information on attending Convention, such as crèche facilities and accommodation options in Wexford, scan the QR code. This page will also be updated with motions and livestream links closer to Convention.



THE ASTI EQUALITY COMMITTEE

The ASTI Equality Committee is working on a number of key areas to promote equality for and to members.



The ASTI Equality Committee. Back row (from left): John Byrne, Marina Carlin, Donal Cremin (ASTI Vice President), Mary Lyndon, Noelle Moran, and John Sims. Front row (from left): Maura Greaney, Philip Synnott, Diarmaid de Paor (ASTI Deputy General Secretary), Geraldine O'Brien (ASTI President), and Eimear Holly.

The Equality Committee is elected by Convention every second year, with a remit to promote equal opportunities for teachers and their pupils across a range of key areas.

Representation of women members

Representation of women in the ASTI and LGBTQI+ issues are key working areas for the Equality Committee in 2024.

Work for the coming year will concentrate on initiating and facilitating discussion on the issue of gender quotas within the ASTI. Despite progress in recent decades on the issue of gender equality, women continue to be woefully under-represented within the structures of the ASTI. The Committee publishes figures and tables illustrating this under-representation in the Annual Report to Convention each year, and Convention has charged the Equality Committee with exploring the merits and demerits, and the practicalities, of introducing gender quotas for ASTI elections.

Some 70% of ASTI members are women; however, there is a consistent pattern of under-representation of females in key positions of influence within the union. 2023 branch delegates to Convention show a figure well under 70%, with only 54% female representation. The trend continues at CEC, which has 46% female members, and only 28% of Standing Committee are women. Representation on ASTI committees is also well below parity overall, with nine out of 16 committees having more men than women.

The Committee is working on a programme of work, including focus groups and facilitated discussions at branch meetings. It must be emphasised that the Committee has not yet formulated a definitive position on the issue and also that any change to the rules of the ASTI would be required to be adopted by Annual Convention.

LGBTQI+ members

Recently, the Committee has spent considerable time in supporting our LGBTQI+ members. This work has included the establishment of an ASTI LGBTQI+ group, the hosting of an event for this group at Convention 2023,

and the preparation and distribution of a poster for staffrooms and attendance at Pride. This work continues.

Equality Conference

At the time of writing, the Committee is also preparing proposals for the holding of an ASTI Equality Conference. These proposals will be brought to Standing Committee in the near future.

Other work

The above is just a flavour of the ongoing work of the Committee. We continue to work on all issues related to the nine grounds of equality and such other matters that are delegated to us by Standing Committee.

The current membership of the ASTI Equality Committee is as follows: Philip Synnott (Chairperson); John Byrne; Marina Carlin; Maura Greaney; Eimear Holly; Mary Lyndon; Noelle Moran; Orla O'Callaghan; and, John Sims. ASTI President Geraldine O'Brien and Vice-President Donal Cremin are ex-officio members of the Committee, and the Deputy General Secretary, Diarmaid de Paor, provides professional support to the Committee.

The ASTI Equality Committee meets between three and seven times a year. Its areas of activity can be divided into three sub-headings:

1. Promotion of equal opportunities for all teachers in terms of access to employment, employment practices and working conditions in operation in schools.
2. Promotion of equality of representation within the structures of the union.
3. Promotion of equality of opportunity for pupils in terms of access to the full range of subjects and involvement in the school.

John Kinnarney



It was with profound sadness and regret that the passing of John Kinnarney was met by his loving family, colleagues past and present in Old Bawn Community School (CS), Tallaght, members of Dublin South 2 Branch, former students, and a wide circle of friends in Dublin and Offaly.

John passed away peacefully on Wednesday, November 1, 2023, following a short but bravely fought illness.

From the closely knit parish of Killurin, outside Tullamore in Co. Offaly, John retired in 2019 following 28 years of service in Old Bawn CS. A highly respected teacher of Maths, Physics and Science, John joined Old Bawn CS in 1991 after several years teaching in Hackney, London.

John unselfishly gave his time serving as school steward, Branch Chairperson/Vice-chair, Secretary and Equality Officer for Dublin South 2, and was a dedicated long-serving ASTI member and Annual Convention delegate. He also served on CEC and worked with several ASTI committees over the years. Furthermore, he was always on hand to lend advice and encouragement to staff and students alike, particularly young teachers starting out.

John, or simply JK, was enormously popular in the Old Bawn staffroom and was renowned particularly for his love of hurling, coaching and managing many school teams to success over the years. Indeed, a lifelong love of education, coupled with an unwavering commitment to hurling both in the school and with his local club Clodiagh Gaels in his beloved Offaly, endeared him to so many people from near and far. While teaching in Hackney, John even arranged for hurls to be imported from Offaly so that young Londoners could learn to love the game!

John loved the school social occasions and was always great company. Stories of organising 'teacher group rates' into Coppers were not exaggerated! He was unequivocally a very talented teacher, intelligent and witty, a great character, lovably mischievous, and as good a friend as anyone could wish for.

Above all, John was a dedicated family man and husband, and we extend our deepest and sincerest condolences to his close family, particularly to his loving wife Liz and children Sean, Catherine, Ailish and Claire.

John Kinnarney left an incredible legacy with his loving family, his wide circle of friends and colleagues in Old Bawn CS, Dublin South 2 Branch, and throughout the ASTI. His industry, initiative and inimitable style and personality will always be fondly remembered, missed and spoken of in the highest esteem, especially when hurling is mentioned!

"When the final whistle for me has blown,
And I stand at last before God's judgement throne,
May the great referee when he calls my name,
Say, you played like a man; you played the game".

Dublin South 2 Branch, ASTI

Eamonn Lowry



It is with heavy hearts and profound sadness that we announce the passing of Eamonn Lowry, a dear friend and esteemed colleague, who left an indelible mark on the lives of countless individuals during his career as a teacher at St Benildus College. Eamonn departed from this world on July 18, 2023, leaving behind a legacy of intellectual prowess and unwavering dedication to his profession.

For nearly three decades, he nurtured the minds of young students, illuminating their paths to knowledge and inspiring them to dream big. Through his guidance, countless young minds were ignited, leading them to pursue further academic achievements.

Beyond the classroom, Eamonn was a true champion of the ASTI and tirelessly fought for the rights and welfare of his colleagues. His staunch advocacy for educational equity and fair treatment of teachers made him a stalwart trade unionist. From 1978 to 1980, he took on the role of school steward, bringing his innate sense of justice and unwavering commitment to the position. As one of the driving forces behind the establishment of the Stillorgan Branch of the ASTI, Eamonn's leadership remains etched in the annals of the organisation. During his time as Branch Chairperson, he initiated the branch retirement function to acknowledge the often-unseen work and achievements of teachers throughout their careers. His service to the Branch was further exemplified by his representation of members at numerous CEC meetings and ASTI Conventions, where his insights shaped important policies and decisions.

Eamonn was a man deeply invested in the social and pastoral development of his students. Alongside his dear friend, colleague, and confidant, Joe McDonagh, he orchestrated enlightening cultural visits and school tours across Europe. He was an integral part of our work family. His vibrant personality, wisdom, and compassionate nature made him a cherished friend and a source of support for his colleagues. Eamonn was a remarkable individual who dedicated his life to the pursuit of knowledge, the advancement of teachers' rights, and the well-being and growth of his students. We, in St Benildus College and the Stillorgan Branch, are tremendously grateful for the privilege of having known him.

Above all else, Eamonn was a family man. His loving wife Peggy and his devoted sons Paul, Conor, Dermot, Brian and Stephen were the light of his life, and his eight young grandchildren were his pride and joy. Eamonn was sadly pre-deceased by his daughter, Suzanne. We extend our heartfelt sympathy to them and to Eamonn's extended family, friends, and colleagues as they deal with their profound sense of loss due to his untimely departure. May his gentle and compassionate soul find eternal peace, and may the impact of his presence continue to inspire.

Stillorgan Branch, ASTI

Happy New Year from the RSTA



Susie Hall
(RSTA President).

As President of the RSTA, I would like to wish all serving teachers and their families a very happy New Year, with good health and many blessings.

Towards the end of 2023, the officers of the RSTA met with those of the ASTI. This very pleasant occasion, which takes place every year, allows the RSTA to bring issues of concern to the ASTI. We thanked the ASTI for the wonderful support we receive and stressed the need for a strong defence of pension parity, which is ASTI policy, when talks on a new pay agreement get underway.

If you feel you need the ASTI to defend your interests as a serving teacher, you will definitely need to join the RSTA when you retire. We welcome all retired second-level teachers, so be sure to spread the word.

Susie Hall
RSTA President



Pictured at the RSTA visit to ASTI Head Office on November 16, 2023, were (from left): Donal Cremin (ASTI Vice President), Pat Younger (RSTA National Treasurer), Pádraig Murphy (ASTI Honorary Treasurer), Norma Fitzpatrick (RSTA Vice President), Geraldine O'Brien (ASTI President), Susie Hall (RSTA President), Kieran Christie (ASTI General Secretary), Micheál O'Neill (RSTA National Secretary), and Pádraic O'Doherty (RSTA Immediate Past President).

RSTA membership application/renewal

Name:

Address:

Home phone:

Mobile:

Email:

RSTA branch:

Annual subscription: €24
Annual renewal date: September 1

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

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

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

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

Standing order set-up form

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___

Just 1 Life



'Just 1 Life' is a road safety programme run by Rotary Ireland. The programme is aimed at Transition Year students and the objectives of the programme are to increase road safety awareness among young people and prevent road traffic deaths.

The programme has been delivered in 10 counties since 2006. In Wexford, where the programme is run in partnership with Wexford County Council, over 20,000 students have participated.

Organisers of the programme say that the positive reception from students, educators, and various stakeholders, as well as road safety statistics, reinforces their belief in its effectiveness. The organisers are seeking to expand 'Just 1 Life' nationwide.

Teachers of Transition Year students can access more information at <https://www.rotary-ribi.org/districts/page.php?PgID=447729&DistrictNo=1160>

STEPS Engineers Week



STEPS Engineers Week, run by the Engineers Ireland STEPS programme, provides opportunities for students to explore engineering, facilitated by their teachers and school communities. STEPS Engineers Week 2024 will take place from March 2-8, 2024. Schools can reach out to local engineers/engineering companies to arrange for them to adopt your school for an in-school, in-organisation, or online digital visit during STEPS Engineers Week.

Register your participation on the Engineers Ireland website in advance of STEPS Engineers Week.

Teachers and schools can access free engineering resources provided by the STEPS team, or create their own engineering-themed activities. STEPS also has a number of online resources in Irish for teachers to download.

For further information visit;
<https://www.engineersireland.ie/Schools/Engineers-week#144931211-primary-and-secondary-school-teachers>

Love Your Wellies



The FarmPEAT Project is delighted to announce another year of its Love Your Wellies competition. FarmPEAT is running a results-based scheme for farmers managing land that surrounds some of Ireland's finest remaining raised bogs. Raised bogs are one of Ireland's most valuable natural assets and their transition to surrounding agricultural land plays an important role in enhancing their long-term conservation value.

The Love Your Wellies Competition uses art to help raise awareness about the importance of the peat landscape. It is designed to cater for all perspectives, age groups and skill sets in primary and secondary schools. There are One4All prizes for winning students and their schools.

Love Your Wellies will run from January 2024 and the deadline for entries is April 26, 2024. For the duration of the competition, FarmPEAT is offering field trips, workshops, presentations, and general guidance to help students during their journey of creativity and learning. If you would like to avail of this service, please contact loveyourwellies@farmpeat.ie.

Further details can be found at:
<https://www.farmpeat.ie/resources-1>

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An bhfuil spéis agat obair ar fhoireann spreagúil, bhriomhar atá paiseanta faoin nGaeilge? Tar ag obair le Coláiste na bhFiann!

Foirm Iarratais ar fáil ar **WWW.CNB.IE**
nó tuilleadh eolais a lorg trí ríomhphost a sheoladh chuig **MICHELLE@CNB.IE**

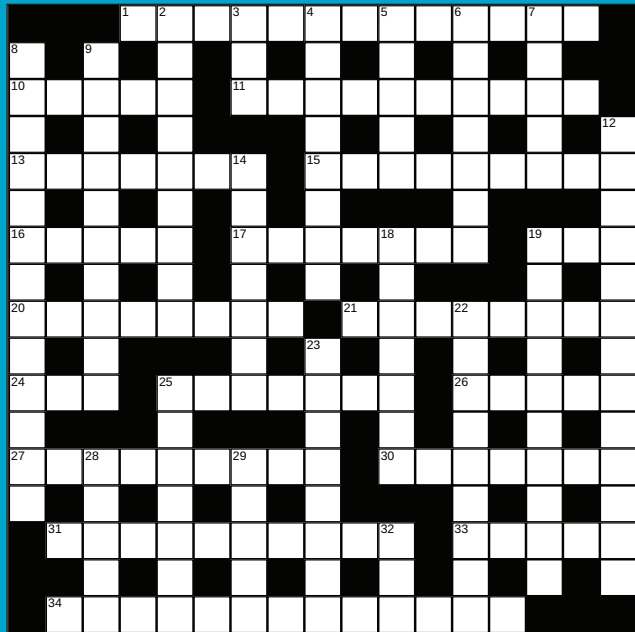


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ASTIR CROSSWORD NO. 2401

The winner will receive €250 in One4All vouchers.

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



Name

School

Address

ASTI Branch

Entries to: ASTIR Crossword No. 2401,
Think Media, The Malthouse, 537 NCR, Dublin 1.

To arrive by: Friday, February 16, 2024.

ACROSS

1. Nutter watches tasty conker (5,8)
10. Attends, minds, considers (5)
11. One who is prejudiced towards those of Jewish origin (10)
13. I am, shortly, asked question and levied (7)
15. Baroness Orczy's one was scarlet (9)
16. Famous Roman fountain (5)
17. 2024 Convention location (7)
19. Could be god, worshipper or stroke (3)
20. Taken into custody because of faulty retreads (8)
21. Short father before national teacher could be deferential (8)
24. Last of 20 across (3)
25. Fail to hit visit, we hear, to get it wrong (7)
26. 700666007 is an example of a palindromic.... (5)
27. Wrapped, swathed, encased (9)
30. Absence when part of school day missed (7)
31. Capital city of Slovakia (10)
33. Relative from southern French city, as heard (5)
34. He's been, or so we hear (5, 8)

DOWN

2. Hit men with intention to kill (9)
3. Turn over piece of tableware for span of time (3)
4. World's largest active volcano, located in Ecuador (8)
5. Mopes around and keeps you regular (5)
6. US singer songwriter and banjo player, born 1959 (3,4)
7. Town in Co. Cork, once famous for its steam rally (5)
8. Arrest chemist during festive season (9,4)
9. Turned up, once again (10)
12. Roman author and friend of Emperor Vespasian (5,3,5)
14. Wonders they are, these pills! (7)
18. Pole vaulter loses lute to double up (7)
19. Cleansed, sanitised, decontaminated (10)
22. Language without irregular verbs and no repeats (9)
23. Nocturnal ant-eating African mammal (8)
25. Armed force raised from the civil population (7)
28. British snooker player and commentator John... (5)
29. Sherpas tarpaulins hide Italian dish (5)
32. One from the Gaeltacht (3)

Solutions to ASTIR Crossword No. 2305

ACROSS	DOWN
1. Chicken thighs	2. Hand cream
10. Rouen	3. Cab
11. Beekeeping	4. Ebenezer
13. Snowcap	5. There
15. Electoral	6. Impetus
16. Erode	7. Honor
17. Sherpas	8. Crossed cheque
19. CEO	9. Eurodollar
20. Calamity	12. Floor polisher
21. Claptrap	14. Posited
24. Ear	18. Polemic
25. Bedroom	19. Coronation
26. Renal	22. Porcelain
27. Uninstall	23. Hooligan
30. Creates	25. Basmati
31. Paraplegic	28. Iraqi
33. Alone	29. Allah
34. Finishing line	32. Col

Did you miss?

Indoor air quality 15

What do school stewards do? 22

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to the winner of
Crossword No. 2305:
Martin Boyle, Christian Brothers College, Cork, Cork North Branch



Both Virtual and In-Person Available



SCHOOL WORKSHOPS & LEARNING RESOURCES

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The Irish Aid Centre

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Scan the QR code to book a **free workshop** to suit your students. We look forward to welcoming your school to the Irish Aid Centre.

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POLITICS & SOCIETY

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There is a service fee for our Health Insurance Comparison Service, if you decide to go ahead with the policy we recommend. Visit cornmarket.ie/health-insurance for details.

*Terms & Conditions: You will be entered into the draw when you get a health insurance quote with Cornmarket, by phone or via our online health tool, between 01.01.2024 & 31.03.2024. You can opt out of the draw by contacting us before the draw deadline date by emailing dataprotection@cornmarket.ie. The prize draw is open to persons aged 18 and over who are ROI residents. A winner will be drawn at random by an independent adjudicator on 05/04/2024 and will be informed by email or phone within 3 working days of the draw. There will be one winner of the Healthy Hamper worth €1,000. There is no cash alternative to the prize. The winner's details will be available upon request. The promoter's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. The promoter, Cornmarket Group Financial Services Ltd. reserves the right to alter, amend and foreclose the promotion without prior notice.

**Average saving based on 372 ASTI members who reviewed & switched their cover between October 2022 & October 2023. Source, Cornmarket November 2023. Cornmarket Group Financial Services Ltd. is regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland. A member of the Irish Life Group Ltd. which is part of the Great-West Lifeco Group of companies.