

ASTI Annual Convention 2023

Address by ASTI General Secretary Kieran Christie

April 12th 2023

Wednesday April 12th 2023

Check Against Delivery

Thank you, President. I would just like to start by joining with so many in congratulating you, President, on your excellent address to Convention yesterday. As usual, you provided your customary forceful, clear and incisive analysis on all of the issues. Your commitment to and passion for improving and advancing the interests of ASTI and its members shone through like a beacon. We salute you.

Of course, I also want to express my congratulations to Geraldine O'Brien on her achievement in becoming President Elect of the Association. Geraldine will undoubtedly serve ASTI with distinction as she has already shown how she excels in each task she undertakes. Congratulations Geraldine, I am very much looking forward to working with you.

I also want to congratulate Donal Cremin on being elected Vice President. Donal as we all know is a strong, experienced and committed ASTI activist. Along with our Honorary Treasurer, Padraig Murphy, I look forward to working with a strong officer board for the coming year. I have no doubt that the affairs of our union are in good hands.

Convention, for this report I have stripped out some central issues from among the several reports you have before you over these three days, many of which we will return to in the form of motions and debate.

Building Momentum

Colleagues, you are aware where we are in the context of last year's review and extension of the Building Momentum

Agreement, with the extension set to run until the end of this year.

On October 6th 2022, the result of a ballot of members was declared and ASTI members voted to accept the proposals from the Workplace Relations Commission regarding the review and extension of the Building Momentum Agreement by 83% to 17%.

The rapid growth of inflation over the past period of time has substantially undermined the living standards of all workers, including teachers.

It is not clear, but there is some expectation that discussions on a new agreement to follow on from Building Momentum will commence in the coming months.

Let me be clear about three key ASTI objectives among others in such talks.

1. A pay rise for all teachers to counter the increasing costs of living within our country.
2. The end of unpaid work currently done under Croke Park and Haddington Road Agreements.
3. Maintenance of pension parity with serving teachers.

I can assure you that we will do all in our power to advance those objectives and no opportunity will be missed.

I also want to say a little regarding the Sectoral bargaining element of the original Building Momentum agreement and

the outstanding business that has yet to be transacted in that regard.

Sectoral Bargaining:

As you know, the 'sectoral bargaining fund' was established under the original Building Momentum agreement.

The equivalent of a 1% increase in annualised basic salaries became payable on 1st February 2022 in accordance with Chapter 2 of the Agreement.

The ASTI and TUI have been regarded as one sectoral bargaining unit. The equivalent to 1% of basic pay was allocated to a fund. A sectoral bargaining unit such as second-level teachers could elect for the funds involved to be used as a sectoral pay round whereby each member would

receive a 1% pay rise or, alternatively, to elect for the funds involved to be divided differently within the sector.

ASTI and TUI opted to use part of this 1% fund to settle a claim for the payment of the Professional Master of Education (PME)/Higher Diploma in Education Allowance (H.Dip in Ed) for post 2010 entrant teachers in the post primary sector.

The revised new entrant salary scale was increased to include the value of the PME/Honours H.Dip in Education Allowance (€1,314) on each point of the scale.

I will say this however. It is regrettable in the extreme that teachers have had to resolve this issue by taking money out of their own pockets.

Remainder of Sectoral Bargaining fund:

This use of the Sectoral Bargaining fund to provide for the reinstatement of the value of Postgraduate Masters in Education (PME) allowance accounted for approximately two-thirds of the funds available. Discussions have also been on-going, somewhat interminably, regarding the use of the remainder of the fund.

To cut a very long story short, we are now at a point whereby the options left regarding the one-third of 1% that's left over, boil down to the following:

Either we will agree, together with the TUI, to pay a third of a percentage increase to all second-level teachers with effect from February 2022 or we will seek to have the restoration of incremental dates for ASTI members who had their points on the scale frozen and consequently adjusted during the ASTI/DES dispute of 2016/2017 dealt with too.

In terms of the numbers, it's quite complicated. In that context, we met recently with the Department of Education and the TUI and we are jointly exploring if this could be paid as a once off cost. TUI will only buy into such a proposition if it is treated as a once off cost. This might mean that we will be able to restore the incremental dates for those of our members affected and meanwhile, every second-level teacher may still receive the third of 1% increase but from the later time of say February 2023 for example too. As I say,

we are still in discussions on the possibilities. If I have lost you in there somewhere, I can assure you it will all be clearer once we have verified figures that we will be able to provide.

Teacher Unity

An interesting aside that developed while we were in discussions with TUI on the sectoral bargaining issue was a push, from them initially, that we should explore the prospects for unity of the two unions. They argued that this was an objective affirmed over many years to “form a stronger, larger union better able to protect, represent and improve the terms and conditions of all our members.”

Standing Committee considered the contents of a TUI letter that set out this position at their meeting of 24th and 25th November, 2022.

The following is an outline of the position we have adopted.

First and foremost, it was decided that the matters of teacher unity and sectoral bargaining are entirely separate and should remain so.

However, it was felt that in common with TUI, ASTI has adopted motions over many years that have advocated for a process of discussion leading to unity.

In that context, ASTI would engage on unity discussions on their own merits, to seek to achieve agreement or otherwise.

Such engagement would take place as a matter of urgency and should enjoy the good faith of ASTI and TUI. However, it would be incumbent on both parties to agree that there were no preconditions.

Scoping discussion on the issue commenced in December and three more meetings have been held since. There would be a long way to go. All that has been done is to try to list the synergies that would flow from unity and barriers that would have to be overcome if any such proposal was ever to get off the ground. Some of the issues, to list but a few that would have to be overcome, include governance issues, electoral processes, staffing issues, policy alignment, due diligence, the complexion of a prospective executive structure, membership categories and the fact that they have a third level grouping in their membership and we don't, and so on and so on.

In any event, if there are developments, they will require massive internal consultation for both unions. Ballots of members would have to be held. The chances of success are

difficult to gauge. Standing Committee and CEC will be kept abreast of any developments as they happen.

Ukraine

Schools have opened their doors and their hearts to Ukrainian families and have gone about the business of settling in 5,405 Ukrainian second-level students in post-primary schools, with professionalism and empathy. This has happened even though our schools are significantly under-resourced and despite the additional pressures on language-support, special education needs, and pastoral care/counselling services over the past year.

The ASTI, in common with other education stakeholders, has engaged with the Department of Education on a continuous basis to ensure a rapid education response to Ukrainian families. Stakeholders like ourselves have worked to share

information, deliver on school places, create supportive school environments and, crucially, serve as a feedback loop to policy makers on what is happening on the ground.

We know that some schools have reached accommodation capacity; that some students require trauma-focused therapeutic interventions; that communication and language issues can arise. We are calling on the Minister for Education to make sure that appropriate resources are made available to schools to address these concerns. We want our Ukrainian students to thrive, to learn, to grow as young people.

ASTI will continue to work with other stakeholders, including the Department of Education, to respond to these issues.

Presentation College, Athenry, Co. Galway.

Convention, I now want to draw attention to a Board of Management and their abominable decision making.

The Board of Management of Presentation College, Athenry, Co Galway have been refusing for some time to release ASTI member Niall Duddy from his teaching duties to attend meetings in respect of his role on the Teaching Council. It must be remembered that Niall is an elected member from the Voluntary Secondary Schools sector, representing in excess of 8000 teachers across the Connaught, Munster and Ulster constituency.

This situation is having a debilitating effect on the work of the Council and the capacity of Niall as an elected representative of teachers to discharge his role and responsibilities under statute on behalf of the profession. The Teaching Council performs roles in the national interest, the most obvious being the registration of teachers, one never more important than at a time of a recruitment and

retention crisis. It is unacceptable that the Board of Management of this school are behaving in a manner that is frustrating this work.

We in ASTI and others have made representations to the Board seeking to resolve the situation but they have been met with intransigence.

Accordingly, ASTI mounted a protest outside the school on October 21st and another last month outside the Teaching Council's offices. I can tell you; we are not done yet.

As I have said before, this Board of Management's disregard for and attack on an electoral mandate, which is provided for under legislation by the Oireachtas, chips away at a small but

important feature of the structures of a functioning democracy.

Although elected to his position, Niall Duddy is technically appointed to serve on the Teaching Council by the Minister for Education. The small-minded action of the Board of Management of Presentation College, Athenry, Co Galway amounts to thumbing their nose at the Minister for Education too.

Every stakeholder, big and small, has a duty to step up to the plate when called upon from time to time, to honour their obligations in full to the teaching profession and the wider education system. This Board of Management of Presentation College, Athenry, Co Galway displays a chronic

lack of broader perspective regarding this matter. They are a disgrace.

Niall Duddy, I think I speak for everyone here today when I say we salute you for the stand you are making.

Senior Cycle redevelopment:

Convention, arising from the announcement by the Minister for Education, Norma Foley, on March 29th 2022 of her plans for senior cycle redevelopment, ASTI has been extremely proactive in developing our response to what will be coming down the line. Thus far, the Minister has not engaged with stakeholders regarding her announcement to any appreciable extent but that will change.

Starting at Annual Convention last year and across a dedicated CEC meeting among others, ASTI has been developing its policy platform regarding all the key issues.

The motions taken yesterday at this Annual Convention have added to that work.

In terms of building alliances, we have been very active too.

We have met extensively with our colleagues in the TUI and in that context, on Saturday 26th November 2022, the ASTI and TUI jointly hosted a seminar for activists and subject representatives in Athlone, entitled 'Equity and Excellence for All'. The purpose of the seminar was to identify areas of common cause, and indeed differences, in the context of the Minister's proposals. I can report that the discussion and feedback was rich and intensive and it was heartening that

there was barely a sliver of difference between us on the substantive proposals.

We want to develop common understandings and common approaches to the suite of actions proposed in the Minister's announcement of 29th March last year.

ASTI is also pursuing contacts with subject associations with a view to developing common cause and approach to the Minister's proposals as appropriate. In particular, we held a joint meeting together with the TUI, with the An Gréasán and INOTE subject associations to assist us in fighting the proposal to have the English and Irish paper one sittings at the end of fifth year withdrawn.

That was an excellent engagement and ultimately a success.

And we will rinse and repeat as we build further coalitions with other subject associations and stakeholders over time.

Our work in tandem with the Irish Secondary Students Union is also on-going and will bear fruit in the years ahead.

The deferral of the Leaving Cert Irish and English Paper 1 decision has shown us how important stakeholder engagement and collaboration is.

Another key event in the suite of initiatives we are putting in place was our Education Conference on 4th March, in Limerick. It was an event at which we showed a great confidence and maturity, to unapologetically bring our messages forward and publicly debate them with leading academics and Department of Education officials alike in furtherance of the development of our voice to advance our opposition to some of the proposals.

But it would be remiss of me not to lay down some markers here today regarding the Minister's proposals.

The lessons that history teaches us must be learned.

Firstly, the learning outcomes approach undertaken at Junior Cycle level has been entirely discredited at this stage and does not enjoy the confidence of teachers.

The lack of depth of treatment has meant that teachers don't know what content to teach, examiners don't know what to assess and students' learning has been dumbed down as a result.

Professor Áine Hyland has done enormous service in highlighting this.

As far back as 2014 she pointed out that the practice of the NCCA in designing syllabi that consist solely of a list of topics

and learning outcomes is not good international practice in syllabus design. The report stated that the author had not come across any centralised or public examination syllabus at the end of senior cycle second-level education which provides only a list of topics and learning outcomes. The Hyland Report concluded that “while learning outcomes are a very valuable tool for identifying what learners should know and be able to do at the end of a course or programme, it is not appropriate to use learning outcomes alone to define a syllabus and its assessment.” (The Hyland Report, p. 5).

Indeed, when you hear the head of the OECD’s Directorate of Education and Skills advising against adopting a curriculum which is “a mile wide and an inch deep” you know the game is up.

The Oireachtas Committee on Education has weighed in on this too when its May 2022 report on Leaving Certificate stated that “As part of Senior Cycle reform, a key priority for the Department of Education must be that the revised syllabus for each subject is far more detailed with comprehensive instructions for teachers.”

ASTI believes that the full range of syllabus documentation (including teachers’ notes, examination specifications etc.) should be officially published at the same time as the syllabus itself. This elaborated documentation should be available well before the syllabus is due to be implemented, to enable teachers to become familiar with the new material and to undergo appropriate professional development and up-skilling.

Another important marker to put down is that not every subject is amenable to follow exactly the same design template. I believe that the rigidity of the Minister's 60/40 model will be unmasked in that context in due course.

The downgrading of knowledge in the curriculum must also be brought to a halt. For instance, Junior Cycle Business Studies went from two papers in the old Junior Cycle to one paper in the new Junior Cycle. Huge amounts of accounting were removed from the course. Accountancy teachers are struggling hugely, trying to teach the accounting course to students who have studied the new Business Studies course at JC level. The erosion of education standards must be brought to an end.

Another aspect that will need to be addressed is in the area of Special Needs education. At Junior Cycle, the NCCA need

to review the Level 2 Junior Cycle program and differentiate between the educational experience of SEN students in Special schools and those in mainstream schools. Some Level 2 students and their parents have expressed their anger at not being able to access the higher order thinking and self-reflection at Level 3 in their schools. These students were previously able to engage with the former Junior Cert at Ordinary and Foundation level. How it might be envisaged that students with mild/ moderate and profound general learning needs would be accommodated in mainstream subjects at Senior Cycle is a profound question that will have to be addressed.

And of course, and we certainly make no apology for saying this, State Examinations must be externally assessed. In

truth, teachers assessing their students for State Certification is simply a bad idea.

The integrity of the process must always be seen to be above reproach.

Teachers are advocates for their students – they are not and must not be their judges.

At the end of the day, it cannot be beyond the capabilities of the system to organise itself in a way that external assessment in these key assessments, that can be life influencing, takes place.

Assessment by teachers would also divert their time and energy away from teaching towards preparing students for

certificate exams and dealing with exam-related issues like appeals and professional consultations.

On 29th March last year, about an hour before the Minister went on to the RTE one o'clock news to announce her plans for Leaving Certificate redevelopment, she provided a briefing to stakeholders. I attended that briefing as did all the great and good associated with second-level education in this country. In truth, with the exceptions of ourselves and the TUI, it was like being at a festival of the Céad Míle Fáilte's. Therefore, it was with some amusement that I watched and listened last week when some of the cheerleaders for her redevelopment publicly grappled with the challenges that the ChatGPT phenomenon now throws up regarding protecting the integrity of our examinations. One could nearly hear the cogwheels in their heads rattle as they sought to position

themselves almost where the ASTI has been sitting for many years, no doubt hoping nobody would notice that they had done so. Because they know what we have always known and promoted - if the integrity of our state examinations become open to a sniff of compromise, the game will be up.

I also want to highlight issues such as class size, resources and CPD – these are big ticket items. We have done them poorly in the past – the mistakes must not be repeated.

Research commissioned and published by ASTI and undertaken by Dr. Brian Fleming clarified that issues such as initiative overload, increasing workload and lack of capacity at school level must be addressed before major change at Senior Cycle can take place.

It hasn't happened to any meaningful extent. The mistakes must not be repeated.

But perhaps the most profound question of all that will have to be wrestled with is the relationship between senior cycle and entry to third level.

Concerns about second level students being prepared for higher education are around a long time and are not unique to Ireland. Similar concerns have been voiced in the UK, the US and in countries of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

Given the concerns identified, does the problem lie with the Leaving Certificate curriculum or with its assessment? An analysis of the current curriculum and its individual syllabi suggests that the curriculum itself is not the key problem. The various subject syllabi are written in such a way as to

require students to engage critically with subject content and to apply higher order thinking skills.

Maybe the real problem here is not particularly the Leaving Certificate, whether curriculum or assessment. Maybe the real problem is the points system.

The points system is merely one of many possible selection mechanisms for selecting students for higher education. Its key purpose is to allocate scarce third level places. If there were sufficient places on every course for all qualified students who applied, there would be no need for a points system. There is scope for change there.

Convention, let's be clear about one thing. The era of the top-down curriculum imposition model is over. We won't

stand for it and recently, the Minister learned that parents, students and other stakeholders won't stand for it either when it came to the English and Irish fifth year Paper 1 proposal. Curriculum development is complex, if it's going to succeed everyone must have a stake, everyone has to be on board.

Abraham Lincoln said "Force is all conquering – but its victories are short-lived"

In my experience in education, most Ministers for Education have a burning desire or a penchant to make their mark, to be remembered as fondly in history as the late Donagh O'Malley for instance. And it should be said that some of them have made their mark in various ways. I would wonder if our current Minister is wishing to be a history maker in

terms of Senior Cycle redevelopment. We wish her well in that regard in that there is a real opportunity to achieve much into the future. They say that the best way to predict the future is to invent it. When it comes to proper, worthwhile, and meaningful change, underpinned by resources and time commitments, ASTI will not be found wanting and will play its part. However, we will not be ignored or disregarded as a stakeholder whose voice does not matter. A dogged approach on her part, in insisting that teachers would assess their own students for certificate purposes, could not and will not be regarded as such. That notion was tried, tested, and failed just a short number of years ago at Junior Cycle. The lesson from history is clear. So, when it does come to history making, I hope the Minister doesn't find herself in the fullness of time becoming ruefully aware of the true implications of Sigmund Freud's comment

when he said, perhaps a little cynically, that “History is just new people making old mistakes.”

Harmful online content

ASTI has undertaken quite a bit of work this year on the whole issue of digital image rights of teachers, harmful online content, offensive communication posts online and the kinds of harassment, bullying and abuses that can arise in that context. We have secured quality legal advice on the matter and a sub-committee of Standing Committee is working on a package of advices that we can issue to our members.

The second National Anti-Bullying Action Plan published in December set out a roadmap on the manner in which the Irish education community can prevent and address bullying in schools. As part of the roadmap, the Department has indicated that the 2013 Procedures will be updated and Tusla

will revise their Guidelines in order to reflect current Department policies and procedures for schools. In our view, these developments present ASTI with a unique opportunity to engage with the relevant State bodies for the purposes of highlighting the prevalence of bullying behaviour and/or harassment of teachers by students using online platforms, to lobby for the changes needed to national guidance frameworks to protect teachers from such actions and behaviour, and to address such incidents (and support the affected teachers) when they occur.

Under the Online Safety and Media Regulation Act 2022, it is also clear that a role for the soon to be appointed Online Safety Commissioner to deal with the prevalence of bullying online is provided, particularly with regard to the ways that social media companies can support measures to prevent

and address bullying among children and young people in schools and online. This is very welcome. The Online Safety Commissioner will be empowered to move quickly to deal with complaints where the complaint has not been satisfactorily resolved by the online service provider. Under the individual complaints' mechanism, the Commissioner will consider complaints where a period of more than 2 days has elapsed since the complainant has raised the complaint with the service provider and where the provider has failed in that period to have the complaint resolved through the agreed complaints process. The Online Safety Commissioner will be empowered to order the take down or limitation of availability of specific items of harmful online content, either on foot of a complaint or on its own initiative.

ASTI will also engage with the Department of Education to ensure that any measures agreed upon with social media

companies also deal with harmful online content posted or shared by students targeting other students or teachers.

Recruitment and Retention Crisis

The recruitment and retention crisis in our schools is growing and having a real and detrimental impact on the work of our schools. The crisis did not just appear out of thin air. A

Teacher Supply Steering Group was set up in March 2018 and true to form at the time, teachers' unions were excluded.

Since then, a minimalist approach has been adopted. There has hardly been a dent made on the problem.

Measures being implemented to date to support the supply of teachers include:

- Additional hours for post primary teachers as a temporary measure;
- New upskilling programmes for teachers;

- Piloting the teacher sharing scheme;
- Greater capacity for student teachers to provide substitute cover;
- Adjustment to the provision of continuing professional development (CPD);
- Supports for retired teachers to substitute; and
- Relaxation of restrictions on job-sharing teachers and teachers on career break.

The big question all of this presents is where are the measures to deal with the retention aspect of the crisis?

Those who have decided to take a career break, job share or retire are central to the big plan of rescue. Students would fill the gaps too. The dogged insistence on persisting with a lower salary scale for new entrants over the past decade, an inadequate number of promotional posts and the continued casualisation of the profession has debilitated the profession.

It must be remembered that downgrading of the teaching profession has been Government policy for over a decade and the consequences are now laid bare.

The list of subjects for which filling vacancies is difficult is continually expanding. Parents have resorted to calling public meetings and demanding solutions from their politicians and a motion on teacher shortages was debated in the Oireachtas.

ASTI recently commissioned a survey on this issue, undertaken by RedC, and the findings are stark.

Firstly, this is not a regional issue - almost every school has had recruitment problems in the current school year. Over three-quarters of principals confirmed that there were situations in their schools where no applicant applied for an

advertised post. Almost half of schools – 46% - have unfilled posts due to recruitment difficulties.

Recruitment problems are compounded by the non-availability of substitute teachers. During the current school year, nine in ten schools have had situations where no substitute teachers were available. One Principal stated that it has got to the stage where they don't see the point of advertising a short-term vacancy as there will be no applicants. Faced with this contingency, school principals or deputy principals have had to take the class or pay student teachers to provide substitute cover. In over 80% of schools, non-qualified teachers had to be employed to provide substitution. As one Principal stated – “Being supervised is not equivalent to being taught”.

And let's get the other key drivers of the situation out there too. Remuneration is perceived as a key driver of supply problems by both school leaders and classroom teachers.

73% of principals stated that teachers are emigrating to get better paid teaching jobs elsewhere and 66% of classroom teachers cited better remuneration in other careers.

Classroom teachers also emphasised that the legacy of unequal pay structures for post-2010 entrants has bestowed to the system continues to impact on teacher supply.

The housing crisis is also a factor: 64% of classroom teachers stated that it is causing teachers to emigrate while 41% of principals stated that the cost of local accommodation was a deterrent to working in their school.

The diminishing attractiveness of teaching as a career is significant: 67% of classroom teachers confirmed this as a factor as did 61% of school principals. The lack of permanent posts for entrants to teaching is also identified as problematic by 54% of classroom teachers. ASTI has been calling for permanent posts upon appointment, subject to satisfactory probation, as it used to be some years ago.

Getting into your third year at a minimum before you achieve permanency as a teacher is no longer acceptable.

Levels of job satisfaction impact on the perception of teaching as an attractive career. Classroom teachers reported lower levels of job satisfaction (44%). School leaders reported job satisfaction at 58%. Over two-thirds of classroom teachers have considered leaving teaching. The main reasons are occupational stress (63%), workload (59%), and poor work-life balance (47%).

The cost of initial teacher education via the Post-Graduate Masters (PME) entry route is perceived by 70% of principals as a cause of recruitment difficulties while 48% of classroom teachers regard it as prohibitive.

While I am at it, I should also mention the problems in the recruitment and retention of principals in schools too.

Our survey showed that over 3 in 5 principals know of recruitment difficulties for the post of principalship in local schools. Workload, work-life balance and complexity of role are key factors discouraging applications for the post. The solutions to this emerging supply problem are focused on strengthening school leadership capacity in schools: more administrative staff (72%); dedicated bursar/financial manager (63%); more allocated time for post-holders (55%) and of course more of them.

The majority of principals reported that they had positive relationships across the school community. However, almost 2 out of 5 principals reported low job satisfaction. Just one third of principals reported their level of wellbeing as good. Poor work-life balance (59%) and inability to disconnect from work at weekend (46%) were reported.

Over two-thirds of principals have considered retiring from their posts. The main reasons were unsustainable workload (86%) and poor work-life balance (69%). Half cited health and wellbeing reasons.

A Distressed System

Convention, what I have outlined here is a system under enormous stress. We are also dealing with an occupational stress crisis. It will call for bold initiatives for both to be cured. When one of the respondents to our survey stated

“Cost of living means that two teachers’ salary in our home means we barely manage to pay the bills each month.

Nothing left over to put into savings. Definitely need to put the heating off and wear extra clothes this winter” it is clear we have a big problem. Teachers are not alone in dealing with the housing crisis – everyone else is too. But something needs to be done in relation to housing of key workers when they work in rent pressure zones in particular.

The reality is that there is going to have to be acknowledgement that we have arrived at the point at which teaching as a career is not sufficiently attractive anymore.

Years of botched curricular reform, multiple inspections and evaluations, innovation overload and work intensification have simply taken their inevitable toll.

A good start to retrieve the situation would be an announcement by the Minister for Education that each of the following would be implemented in a short timeframe.

- (i) A pay review for teachers focused on shortening teachers' pay scales.
- (ii) A reduction of the Professional Masters in Education course from two years to one
- (iii) An offer of a permanent, secure teaching job on initial appointment.
- (iv) A commitment to doubling the level of Posts of Responsibility in schools

This would be a good start.

The motions that are being debated across this Convention provide touchstones to the issues that need to be addressed.

These include initiative overload and unequal pay, mountains of administration, chronic underinvestment, lack of promotional posts, precarious employment and the housing crisis.

Colleagues, the importance of maintaining the attractiveness of entering the profession is at stake. Students' education is at stake. It is that serious.

Investment in Education:

The pandemic highlighted how crucial a quality education service is for young people. The most recent OECD report *Education at a Glance 2022* finds Ireland, once again, in last place out of 36 countries for investment in second-level education as a percentage of GDP. It is crucial that the Government would commit to a significant increase in

investment in education. Unfortunately, the governments delivery in that regard was an utter disappointment. In 2019, Ireland invested 1% of gross domestic product (GDP) in second-level education compared to the OECD and EU averages of 1.9%, according to Education at a Glance 2022. Expenditure per second-level student is \$10,383 compared to \$11,400 OECD average and \$11,673 EU average.

Schools must be adequately staffed and resourced if students are to thrive. While I have touched on some of the pressing issues for teachers and schools in 2023, there are many others: food poverty, children experiencing homelessness, increasing societal violence, equality issues, and the ever present challenge of rapidly evolving technologies and the impacts on young people's wellbeing. The OECD is unequivocal on the need for strong investment in education

by countries in order to protect individuals, economies and societies. Schools and teachers are under strain, so much so that the Irish education system is at a critical point. Failure to act on this reality in the face of overwhelming evidence demonstrates unconscionable short sightedness which must be called out.

Thank you.