

# ASTIR

ASSOCIATION OF SECONDARY TEACHERS, IRELAND

ISSN 0790-6560 | VOLUME 42: NUMBER 2: MARCH 2024

## National trade union membership campaign

**BETTER  
IN A TRADE  
UNION**



- | What do ASTI subject reps do?
- | Teachers' leave entitlements

ASTI

# active MATHS

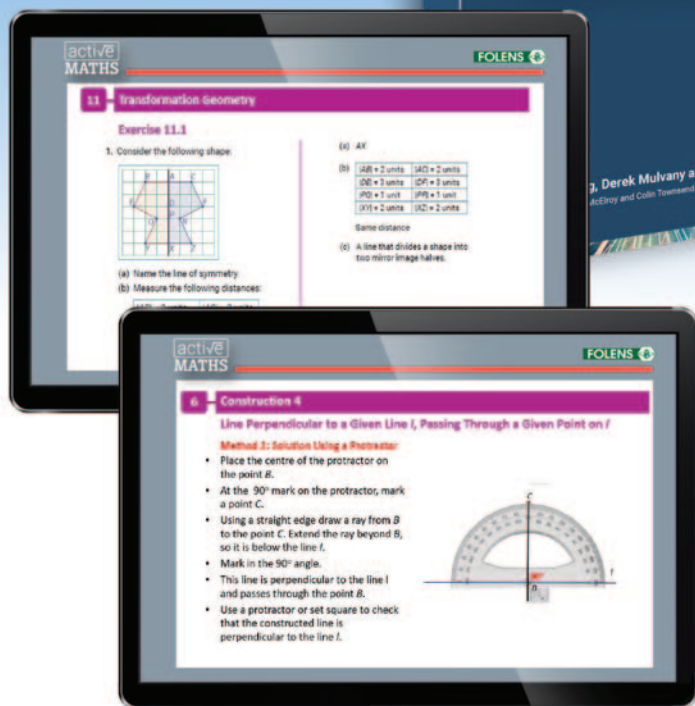
# 1

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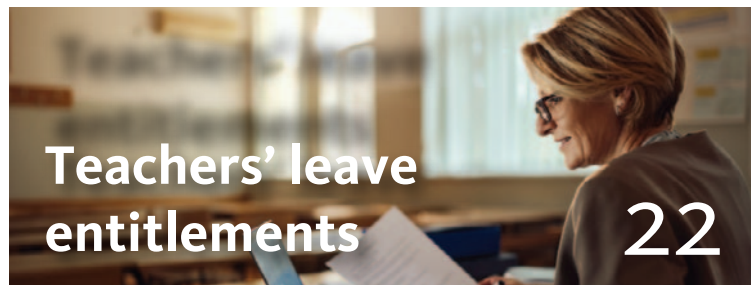
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### Published on behalf of ASTI by Think Media

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## Tackling the big issues

A report from the Irish Universities Association outlines problems arising from the adoption of what it describes as a “learning outcomes only” approach to syllabus design in Ireland over the past decade. The report – a response to the Leaving Cert Biology, Chemistry and Physics draft specifications – warns of a lack of clarity for teachers on what subject content should be taught to students, and the depth to which content should be taught.

Last year, ASTI Annual Convention passed a motion demanding that all future Leaving Cert syllabi (specifications) be accompanied by detailed syllabus documentation, which embeds depth of treatment and includes comprehensive teacher guidelines. This issue will once again feature at this year's Convention, including a motion that all feedback received in public consultations on subject specification be shared with each member of the relevant National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) Subject Development Group, so that a consensus report can be published. Teachers continue to have serious concerns about new subject specifications and their potential impact on teaching and learning. The ASTI will continue to highlight these concerns and demand sound redevelopment of Senior Cycle. No one wants a repeat of the mistakes made in the Framework for Junior Cycle development process.

### AI and education

The impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on teaching and learning will also be considered at Annual Convention. While AI brings many unknowns, one thing is clear: AI is evolving much faster than the education sector's ability to fully comprehend its impact on teaching, learning and education. The Department of Education must play a proactive role in ensuring that there is a plan in place for the development and use of AI in schools. This plan must include consideration of all potential consequences for students: their development as human beings, their right to safety and privacy, and more. The impact on teachers must also be prioritised including protecting the relational nature of teaching, workload and work intensity, access to quality CPD, the right to safety and privacy, and the safeguarding of intellectual property created by teachers for and in the classroom.

### Workload

A number of motions at this year's Annual Convention reflect teachers' concerns that workload and work intensity are impacting negatively on teaching and learning. The work of teachers has changed significantly over the past 15 years. The role and workload of the teacher has expanded. This has been exacerbated by initiative overload in education and by Government policies that tie teachers into bureaucratic processes, which do nothing to improve students' education. I look forward to meeting many ASTI activists at Annual Convention, and to discussing all of the above issues and many more. For members not attending Convention, I hope that you can follow the discussions and debates online and in the media over the three days.



**Geraldine O'Brien**

ASTI President

## Senior Cycle redevelopment

Senior Cycle redevelopment is now well underway. Important modifications to the original announcement by Minister Foley on March 29, 2022, have been achieved.

Strong campaigning by the ASTI led to an announcement by the Minister that she had asked the State Examinations Commission (SEC) to research the potential role and impact of generative artificial intelligence in teacher-based assessment. While this work is ongoing, she has decided to progress additional and practical components that will be externally assessed by the SEC. Prior to this development, the Minister took a decision to abandon her plans for students to sit Leaving Certificate Paper 1 in both English and Irish at the end of fifth year. Decisive and co-ordinated action works.

However, there has been no breakthrough regarding the timing of the Leaving Certificate oral examinations. Following strong representations by the ASTI, the music practical performance exams were returned to within school term for Leaving Certificate 2023. It is regrettable that our demand that oral examinations also be returned to within school term has not been met. This is neither a sound educational nor logistical decision. Students will again be enormously stretched to perform across a range of subjects over a tight timeframe.

The ASTI was assured by the SEC that holding the oral examinations at Easter in 2023 did not indicate the timing of these tests in perpetuity. The SEC stated then that holding the exams at Easter would allow for a comprehensive evaluation of the arrangements outside of the context of Covid. Unfortunately, in December 2023, the ASTI was advised that while the SEC had intended to have all of the evaluation work completed at an earlier point in time, it had not been possible to complete the evaluation in a timeframe that would not have delayed important decisions on the 2024 examinations. Accordingly, the 2024 Leaving Certificate oral examinations will be undertaken during the first week of the Easter holidays. This is not good enough.

More generally, we have consistently stated that it is essential that the mistakes made in the introduction of the Framework for Junior Cycle, which sidelined the voice of teachers, must not be repeated.

Many subject specifications are currently being redeveloped. The ASTI has encouraged our members to engage with public consultations. Indeed, since Leaving Certificate redevelopment was announced, the ASTI has worked closely with the TUI and other stakeholders on a joint approach of opposition to elements of the proposals. A key element of this has been the joint hosting of seminars for activists and subject representatives. It is important that the two unions continue to collaborate on the wider ongoing programme for Senior Cycle change and advance the terms of the joint position adopted last year at both the ASTI Annual Convention and the TUI Annual Congress, which set out in detail our requirements regarding subject specifications and accompanying documentation that underpin the introduction of new/redeveloped syllabi.



**Kieran Christie**

ASTI General Secretary

## Seachtain na Gaeilge 2024 – Márta 1-17



I rith mhí an Mhárta, déantar iarracht ar leith gach bliain tús áite a thabhairt don teanga i saol laethúil an phobail i gcoitinne. Ceiliúradh dár dteanga agus dár gcultúr dúchais is ea é. Ceanglaítear an ghaeilge a chur chun cinn go taitneamhach le himeachtaí a bhaineann le Lá le Phádraig, saoire náisiúnta na nGael, ní hamháin anso in Éirinn ach thar lear timpeall an domhain chomh maith. Anois is féile idirnáisiúnta Ghaeilge í Seachtain na Gaeilge. Cé go dtugtar ‘seachtain’ na gaeilge ar an bhféile, de ghnáth leanann sé ar feadh coicise ó thús mhí an Mhárta go Lá le Phádraig.

Is í an fhéile Ghaeilge is mó in Éirinn agus ar fud an domhain agus beidh imeachtaí éagsúla ar siúl i do cheantar féin, pé áit sa tír ina bhfuil tú lonnaithe. Is féidir cur amach a fháil ar na heachtraí a bheidh ag titim amach in aice leat ar na meáin shóisialta nó téigh chuig [www.snag.ie](http://www.snag.ie).

### Tugann an tréimhse seo deis iontach do gach éinne an teanga a úsáid ina saol féin.

Teanga bheo í an ghaeilge, ceann de na teangacha is ársa san Eoraip. As an 7,000 teanga ar domhan, tá sé suimiúil agus údar mór misnigh é go bhfuil an ghaeilge sa 100 teanga is mó a úsáidtear ar líne. Ní haon ionadh é go bhfuil meas idirnáisiúnta ar ár dteanga, mar le blianta fada anuas tá an ghaeilge á mhúineadh in ollscoileanna i Meiriceá, Ceanada agus ar fud na hEorpa. Tugann an tréimhse seo deis iontach do gach éinne an teanga a úsáid ina saol féin, is cuma cé chomh meirgeach is atá a gcuid gaeilge. Is féidir tosú le cúpla focal. Áis iontach í an bealach nua teilifíse Cúla4, a tháinig ar an bhfód anuraidh, do dhaoine óga an teanga a bhlaiseadh agus a fhoghlaim ar shlí taitneamhach, nua aimseartha.

Is beag áit sa tír nach bhfuil ciorcal comhrá ar siúl, sé sin grúpa beaga ag bualadh le chéile go háitiúil uair sa tseachtain le haghaidh cúpán caifé agus comhrá réchúiseach. Cuirtear fáilte roimh gach éinne agus ná bíodh leisce ort bualadh isteach ann, beag beann ar chaighdeán do chuid gaeilge, mar ní bheidh brú ar bith ort labhairt go dtí go mbeidh tú ar do shuaimhneas.

I mbliana, tá seinnliosta speisialta cruthaithe don cheiliúradh ar Spotify, bí ag éisteacht. #SnaG24.

Is í ár dteanga féin í, bíodh misneach agat agus bain triail aisti gan mhoill. Seo cúpla smaoineamh chun an chéad chéim a thógáil:

- labhair le cara leat as gaeilge,
- seol teachtaireacht trí ghaeilge -tá roinnt GIFs cruthaithe don fhéile.
- aistrigh do ghuthán go gaeilge sna socrúithe,
- imir cluiche cártaí trí ghaeilge le duine éigin,
- eagraigh maidin chaifé trí ghaeilge, agus
- eist le podchraoladh trí ghaeilge, cuir i gcás:

*Féidearthachtaí SnaG,  
How to Gael,  
Beo ar Éigeán,  
Glórtha Ciotacha  
[www.peig.ie](http://www.peig.ie)*

#SnaG24 shona daoibh go léir.  
*By Anne Loughnane.*

## ASTI at the BT Young Scientist & Technology Exhibition



At the BT Young Scientist & Technology Exhibition in January were (from left): Geraldine O'Brien (ASTI President), students Seamus Keenan and Isaac White with their teacher, ASTI member Sophie Caine (St Mary's Diocesan School, Co. Louth), and Kieran Christie (ASTI General Secretary). The students' project was titled: 'Is there a correlation between the numbers of hours of screen time and fine motor skills?'



At the BT Young Scientist & Technology Exhibition in January were: Presentation Secondary School, Co. Kerry, teachers Catherine Kennedy (far left) and Jessica Keane (far right), with students Ellen Murphy (left) and Siún O'Brien (right), photographed alongside ASTI President Geraldine O'Brien (centre). The students' project was titled: 'Does the menstrual cycle affect 13-14 year old girls' concentration levels at school?'

## Requesting digital publications through MyUnion

MyUnion, the members' only area of the ASTI website, allows members to decide how they would like to receive our publications – digitally or by post.

Once you have created an account, you will have convenient access to information about your membership and will be able to request digital and hard copies of all our publications, such as *Nuacht* and *ASTIR*.

Members can also update their personal details directly in the MyUnion area – for example, your home address and email address – to ensure that you receive the most up-to-date correspondence from the ASTI.

You can do this at: <https://www.asti.ie/my-union/>



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## Teacher Fee Refund Scheme 2023



The Teacher Fee Refund Scheme provides funding towards the cost of professional development courses relevant and of benefit to schools. Courses must be subject to certification/award by an accreditation authority recognised by the Department of Education. Applications will only be considered for courses/part of courses completed in the period from September 1, 2022, to August 31, 2023 (see Circular 0005/2024). The closing date for receipt of applications is March 31, 2024. Late applications will not be considered.

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## Teaching Council renewal/re-vetting

Application for renewal of Teaching Council registration can now be made online via the 'My Registration' account on the Teaching Council website. Teachers should ensure that they update their personal contact information and provide any missing data, such as Eircodes and mobile phone numbers. Please note that it is no longer possible for Teaching Council staff to take payments over the phone. Further information can be found on the My Registration section of the Teaching Council website: <https://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/registration-renewal/>.

### Registration with conditions

If a teacher is reaching the expiration date of their registration with conditions, they are required to submit evidence that they have met the requirement(s). If they have not been in a position to meet the requirements, they must request an extension of time. If a teacher intends

to request an extension of time to comply with the conditions attached to their registration, the Council kindly asks that they engage in a timely manner. The Teaching Council states that these teachers can help it to deliver a more efficient service to all teachers requesting extensions by submitting the required documentation and promptly responding to any follow-up queries. Teachers can make their extension request and submit the supporting documentation by logging onto the My Registration portal and selecting My Conditions. It is important to note that teachers who do not engage or do not show evidence of attempting to address their conditions are putting their registration at risk.

### Re-vetting

Teachers who hold a National Vetting Bureau (NVB) disclosure that is more than three years old must apply for re-vetting on a rotational basis. Re-vetting is a two-stage process. If a



teacher has received an invitation to apply for re-vetting, the Teaching Council asks that they commence the process as soon as possible by logging onto their My Registration account and uploading their proof of identification documents (stage 1). The Council will check the teacher's application and identification documents, and submit their application to the NVB. The NVB will then email the teacher with a link to the online vetting application form. The teacher has 30 days to complete the form from the date they receive it (stage 2). Information about re-vetting can be found on the Teaching Council's website.



**Irish Aid**  
An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha  
Department of Foreign Affairs





# Grant Call 2024

## Irish Aid's national Global Citizenship Education programme for Post-Primary Schools

**Apply for grant funding to assist with activities and initiatives that promote Global Citizenship Education (GCE)**

Application opens: **17th April 2024**

Deadline for application: **17th May 2024**

Info: [grants@worldwiseschools.ie](mailto:grants@worldwiseschools.ie)

Some GCE themes you can explore:



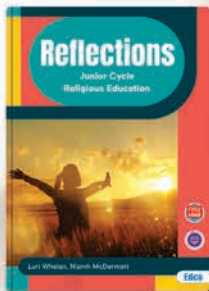
Scan here to find out more and apply:



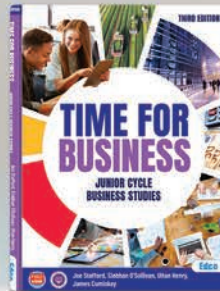


# EDCO 2024 NEW PUBLICATIONS

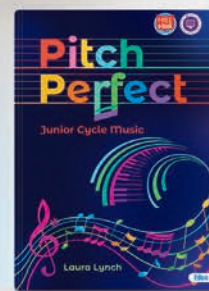
## JUNIOR CYCLE



JC Religious Education

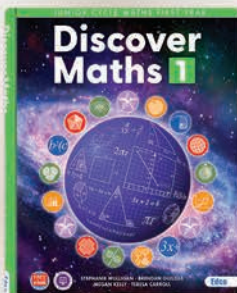


JC Business

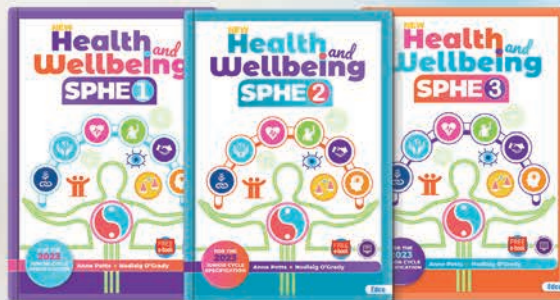


JC Music

## JUNIOR CYCLE

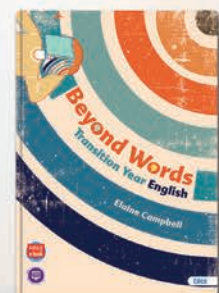


JC Maths



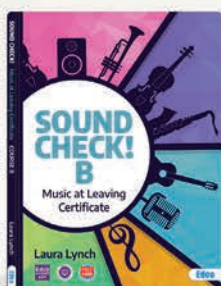
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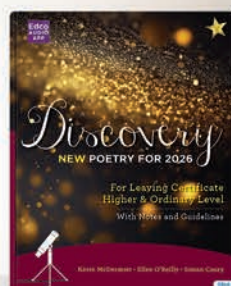


TY English

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Edco 2024

## RSTA coffee morning



Pictured at the recent RSTA coffee morning held in ASTI Head Office were (from left): Kieran Christie (ASTI General Secretary), Geraldine O'Brien (ASTI President), Pat Cahill (RSTA Committee member), and Ger O'Donoghue (RSTA Committee member).



Pictured at the recent RSTA coffee morning held in ASTI Head Office were (from left): Rosemary Kiernan (RSTA member), Marion Lyons (RSTA National Committee member), Pdraig O'Doherty (RSTA Immediate Past President), and Betty McLaughlin (RSTA member).

## New report highlights quality of education for Ukrainian students in Irish schools



The latest report released by the Department of Education Inspectorate sheds light on the educational experiences of Ukrainian students in both primary and post-primary schools across Ireland. *The Report on the Quality of Education for Children and Young People from Ukraine* presents findings from 78 inspections conducted between September and December 2023. With over 18,000 Ukrainian students enrolled in Irish schools, and one-third of these students attending post-primary schools, this report provides valuable insights into their educational journey.

The inspections, which focused on teaching quality, inclusion support, and student engagement, revealed several strengths in the educational system. Notably, the majority of Ukrainian students in Irish schools are reported

**Language support, special needs, teacher training, counselling and pastoral care were the areas that both teachers and school leavers identified as being underfunded.**

to receive 'good' or 'very good' teaching and learning experiences. The report also highlights the implementation of measures in nearly all schools to ensure that Ukrainian students and their parents feel a sense of belonging within their new school communities. Additionally, an encouraging 85% of schools reported effective integration of Ukrainian and Irish curriculums. However, the report also identifies areas for improvement. Recommendations include reducing the time students spent away from their mainstream classes for support in small group settings. Another recommendation included organising classroom seating to maximise opportunities for students to develop their language skills and to form friendships with their peers. The attendance levels of Ukrainian students, both in primary and post-primary schools, require attention. Lastly, there is a noted lack of clear information provided to young Ukrainian students regarding access to further education and career pathways, indicating room for enhancement in support services.

These concerns are not new. In 2022 the ASTI made a submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Skills highlighting the above issues on behalf of its members. In its submission the ASTI expressed concerns about schools' lack of resources in addressing the needs of Ukrainian students. Language support, special needs, teacher training, counselling and pastoral care were the areas that both teachers and school leavers identified as being underfunded.

This report serves as a valuable resource for teachers as it offers insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the current educational support system for Ukrainian students in Ireland.

**Access the full report at:**

**<https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/faob7-department-of-education-inspectorate-publishes-report-on-quality-of-education-for-children-and-young-people-from-ukraine/>**



# POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMMES AT MARY IMMACULATE COLLEGE

## EDUCATION POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMMES

- Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology
- Structured PhD in Education
- Professional Master of Education (Primary Teaching)
- Master of Education (M Ed)
- M Ed in Literacy Education
- M Ed in Religious Education
- M Ed in Leadership of Wellbeing in Education
- M Ed in Educational Leadership & Management
- M Ed in Education for Human Rights & Equality (NEW)
- M Ed in Education for Sustainability & Global Citizenship
- MA in STEM Education
- MA in Music Education
- MA in Education & the Arts (META)
- Graduate Diploma/M Ed in Special Education
- Graduate Diploma/M Ed in Adult & Further Education
- Graduate Diploma/M Ed in Information & Communication Technologies in Primary Education
- Graduate Certificate/Graduate Diploma/MA in Autism Studies
- Graduate Certificate/Graduate Diploma/M Ed in Digital Leadership in Education
- Graduate Certificate/Graduate Diploma/M Ed in Middle Leadership & Mentoring
- An Teastas Iarchéime i dTeagasc Ábharbhunaithe (TTA) san Iarbhunscolaíocht Lán-Ghaeilge & Ghaeltachta
- Graduate Certificate in Academic Practice

## PhD & MA BY RESEARCH AND THESIS IN THE FOLLOWING EDUCATION DEPARTMENTS

Learning, Society & Religious Education; Language & Literacy Education; Arts Education & Physical Education; Reflective Pedagogy & Early Childhood Studies; Educational Psychology, Inclusive & Special Education; STEM Education

## LIBERAL ARTS POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMMES

- Structured PhD in Applied Linguistics
- MA in Climate, Justice & Sustainability
- MA/M Sc in Environment, Society & Culture
- MA in Modern English Literature
- MA in Applied Linguistics
- MA in History
- MA in Local History (with UL)
- MA in Media Studies
- MA sa Ghaeilge
- Certificate/MA in Christian Leadership in Education

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## ASTI health and safety training



ASTI safety representatives attending the training delivered by Safety Advisor Shay Bannon.

ASTI health and safety training recently took place in Head Office, attended by ASTI members who are health and safety representatives in their schools.

This training session was organised to equip safety representatives with the skills and knowledge to better understand their role and how to carry it out effectively. Employers are responsible for ensuring

that the safety representative has access to training to carry out their role.

Some of the key issues covered by the training included: key safety legislation, types of occupational hazards safety reps may come across, how to carry out an effective risk assessment, and the supports available for those in the role. This was followed by a question and answer session.

A 2021 Primary Illness Overview by Medmark, the occupational healthcare provider for the Department of Education and hence all post-primary teachers in Ireland, lists 'Mental Health/Stress' as representing 40% of all reported illness.

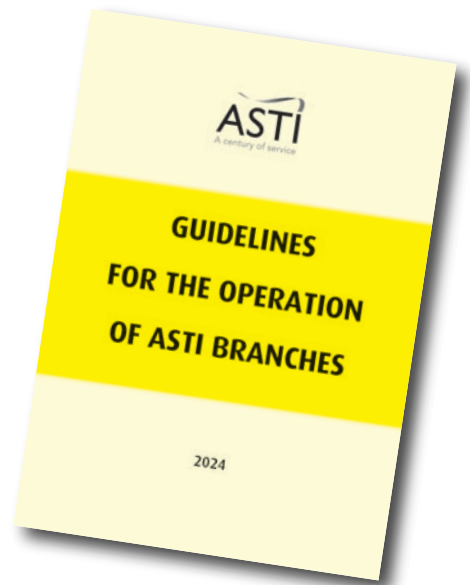
This training was organised by ASTI Industrial Relations Official Conor McDonald and was delivered by Educational Consultant/Health and Safety Advisor Shay Bannon.

## ASTI supports 'Better in a trade union' campaign



ASTI Standing Committee marked the launch of the Irish Congress of Trade Union's Better in a Trade Union Campaign in February. The campaign promotes the values and benefits of trade union membership. Read about the Better in a Trade Union campaign and the ASTI's involvement on page 19.

## Updated branch guidelines



Guidelines for the Operation of ASTI Branches 2024 was launched in February.

Copies have been sent to all branches and the publication is also available to download at:

<https://www.asti.ie/about-asti/structure/branches/>.

The Guidelines provide comprehensive guidance on everything from holding branch meetings and running elections for Standing Committee representatives, to conducting an annual audit of the branch's accounts. Templates for branch standing orders and meeting agendas are also included.

# SENIOR CYCLE UPDATE

## A number of announcements have been made, and consultations are ongoing regarding Senior Cycle change.

In September 2023 the Minister for Education, Norma Foley TD, announced an accelerated process of redevelopment of the Senior Cycle curriculum.

### Tranche 1 subjects

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

- Ancient Greek,
- Arabic,
- Biology,
- Business,
- Chemistry,
- Climate Action and Sustainable Development,
- Drama, Film and Theatre Studies,
- Latin, and
- Physics.

Public consultations began in December 2023 and are either completed or ongoing. The aim of these consultations is to gather feedback to help inform the work of National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) Subject Development Groups in refining draft specifications. Oide – the support service for teachers and school leaders – will commence delivery of in-service training and other supports for these subjects from November 2024.

### Tranche 2 subjects

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

- Accounting,
- Construction Studies,
- Engineering,
- English,
- Geography,
- Physical Education, and
- LCVP Link Modules.

NCCA Subject Development Groups have been established and will be working on draft specifications in the coming months.

### Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes

Senior Cycle Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes have been developed as follow-on programmes for students who are progressing from Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes at Junior Cycle. The goal of the Senior Cycle programmes is to prepare students for life beyond school. These are personalised programmes that are tailored to the individual learning needs of the student. A Programme Statement for Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes is currently out for consultation.

### Raising teachers' concerns

The ASTI recently met with the Senior Cycle Programme Delivery Board and raised a number of issues of concern to teachers, including:

- inadequate depth of treatment in draft specifications,
- the need for appropriate balance between written and other assessment components, which should be developed through consultation, and

- the need for improved communications with/to teachers regarding Senior Cycle redevelopment – the recent announcement regarding the holding of oral exams at Easter being a case in point.

The need for comprehensive syllabus documentation not less than 12 months prior to the implementation of a syllabus is in line with the joint position adopted last year at both the ASTI Annual Convention and the TUI Annual Congress.

### Transition Year

A Transition Year statement was developed by the Transition Year Programme Statement Development Group. A public consultation on the statement was undertaken by the NCCA in 2023. A strong affirmation of Transition Year as a standalone programme in Senior Cycle was reaffirmed in feedback received. Key themes that emerged included:

- the section on encouraging participation and engagement could be strengthened through some further guidance,
- there could be more clarity on how the development indicators are expected to be used,
- the main graphical overview of the programme statement could convey how the Student Dimensions interconnect, while retaining the parity of each dimension,
- some of the descriptions and naming of Student Dimensions could be more aligned to the overall thrust of the programme statement, and
- there needs to be more emphasis on the responsibility of the student to contribute to the effectiveness of their school's TY Programme.

Other feedback included:

- continuing professional development (CPD): there is a real need for immediate and ongoing professional learning supports,
- funding a TY programme: realising the ambition of the Student Dimensions and in particular the student experiences, requires schools to source significant additional funding, and
- time and space for co-ordination: the evolution of TY requires an evolution in thinking about the role of the TY Co-ordinator and about co-ordination of the programme in general – a standalone programme was generally seen as requiring a standalone post.

The revised TY Programme will commence in schools in September 2024. Oide will provide online and in-person in-service and support, including school support, for the revised Programme.

### SPHE

The redevelopment of Senior Cycle SPHE is ongoing. A publication consultation on the draft specification took place in 2023 and a report is expected to be published shortly.

# RETIREMENT DUE TO ILL HEALTH

DESMOND O'TOOLE, ASTI Development, Organisation and Industrial Relations Official, looks at how retirement due to ill health for teachers works.



Teaching is an ennobling profession. Teachers raise up their students, earning their life-long respect and that of their communities for their enduring efforts. Teaching is a profound act of human emancipation. Teachers demand a lot of their students, and a lot is demanded of teachers in return. This sustained effort exacts a high price from teachers in their time, their passion and their stamina. For some teachers these demands can be overwhelming. For other teachers a serious illness, or progressively limiting disability, or a catastrophic diagnosis can bring a premature end to a promising and valuable career. Such teachers may be candidates to retire from teaching on medical grounds.

This article sets out how medical retirement works and the grounds on which a teacher may be a candidate for medical retirement. Finally, it discusses applying for medical retirement and the pension benefits to which you may be entitled. Throughout this process, the ASTI provides close support to teachers who may be a candidate for medical retirement.

## Permanently unfit to work

To retire from teaching on medical grounds a teacher must be able to demonstrate that they are 'permanently medically unfit' to continue teaching. This is a high threshold to meet and involves the production of

a medical report from a treating medical consultant and usually a face-to-face medical assessment by the Occupational Health Service (Medmark). Teachers who secure medical retirement are granted immediate retirement with an enhanced lump sum payment and regular pension for the rest of their life. The specific terms and benefits available for medical retirement are linked to a teacher's membership of the relevant occupational pension scheme. In addition, the ASTI Salary Protection Scheme is designed to wrap around long-term sick leave and medical retirement to ensure that illness or disability does not risk financial insecurity for a teacher or their family.

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**To retire from teaching on medical grounds a teacher must be able to demonstrate that they are 'permanently medically unfit' to continue teaching.**

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**Applications are made based on a diverse range of serious medical conditions. These include: physical illness or disabilities, including cancer, coronary heart disease, musculoskeletal problems or severe voice and hearing impairment; psychiatric issues, such as depression, acute anxiety and severe work-related stress; and, neurological and rheumatological conditions, such as fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome.**

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A teacher may become a candidate for medical retirement if they find themselves on long-term sick leave, typically after being diagnosed with a serious physical or mental illness, which is likely to keep them off work for six months or more. Alternatively, a teacher's capacity to manage an existing or progressively limiting disability may make it impossible for them to continue working, or a teacher may have received a catastrophic diagnosis, which threatens to substantially shorten their lifespan. In all such circumstances, a teacher should make contact with the ASTI for support, advice and assistance in preparing a strong application to retire on medical grounds. The application process is complex and the ASTI will provide support and advice to teachers embarking on it.

A decision to award a disability pension is made exclusively on the medical evidence presented to the Occupational Health Service. Some applications arise very quickly from the most serious medical diagnoses, but more typically an application emerges during a period of long-term sick leave. In such circumstances it is essential that a teacher has been under the care of a consultant-level medical professional before making an application. Applications are made based on a diverse range of serious medical conditions. These include: physical illness or disabilities, including cancer, coronary heart disease, musculoskeletal problems or severe voice and hearing impairment; psychiatric issues, such as depression, acute anxiety and severe work-related stress; and, neurological and rheumatological conditions, such as fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome. It is very important to state that all illnesses or disabilities are equally authentic and are treated with seriousness and sensitivity by the Occupational Health Service, which assesses whether the illness or disability materially and permanently prevents the teacher from continuing to work.

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**The application process is complex and the ASTI will provide support and advice to teachers embarking on it.**

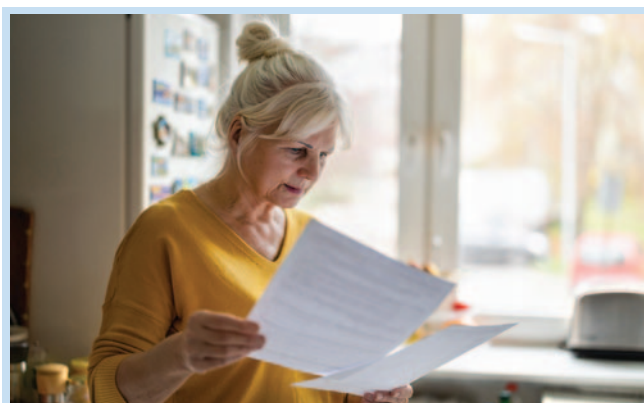
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#### **Pension entitlements**

If a teacher's application for medical retirement is successful, the benefits they secure will depend on the pension scheme of which they are a member. Teachers who commenced their teaching career before December 31, 2012, and have been continuously employed in a teaching position since then, including periods of approved unpaid leave, are members of either the Secondary or ETB Teachers Superannuation Schemes.

'Original members' of these pension schemes, whose continuous service started before April 2004, may retire on medical grounds up until their 60th birthday without penalty and with an enhanced pension. After 60, they may retire in the normal way without any enhancement. 'New entrants' to these pension schemes, whose continuous service started on or after April 4, 2004, may medically retire with enhanced pension benefits up until their 65th birthday, and in the normal way thereafter. These enhancements are capped at up to an additional six and two-thirds years of service, and have the effect of increasing the value of the lump sum payment and regular pension paid on retirement.

Teachers who commenced or re-entered teaching after January 1, 2013, are members of the Single Public Service Pension Scheme. Teachers who have completed at least five years of pensionable service may retire on medical grounds up until the age at which they become entitled to the State Contributory Pension (currently 66), without penalty and with an enhanced pension. A member retiring on medical grounds is credited with additional superannuation payments (called 'referable amounts') to take them up to what they would have contributed if they had continued in the Scheme until their 66th birthday, divided by two. The lump sum and pension enhancements are capped at a maximum of ten times the total referable amounts paid in the last full calendar year prior to retirement, or which would have been paid if a member was on unpaid sick leave.



#### **ASTI support**

Finding yourself in the position of having to retire on medical grounds from the profession you love can be a difficult and anxious time. The ASTI will help you walk this path by providing solid advice and support that you can rely upon to navigate this process. This is what we do together.

# AI AND EDUCATION

**ASTIR** reviews three key publications that examine the issue of emerging digital technologies in education, including AI, and the role of teachers and teacher unions in their development and use.

## *Teaching with Tech: The Role of Education Unions in Shaping the Future*

**Author:** Dr Christina J. Colclough.

**Published by** Education International, 2020

This 2020 publication from Education International contains the findings of research by Dr Christina Colclough, an expert on the future of work and the politics of digital technology.

Dr Colclough undertook research on the use of digital technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI) in schools, and teachers' experience of and attitudes towards the emergence of new technologies. Teacher unions around the world participated in a survey on behalf of their members.

Noting the vital role digital technologies played in keeping students and schools connected during the pandemic, Dr Colclough found a high use of digital tools in education across the world. While teacher unions acknowledged the benefits of new technologies, they voiced a number of concerns, including:

- access to digital infrastructure in and out of school,
- a growing digital divide leading to increased inequalities for disadvantaged groups,
- pressure on teachers to use digital technologies,
- a lack of professional development opportunities for teachers,
- a low level of consultation with teacher unions, and
- a lack of evaluation of the impact of technologies on teaching, learning and education.

Dr Colclough found that a key concern for teachers is the expected increased work intensification, followed by a concern for negative mental health impacts caused by technostress and screen time. She emphasises the need for these issues to be addressed in collective agreements with teacher unions. She recommends that teacher unions prioritise the following areas:

- enhancing the quality of teaching and learning,
- teachers' well-being,
- protecting labour rights,

- governance and policy dialogue,
- the commercialisation of education,
- teachers' professional development and training,
- inclusion/equality,
- professional autonomy/academic freedom,
- student well-being, and
- intellectual property and copyright.

**Dr Colclough found that a key concern for teachers is the expected increased work intensification, followed by a concern for negative mental health impacts caused by technostress and screen time.**

Dr Colclough's report is available from: <https://www.ei-ie.org/file/590>

## *The Unintended Consequences of Artificial Intelligence and Education*

**Author:** Wayne Holmes.

**Published by** Education International, 2023

This report provides an overview of AI and education. It distinguishes teaching and learning with AI (AIED) from teaching and learning about AI (AI literacy). There are at least 20 known types of AIED, which can be divided into the following three categories: institution focused, student focused, and teacher focused.

Wayne Holmes, who is an Associate Professor with the Faculty of Education and Society, University College London, provides a review of 150 different AI-enabled AIED applications.





One conclusion of the report is that while there is limited independent evidence of the 'claimed' benefits of using AI in the classroom by teachers, the risks are well established. Such risks include privacy and security hazards, which can affect teachers and students. AI can contribute to the propagation of harmful biases, as a large majority of AI tools are created with Western countries/cultures in mind.

Other risks associated with the use of AI within school environments include the potential erosion of social interaction among students, and also between students and their teachers. Critics of AI argue that its use in classrooms can lead to the undermining of whole student development. Furthermore, the use of AI has the potential to sideline the role of education in community building. AI can perpetuate and exacerbate existing socio-economic and cultural disparities.

## One conclusion of Wayne Holmes' report is that while there is limited independent evidence of the 'claimed' benefits of using AI in the classroom by teachers, the risks are well established.

Other drawbacks associated with the use of AI include minimising the role of the teacher in the classroom to one of a technology operator, or a service provider. There is concern regarding the displacement of teachers. The exploitation of both student and teacher data is also another valid concern. Finally, the increased commercialisation of education, the perpetuation of neo-colonialism by the West, and the technocratic view of education are real causes for concern.

To safeguard society, Holmes recommends two strategies:

1. Ethics by design – the active consideration of ethical implications, as well as the embedding of ethical principles, into the design and development of educational technologies and AI systems.
2. Recognition of the role of teachers and their unions – teachers and teacher trade unions play a crucial role in ensuring that teaching with AI and teaching about AI supports human rights and social justice, strengthens education as a democratic public good, and empowers teachers and supports student agency.

This report is available from: <https://www.ei-ie.org/en/item/28115:the-unintended-consequences-of-artificial-intelligence-and-education>

### *Opportunities, Guidelines and Guardrails for the Effective and Equitable use of AI in Education*

Authors: Education International and OECD. Published by OECD, 2023

There has been an increased uptake of AI in schools across the country post Covid. Its use has provided teachers and students with opportunities and risks. There are also unknowns associated with its usage.

Some of the opportunities associated with the use of AI in the classroom by teachers include improving the quality and equity of education offered to students. Proponents of AI argue that it is advantageous to teachers as it frees up their time to focus on teaching. Teachers are able to provide their students with new routes to learning. Furthermore, AI enables

## AI supports inclusivity and equity in education, as it provides teachers with accessibility tools in the classroom and enables children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to participate.

teachers to provide personalised content to their students and track their progress. This enables teachers to pinpoint the areas their students excel in, and the areas they need help in. AI can be advantageous to students, as it allows them to have increased autonomy over their learning, which increases their levels of engagement overall. AI supports inclusivity and equity in education, as it provides teachers with accessibility tools in the classroom and enables children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to participate. Such AI tools include speech-to-text and auto-captioning. Furthermore, early human intervention alongside the use of AI in the classroom can address learning difficulties, such as dyslexia/dyscalculia/dysgraphia, enabling students to better perform as a result of the supports available to them. AI ensures collaborative learning for students and can support teachers by generating draft lesson plans.

One drawback of using AI in the classroom is that its use is dependent on how comfortable teachers are with using technology, and less technologically inclined teachers are less likely to avail of AI tools. Inequalities can also result from unequal access to technology, and AI use is associated with privacy and security concerns for both students and educators alike.

Bias from developers, society and past databases are valid concerns arising from AI use. There are fears that the increased use of AI in the classroom could lead to the atrophy of human skills and agency for both teachers and students. The increase in workload for teachers is also a significant problem associated with AI. Frequent use of AI among students may lead to social isolation.

This report is available from:

<https://www.oecd.org/education/cei/Opportunities,%20guidelines%20and%20guardrails%20for%20effective%20and%20equitable%20use%20of%20AI%20in%20education.pdf>

### Key points

1. AI presents opportunities, risks and unknowns.
2. There is little independent research to date on the benefits of AI in the classroom.
3. Regulation in the areas of AI development, implementation and use is essential for society.
4. Teachers and their unions must play a significant role in all aspects of AI in education in order to protect teachers' professionalism and professional rights, and students' and teachers' human rights.

### What the experts are saying

**Dr Christina Colclough**

"Who has the responsibility to check whether these tools are exacerbating or bridging inequalities?"

"Addressing national and regional authorities on the necessity of including educators' unions in the pre-evaluation, implementation and assessment of digital technologies in education [is essential]. This is not only to protect educators' well-being and professionalism, but also to be the guardians of human rights and privacy rights in education."

**Wayne Holmes**

"AI has the ability to process and analyse vast amounts of data at speeds beyond human capabilities, and while it may mimic intelligent behaviour and sometimes even appears intelligent, it actually lacks consciousness and any real understanding."

"AI-enabled personalised learning is deeply influenced by the Silicon Valley perspective, which over-emphasises technology and individualism at the expense of community."

"Teachers and teacher trade unions play a crucial role in ensuring that teaching with AI and teaching about AI supports human rights and social justice, strengthens education as a democratic and accountable public good, empowers teachers, and supports student agency."

**OECD/Education International**

"When applied to education, technologies such as artificial intelligence, machine learning and robots have the potential to improve the quality and equity of learning, free teachers' time to focus on their teaching, and provide students with new routes to learning."

"The use of algorithms to make automated decisions on learning interventions (e.g., identify potential early school leavers), progression or admission could, as with similar human decisions, entail risks of bias of developers, society and past datasets *vis-à-vis* certain student groups, resulting in different forms of discrimination, and perhaps amplifying and making them systematic compared to their occurrence in traditional, fully human-driven education."

"Digital transformation can exacerbate existing inequity if access to the internet and thus learning tools and resources are unevenly distributed among learners."

# BETTER IN A TRADE UNION

ASTI members are among a number of trade union members who feature in an all-island campaign to highlight the benefits of being in a union.

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) has launched a major PR campaign: Better in a Trade Union. The initiative aims to create awareness of unions, the benefits of union membership and employees’ right to collective bargaining. The Better in a Trade Union campaign involves advertisement on bus and rail, as well as radio and digital media advertising, and a social media campaign.

The campaign website – [www.unions.ie](http://www.unions.ie) – includes a range of video clips featuring trade union members, including teachers, and links to campaign social media accounts.

ASTI members Aisling Hughes from Monaghan and Fintan Creagh from Dublin feature in the campaign (see below).

The Better in a Trade Union campaign will culminate in Trade Union Week, which takes place from April 29 to May 6, and includes a range of public and workplace activities. The ASTI will host a number of school-based events during Trade Union Week.

To keep up with the Better in a Trade Union campaign and Trade Union Week, and to see how you can get involved, visit [www.asti.ie](http://www.asti.ie) and click on Better in a Trade Union on the homepage.



**Aisling Hughes**  
 Teacher of Home Economics and Religion, Our Lady’s Secondary School, Castleblayney, Co. Monaghan  
 ASTI Monaghan Branch member

***It is important to be in a trade union because...***

“It offers legal assistance and professional advice to teachers. It also ensures that we are well informed of our legal entitlements. Membership of a union means that there is representation at national, local and school levels. I would like to thank our ASTI school steward Enda Tourish for encouraging young teachers to join a trade union and for keeping us well informed. There are also a variety of discounts available to members of a trade union, such as reductions in car and home insurance.”



**Fintan Creagh**  
 Teacher of History, English, and Politics and Society, Ardgillan Community College, Balbriggan, Co. Dublin  
 ASTI Fingal Branch member

***It’s important to be in a trade union because...***

“Over the years unions have achieved tremendous things: the weekend, the eight-hour day, pensions, a minimum wage, lunch breaks – two hundred years ago these were considered ridiculous dreams! Now imagine what we could achieve in the years to come. A four-day working week? Earlier retirement? Abolition of zero-hour contracts? Universal healthcare? An end to homelessness for workers? Pay parity for post-2011 teachers? Anything is possible when workers come together and get organised.”

# WHAT DO ASTI SUBJECT REPS DO?

**BREEDA SLEVIN** talks to three ASTI Subject/Programme Representatives about their work.



ASTI Subject/Programme Representatives are classroom teachers who make a vital contribution to the development of ASTI education policy and to the advancement of that policy.

ASTI Subject/Programme representatives are elected annually by the union’s Central Executive Council to assist in formulating ASTI curricular policy. The ASTI maintains a network of two representatives for each subject and curriculum area.

**Representative role**

A key part of the role is representing the ASTI on the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) Subject Development Groups in their subject area. NCCA Subject Development Groups are responsible for the development of subject specifications and assessment guidelines. ASTI representatives on NCCA Development Groups work to ensure that the expert voice of the classroom teacher is heard at NCCA level. They also promote ASTI policy on curriculum and assessment at NCCA Development Group meetings.

**Advisory role**

ASTI Subject/Programme Representatives provide written reports to the ASTI Education Committee after each NCCA Subject Development Group meeting. Apart from NCCA work, subjects are continuously developing and Representatives provide information and advice to the Education Committee to ensure that the ASTI is fully up to date on curriculum development. They are a vital resource for the ASTI in terms of the union’s contribution to national education policy.

**State Examinations role**

ASTI Subject/Programme Representatives provide professional commentary on the State exams to the media and submit a post-examination report to the SEC via the ASTI.



**Noelle Moran**

Noelle is an ASTI Subject Representative for Accounting, along with Eamon Scully. Noelle is a member of the Tuam Branch.

**Senior Cycle re-development and teacher voice...**

“As an ASTI Subject Representative, you are a member of the NCCA Subject Development Group for your subject. It is an important role, as ASTI Subject Representatives bring the voice and expertise of classroom teachers to the table when the NCCA is looking at curriculum reform. Subject Representatives promote ASTI policy on curriculum and assessment on NCCA Development Groups and advise the ASTI on developments in their subject area.

“One role of NCCA Development Groups is to develop background papers in subject areas, which the NCCA puts out for public consultation. It is important to note that teacher union reps are only one of many stakeholders on NCCA Development Groups. I would urge all teachers to become involved in the NCCA public consultations. Teachers can bring a vital holistic perspective to curriculum development because they have practical experience and knowledge from the classroom.”

**Supportive network...**

“ASTI Subject Representatives don’t work in isolation. The ASTI hosts an annual seminar for all Subject Representatives, which is a very informative day both for those new to the role and for people in the role for a number of years. At this seminar ASTI education policy – including union policy on curriculum and assessment – is discussed and updates

are given to all representatives regarding national developments in the area of subject reform. As an ASTI Subject Representative, it is important to hear about what's happening in other subjects.

"Two recent seminars were joint meetings with the TUI, which were productive events. It is important to work together on curriculum and assessment issues.

"I work with my counterpart Eamon Scully – the other ASTI Representative for Accounting. For example, we jointly prepare written reports for submission to the Departmental Marking Conferences for Leaving Certificate Accounting. We also contribute to the media coverage of Certificate Examinations on the day of the Leaving Cert Accounting Exam."



**Kate Barry**

Kate is an ASTI Subject Representative for English, along with Siobhan O'Donovan. Kate is a member of the Fermoy Branch.

**Being an ASTI Subject Representative...**

"I really like the fact that you're not on your own, that there are two Subject Representatives, so you have a partner that you're working with. This was especially important for me when I first became an ASTI Subject Rep. Being able to attend ASTI-organised meetings where you meet Subject Reps for other subjects also really helps because you get an idea about issues such as how curricular and assessment changes affect teachers of other subjects and their students – things come up that I might not have thought of."

**Representing the ASTI**

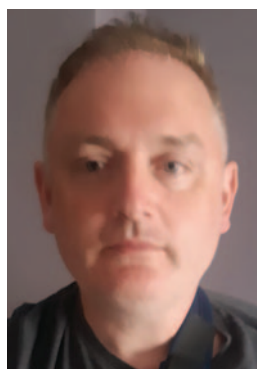
"I'm very conscious that I'm speaking for ASTI members who teach English, that it's not about my opinion. We are looking at things such as: have standards been maintained? Is assessment fair to students?"

"In relation to feedback to the State Exams Commission [SEC] on the State exams, normally the ASTI English Reps consult with other teachers, with the objective of ascertaining how students who were prepared well by their teacher would have coped with that Exam paper.

"Exam papers can present issues and obviously any teacher can contact the SEC themselves, but we would encourage ASTI members to contact the ASTI Subject Reps with their concerns, because if we get a number of teachers who have a similar issue with an Exam paper, then it gives the issue greater weight."

**Making a difference...**

"Last year when there were proposals [from Minister for Education Norma Foley TD] to have English Paper 1 in fifth year, we had a meeting where the Presidents of the ASTI and TUI were there. I acted as a contact for INOTE, which is the English teachers' association. We had a really productive meeting and issued a joint press statement from the two unions with the backing of INOTE and An Gréasán, the Irish teachers' association. Soon after that the Minister for Education announced that the proposals were being deferred. It was great to be on the same page, but also to be working together for teachers and students."



**Dermot Brennan**

Dermot is an ASTI Subject Representative for Climate Action and Sustainable Development, along with Ciara McGarry. Dermot is a member of Carbery Branch.

**Being an ASTI Subject Rep for a new subject specification...**

"The main work involves analysing the general learning outcomes for each strand, working through these to develop appropriate learning outcomes for a Leaving Cert course in this subject area. The work of the Development Group is unusual in that there's no predecessor at Senior Cycle and there's no subject directly linked from Junior Cycle. There are subjects that have elements in them that are linked to Climate Action and Sustainable Development – such as CSPE, Geography and Science – but there is no equivalent course coming through from Junior Cycle into Senior Cycle. Working out what is to be taught and the learning outcomes has to be parsed through very carefully."

**Bringing teachers' voices to the process...**

"I think that the teacher has a perspective that's different from the other stakeholders. We are more *au fait* with the needs of students, and the pressure students are under. We have been highlighting the need for resources because we know first hand that working-class children don't benefit from some of the advantages of more well-off children. We know that education is not a level playing field in Ireland. So, we are bringing that voice to the process. Being an ASTI activist, you are always advocating for students, because as teachers we are with them every day and we know them, and understand their realities."

**Working together...**

"With such a focus on learning outcomes, we need to ensure that the development of learning outcomes for new specifications, and the language around learning outcomes, are student friendly. This is especially so because you have one specification, encompassing higher and ordinary. So, the learning outcomes need to be applicable to both levels. I think the ASTI could play a role here in ensuring that ASTI reps going on development groups for new specifications have their brief."

**How to become an ASTI Subject/Programme Representative**

- Elections for ASTI Subject/Programme Representatives take place at the January Central Executive Council meetings each year,
- nominees must be teaching their subject/programme for at least two years,
- if you are interested in putting your name forward for 2025, contact your Branch Secretary, and
- training and guidance are provided by ASTI Head Office.



The list of ASTI Subject/Programme Representatives 2024 is available from <https://www.asti.ie/document-library/subject-convenors-202223/>, or by scanning the QR code.

# TEACHERS' LEAVE ENTITLEMENTS

Some recent amendments and additions to teachers' leave entitlements have been implemented.

## FORCE MAJEURE LEAVE

Force majeure leave is a statutory special leave with pay for urgent family reasons.

### What's new?

A new Department of Education circular on this leave was issued in 2023.

### Eligibility for force majeure leave

In determining eligibility for force majeure leave, the specific circumstances must be:

- a) considered urgent owing to an illness/injury of an immediate relative, where the teacher has to act without delay, and
- b) the immediate presence of the teacher is indispensable, to provide support at the place where the ill or injured immediate relative is located.

Force majeure leave is not applicable for accompanying a sick or injured relative to a scheduled medical appointment. Force majeure leave consists of one or more school days but must not exceed a minimum total of: three school days in 12 consecutive months or five school days in 36 consecutive months.

Please refer to Appendix A of Circular Letter 0058/2023 for the updated list of immediate relatives (as defined in the Parental Leave Act).

## ILLNESS IN FAMILY LEAVE

Illness in family leave is a non-statutory special leave with pay.

### What's new?

A new Department of Education circular on this leave was issued in 2023.

### Eligibility for illness in family leave

In determining eligibility for illness in family leave, the specific circumstances must be:

- a) in the event of the serious and unforeseen illness of, or injury to, a teacher's immediate relative/near relative, and where alternative domestic arrangements cannot be made, and

- b) in any case where force majeure leave has been exhausted or does not apply.

Illness in family leave consists of one or more school days but must not exceed a maximum total of five school days in each school year in respect of an immediate relative, or three school days in each school year in respect of a near relative.

The maximum illness in family leave entitlement in a school year is five school days. This is inclusive of the force majeure entitlements. The immediate relatives and near relatives that qualify a teacher for illness in family leave are listed in Appendix A of Circular letter 0058/2023.

### Application procedures

Employer approval must be sought for force majeure leave and illness in family leave. A teacher who avails of force majeure leave or illness in family leave is required to complete the application form at Appendix C of Circular 0058/2023. The application form should be completed and submitted to the employer as soon as is reasonably practicable after availing of such leave.

The employer should satisfy themselves that, in the circumstances, an application for force majeure leave or illness in family leave is fully justified and can be granted.

An employer may, at their discretion, request supporting documentation such as a medical letter to support the teacher's application. The medical letter does not need to state the nature of the medical condition. It only needs to be a statement of fact that the person is, or was, in need of significant care or support for a serious medical reason.

An employer may only approve force majeure leave and illness in family leave at the time of the illness or injury to the immediate relative or near relative. The first day of force majeure leave and illness in family leave is covered by the Supervision and Substitution Scheme. The employer may appoint a substitute teacher, paid by the paymaster, for consecutive force majeure leave or consecutive illness in family leave.

For full details on force majeure leave and illness in family leave entitlements, please refer to Circular letter 0058/2023.

### UNPAID LEAVE FOR MEDICAL CARE PURPOSES

Unpaid leave for medical care purposes is a statutory leave entitlement. This is in addition to existing statutory entitlements to carer's leave, force majeure leave, and the non-statutory entitlement to illness in family leave.

#### What's new?

Unpaid leave for medical care purposes is a new type of leave, which was introduced in July 2023 arising from the Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023.

#### Eligibility for unpaid leave for medical care purposes

A teacher can apply for unpaid leave for medical care purposes to provide personal care or support for a serious medical condition to their:

- child (including adopted child, stepchild, and child being cared for on the basis of *in loco parentis*)
- spouse or civil partner
- cohabitant
- parent or grandparent
- brother or sister, and
- housemate (person who resides in the same house as the teacher, other than those listed above).

Unpaid leave for medical care purposes consists of one or more school days but must not exceed a maximum of five school days in a consecutive 12 months.

#### Application procedure for unpaid leave for medical care purposes

The employer's approval must be sought for unpaid leave for medical care purposes. An application form for unpaid leave for medical care purposes should be completed and submitted to the employer as soon as is reasonably practicable prior to or after availing of such leave. An employer may only accept an application for unpaid leave for medical care purposes at the time of the illness or injury.

The application form is located at Appendix A of Circular Letter 0050/2023: <https://www.asti.ie/document-library/circular-00502023-unpaid-leave-for-medical-care-purposes-for/>.

The employer should satisfy themselves that, in the circumstances, an application for unpaid leave for medical care purposes is fully justified and can be granted. An employer may, at their discretion, request supporting documentation, such as a medical letter to support the teacher's application. The medical letter does not need to state the nature of the medical condition. It only needs to be a statement of fact that the person is, or was, in need of significant care or support for a serious medical reason.

#### Status during unpaid leave for medical care purposes

A teacher on unpaid leave for medical care purposes is deemed for all purposes to be in employment at that time, with the exception of remuneration and superannuation. Unpaid leave for medical care purposes is fully reckonable for seniority and progression on the incremental salary scale.

For full details on unpaid leave for medical care purposes, please refer to Circular Letter 0050/2023.

### AMENDMENT TO THE PARENTAL LEAVE SCHEME

#### What's new?

A Department of Education information note containing an amendment to the age of the child for which a parent can avail of parental leave was issued in November 2023.

#### Amendment to the Parental Leave Scheme for registered teachers employed in recognised primary and post-primary schools

With effect from January 8, 2024, a teacher is entitled to a maximum of 26 weeks of parental leave in respect of each child up to the age of 16 years of age. Previously, the entitlement was 26 weeks of parental leave in respect of each child up to 13 years of age, or the age of 16 years in the case of a child with a disability and/or long-term illness. Please refer to information note TC/IN 0010/2023.

For further information on leave entitlements, please visit: <https://www.asti.ie/your-employment/terms-and-conditions/tags/leave/>.

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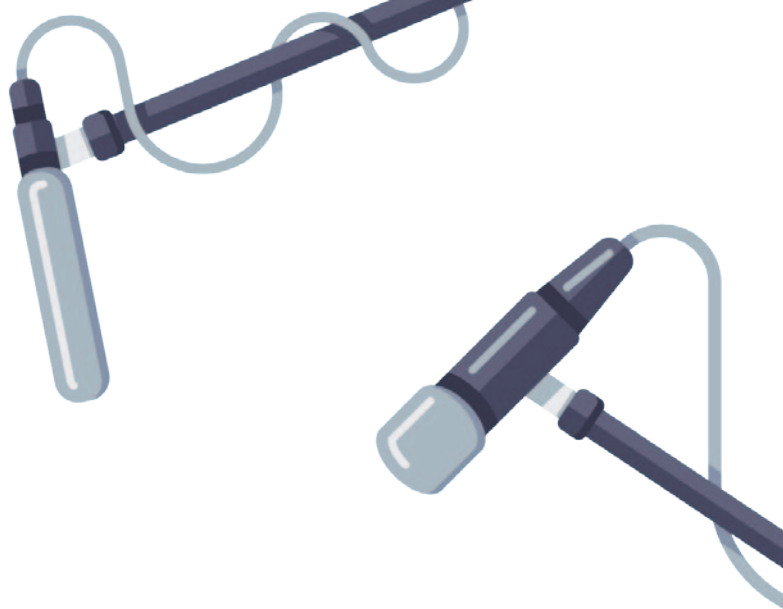
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Fáilte Ireland

# TEACHER SHORTAGE – CRISIS CONTINUES



## ASTI representatives have been highlighting the huge difficulties in recruitment and retention of teachers around the country

“The refusal of the Minister for Education to seek the necessary funds to address the problems associated with incremental credit for some teachers returning to Irish schools is an abject failure. Her determination to maintain the extraordinary casualisation of teachers’ employment status in their early years, coupled with an excessive length of pre-teacher training for graduates, demonstrates a minister with neither the political will nor wherewithal to properly tackle the problem.”

**Kieran Christie, ASTI General Secretary,**  
*Irish Daily Mail, January 9, 2024*

[On teacher shortages] “The situation currently is at a crisis stage; very often principals and management are withdrawing special education needs teachers, who were allocated to students who have that need, and placing them in the mainstream classroom because otherwise students are unsupervised.”

**Geraldine O’Brien, ASTI President,**  
*Clare FM, January 9, 2024*

[On bullying] “We welcome the initiative, which is called Cinéaltas, which as you know means kindness. It was introduced by the Minister in 2022 and it’s an effort to record as you have said all incidents of bullying behaviour in schools and it’s something that will put an extra burden on schools because any initiative as you know, takes personnel to run. So, it will be an additional workload.”

**Geraldine O’Brien, ASTI President,**  
*The Michael Reade Show, LMF, January 31, 2024*

[On unfilled teaching posts] “Our statement reflects the level of frustration that we feel and more importantly that principals, staff and parents and students throughout the country feel at the fact that there are many classrooms today and every other day unfilled, and students aren’t being taught, or are being amalgamated. Special needs teachers are being deployed in the mainstream classes. There is a lot of chaos out there.”

**Kieran Christie, ASTI General Secretary,**  
*Drive Time, RTÉ Radio 1, January 8, 2024*

“We are finding it increasingly difficult to staff our school. We would advertise for vacant positions in May and fill those positions in May or early June, but then come August we are finding that we are constantly on tenterhooks the whole summer wondering will those teachers show up for the positions they have been offered, because potentially they have been offered positions in schools outside of Dublin where the cost of living is more affordable and where they can actually find accommodation. It is next to impossible to find substitute teachers at the moment.”

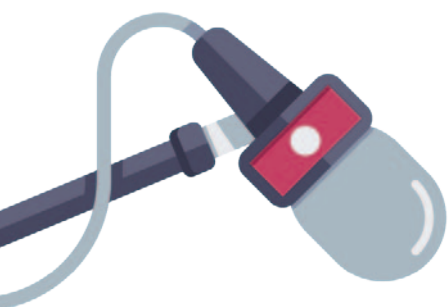
**Sinead Corkery, ASTI Standing Committee Representative Region 18,**  
*Virgin Media News, January 8, 2024*

“There is a crisis in teaching recruitment at the moment and retention around the country. It used to be confined chiefly to Dublin. It used to be confined chiefly to STEM subjects and languages. But now, practically all subjects around the country are suffering from not being able to get teachers that are required in schools.”

**Diarmaid de Paor, ASTI Deputy General Secretary,**  
*The Michael Reade Show, LMF, January 9, 2024*

“Agus an ghéarchéim maidir le soláthar múinteoirí ag dul in olcas, tá cáineadh déanta ag an ASTI ar an Aire Oideachais de bharr nach bhfuil sí tar éis dul i ngleic leis an bhfadhb maidir le creidmheas incriminteach nach bhfuil ar fáil do mhúinteoirí Éireannacha atá ag filleadh abhaile ó thíortha nach bhfuil san AE. Níl léargas ar bith mar bhonn leis an gcinneadh seo.”

**Moira Leydon, ASTI Assistant General Secretary,**  
*Nuacht a hAon, RnaG, January 8, 2024*





# PRESSING ISSUES ON THE AGENDA AT CONVENTION 2024

Some of the key items on the agenda for ASTI Annual Convention 2024 include proposed changes to Leaving Cert assessment, workload, teacher shortages and student well-being.



This year's ASTI Annual Convention will be held in the Clayton Whites Hotel, Wexford, from April 2-4. Convention is where ASTI members from across the country gather to decide ASTI policy for the coming year. Delegates will listen to key speeches, including from ASTI President Geraldine O'Brien, guest speaker and artificial intelligence (AI) expert Dr Christina Colclough, and the Minister for Education Norma Foley TD.

## Topics for debate

Some of the key motions for debate at Annual Convention 2024 are proposed changes to the Leaving Cert, the Junior Cycle CBA process, risks posed by AI to Leaving Cert additional components, student and teacher well-being, teacher workload, and teacher shortages.

Motion 69 examines the risk AI poses to Leaving Certificate additional component assessment, particularly in the context of the Minister's proposal that 40% of Leaving Cert subject grades be allocated to additional components.

On the issue of Leaving Certificate oral examinations, motion 72 calls for oral exams to be scheduled during term time and not during Easter time to ensure that students get a break before their final exams in June.

Composite motion 69 seeks flexibility in the percentage marks allocated to each of the additional components of the Leaving Certificate assessment, such as coursework, orals or practical examinations, due to the recent developments in AI.

Several motions are dedicated to teachers' working conditions, with motion 30 seeking a reduction of the PME to one year instead of the current two years, which would enable teachers to join the workforce earlier and help to address teacher shortages.

On teacher workload, motions 27, 36, 44 and 51 seek an end to the Croke Park Hours. Motion 51 emphasises that this must be done without financial penalty to teachers. This motion also seeks to abolish all Haddington Road extra working hours. Motion 44 seeks the abolition of such additional working hours before the beginning of the 2025/2026 academic year.

Motion 39 seeks the enactment of stronger laws to protect teachers from online abuse and harassment.

Motion 64 demands that the Minister for Education ensures that students have access to adequate psychological services such as counselling by designating schools with such resources.

Other motions include those on reducing the current 25-point salary, opt-out of the supervision and substitution scheme for teachers with more than 15 years' service, and the restoration of pre-2013 pensions for members.

Motion 79 calls on the ASTI to strongly support the rights of children both nationally and internationally to education, water, food, shelter, medical assistance, and freedom from violence and murder.

For a full list of motions at Convention 2024 visit:  
<https://www.asti.ie/member-benefits/events/annual-convention2024/>

## Tune in to ASTI Convention 2024

How to follow what's happening at Convention 2024:

### Watch key speeches live and read them back

Key speeches from the ASTI President and Dr Christina Colclough will be streamed live on the ASTI website. The text of the speeches will also be available on the website after they have been given.

### Social media

The ASTI X (formerly Twitter) account @astionion will be tweeting updates from Convention 2024, including what delegates are saying and what decisions are being made. Don't forget to use the hashtag #ASTI24 to see all the latest tweets from Convention and to join in the discussion.

Updates will also be posted to the ASTI Facebook account – <https://www.facebook.com/astiteachers/> – and to the ASTI website – [www.asti.ie](http://www.asti.ie)

# ASTI CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Central Executive Council is a key component of the ASTI’s governance structure.



The Central Executive Council (CEC) met on Saturday, January 20, 2024 at the Gresham Hotel in Dublin.

## What is the CEC?

The Central Executive Council (CEC) is the governing body of the ASTI when Convention is not in session. The CEC has the authority to act on behalf of the Association and make decisions on questions not provided for in the ASTI Rules. When the CEC is not in session, Standing Committee is the governing body.

The CEC is an integral and historically important part of the democratic structure of the union. The first meeting of the CEC took place in January 1910, less than a year after the formation of the ASTI. The election of ASTI President PJ Kennedy took place at that meeting, and in attendance was a young Eamon de Valera, then himself a teacher.

## What does the CEC do?

The CEC determines the time and place for each Annual Convention, and the newly elected CEC comes into office at the start of Convention each year. CEC members attend and participate in Annual Convention along with delegates. They have the same voting rights as delegates: one vote per member.

The first CEC meeting takes place after Convention in May and there is always a minimum of two meetings per year. A quorum is required of not less than one-third of the total number of members, exclusive of the President. The second meeting usually takes place in January.

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## Central Executive Council is a key component of the ASTI governance structure.

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At the first meeting, the CEC appoints from among its members an Honorary National Organiser and regional organisers. The CEC Appeals Sub-Committee, which considers appeals against Standing Committee decisions, is also elected at this meeting in May. This sub-committee consists of five CEC members and can act with the full power of the CEC.

The CEC can appoint committees, in addition to those defined in the ASTI Rules, for particular purposes. The Business of the CEC Sub-Committee, which considers motions for CEC meetings, is appointed from among CEC members. The Awards Committee and the Benevolent Committee are also elected by the CEC, with nominations for the Awards Committee being taken on the last day of Annual Convention. Changes to election procedures within the ASTI are approved by the CEC from time to time.

The CEC has particular responsibilities with regard to pay agreements. Any final salary offer is referred to the CEC and can be rejected by a



In 2016, Central Executive Council held its January meeting in the Mansion House, Dublin, to commemorate the founding of the ASTI and the role of founding member Thomas MacDonagh. A meeting in the Mansion House in July 1909 is regarded as the foundation meeting of the ASTI. (Photo of Thomas MacDonagh courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.)



two-thirds majority. The CEC is not entitled to accept such an offer without a ballot of members. If a ballot is held, a simple majority of votes is required. In the case of salary proposals emerging as a result of centralised bargaining by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, the CEC ballots all ASTI members.

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### The CEC has particular responsibilities with regard to pay agreements. Any final salary offer is referred to the CEC and can be rejected by a two-thirds majority.

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The CEC can also ballot members on matters of policy or principle, and can act on behalf of the union to issue directives arising from ballot results, for example, the sanctioning or suspension of industrial action. They can also make representations to and carry out negotiations with any employer or local or Government authority in respect of the terms or conditions of employment of members.

#### The CEC: today and yesterday

At the most recent meeting of the CEC, held on January 20, 2024, the election of subject representatives for 2024 took place. Also on the agenda were updates on public sector pay talks and teachers' pensions. Motions were passed including a motion that the ASTI foster co-operation with the TUI. The annual report of the CEC was finalised for publication in the Convention Handbook. The CEC also considered recommendations for honorary life membership for outstanding service to the ASTI.

Fifty years ago, a feature in *ASTIR* reported that the CEC met on September 14, 1974, to discuss Resolution E, passed at Convention 1974, instructing teachers not to teach more than 22 hours a week from the beginning of the next school year. The CEC offered a detailed decisive interpretation of the resolution, including recommending industrial action in schools if punitive action was taken by managers against an ASTI teacher who refused to work more than 22 hours.

Looking further back to January 1940, the CEC passed a policy on the creation of work contracts, as at the time teachers did not have formal, written contracts. The CEC has been central to many significant advances in teachers' working terms and conditions over the ASTI's 114-year history, and continues this crucial role today.

#### How is the CEC elected?

The CEC comes into office at the commencement of the Annual Convention each Easter and consists of 170-180 members, reflecting ASTI overall membership figures. The President, Vice President and Honorary Treasurer are *de facto* members of the CEC, as are members of Standing Committee. All other members are elected from the branches.

Each of the 56 branches of the ASTI conducts its own election of CEC members and submits the names to the General Secretary before December 31 each year. Each branch, depending on size, elects one, two or three members.

ASTI members who have been in the union for a minimum of three years are eligible to be candidates for election to the CEC (exceptions are made where a branch is less than three years old). Student members, emeritus members and 'members on leave' are not eligible to be elected to the CEC.

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### The CEC comes into office at the commencement of the Annual Convention each Easter and consists of 170-180 members, reflecting ASTI overall membership figures.

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For further information on the role of the CEC visit <https://www.asti.ie/about-asti/structure/committees/> and <https://www.asti.ie/about-asti/rules-and-constitution/>

Credit: *Unlikely Radicals: Irish Post-Primary Teachers and the ASTI, 1909-2009* by John Cunningham was used as a source for this article.

# If you are thinking of retiring this year, join us!

The RSTA is truly grateful for the support we receive from the ASTI for the maintenance of pension parity. We are members of the Alliance of Retired Public Servants and the Retired Workers' Committee of Congress, and work in conjunction with them in fighting to maintain pension parity, which is the only mechanism by which our pensions can be increased. Apart from this, we engage in outings, trips and various other activities. We have 18 branches all over the country and extend a really warm welcome to new members, so do join us when you retire.



Susie Hall (RSTA President).

**Susie Hall, RSTA President**



ASTI President Geraldine O'Brien (left) and RSTA President Susie Hall at the recent RSTA coffee morning in ASTI Head Office.



RSTA member Louis O'Flaherty (left) and ASTI Honorary Treasurer Pádraig Murphy at the RSTA's coffee morning in ASTI Head Office.

## 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](mailto: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](http://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\_\_\_

## The Edward Worth Library, Dublin



The Edward Worth Library was bequeathed to Dr Steevens' Hospital by Dr Edward Worth (1676-1733), an early eighteenth-century Dublin physician. It has been wonderfully preserved in the Library's original bookcases in Dr Steevens' Hospital, one of the earliest hospital foundations in Dublin. This building is now the headquarters of the Health Service Executive and is located directly opposite Heuston Station, Dublin. It is easily accessible via bus and tram.

Edward Worth's collection is a treasure trove for anyone interested in the history of early modern medicine, science and, especially, the history of the book, as Worth was a connoisseur of rare printing and fine bindings. He was also interested in literature (both classical and contemporary), history and geography. Many of these themes have been explored in online exhibitions, which are all available under the 'Exhibitions' tab of [www.edwardworthlibrary.ie](http://www.edwardworthlibrary.ie).

Tours of the Edward Worth Library are by appointment. Teachers who would like to book a tour for their class can either email [info@edwardworthlibrary.ie](mailto:info@edwardworthlibrary.ie) or phone 01-635 2215. The maximum number allowed on any single tour is 23.

## End orphanage volunteering and care

The ASTI has formally endorsed the recommendations of the Comhlámh End Orphanage Volunteering campaign. The campaign is supported by over 40 organisations from across civil society. It forms part of the global care reform movement, which is working to raise awareness about the harm caused by orphanage volunteering and to promote family-based care.

Approximately 80% of the 5.4 million children living in orphanages globally have a living parent, and even more have extended family that could care for them, given the right supports. Research has shown that orphanage care is harmful to children, leading to delays in physical and emotional development, and exposing children to neglect and abuse.

Support for orphanages through volunteering, visits, and fundraising is helping to perpetuate a system that puts children at risk and harms their long-term development. Assistance provided by well-meaning visitors can help to sustain an 'orphanage industry', increasing the risk of exposure to abuse and exploitation. In Ireland, we have moved from large-scale residential institutions to working to prevent family separation and providing foster and kinship care when in the best interests of the child.

The campaign is now working to raise awareness across the education sector, and is calling for the development of child-safe guidelines for trips overseas, including guidance not to visit or volunteer in orphanages.

Is your school involved in student trips that might involving visiting or volunteering in an orphanage? Are any school fundraisers supporting institutions for children? Can you work to challenge these practices and raise awareness in your school about the harm caused by orphanage volunteering and the institutional care of children?

To find out more, please contact [fiachra@comhlamh.org](mailto:fiachra@comhlamh.org) or visit the Comhlámh website. You can show your support for the campaign by signing the pledge and committing not to support orphanage visits, and to raise awareness about the harm caused by the institutional care of children.

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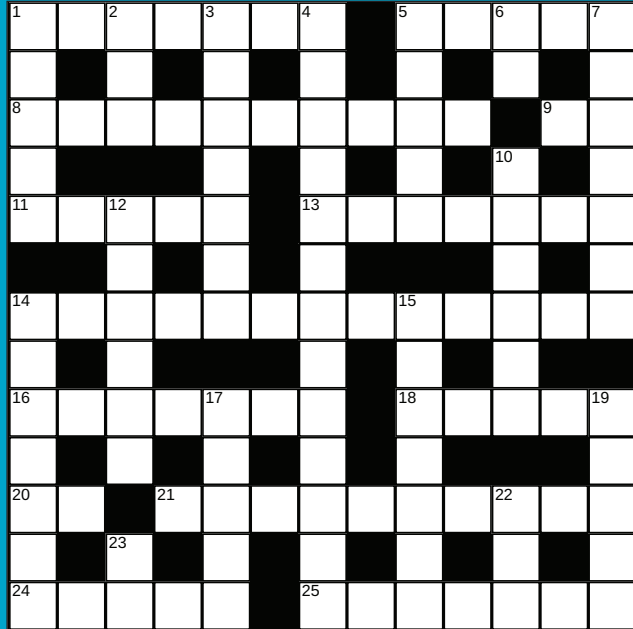


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ASTI Branch

Entries to: ASTIR Crossword No. 2402,  
Think Media, The Malthouse, 537 NCR, Dublin 1.

To arrive by: Friday, April 5, 2024.

LEIDEANNA TRASNA

1. Taighde a dheintear, nó an duine a dheineann é, tar éis dochtúireacht a bhaint amach (7)
5. Fabhta i Loch Tacumshin (5)
8. Ceoltóir, nó gléas chun ceol a chasadh (10)
9. Cuan i Lombardy (2)
11. Ceirnín nó leabhar ó Alabama (5)
13. Pointeáilte mar chaipín nó gléasta go gáifeach (7)
14. Ranna le haghaidh toghchán ginearálta (13)
16. Teastaíonn uaim, tá dúil mhór agam (7)
18. Giúmar maith, sástacht, gliondar (5)
20. An Astráil, go neamhfhoirmeálta (2)
21. Ball de chlub rugbaí cáiliúil na Gaillimhe (10)
24. Luach saothair nó gradam (5)
25. An iníon is óige ag Prionsa Andrew Shasana (7)

LEIDEANNA SÍOS

1. Cuaille nó stáca (5)
2. Bealach, bóthar, conair (3)
3. Próiséas a bhíonn ag síorathrú ó CD i Mini (7)
4. Galar na ngadaithe (13)
5. Madra spáis na Rúise (5)
6. Caladh i gCeatharlach (2)
7. An focal is coitianta agus is tábhachtaí san alt ar leathanach ??(7)
10. Bagheat achrannach ar stíl ghruaige (6)
12. Páistí in Albain (6)
14. Céadainm údar an ailt ar 7 síos (7)
15. Fiaile chomónta a dhóinn (7)
17. " ... teacht an earraigh, beidh an lá 'dul chun síneadh" (5)
19. Údar Riders to the Sea (5)
22. Poulter, Botham nó Rush (3)
23. An t-ábhar gearáin is mó atá ag 7 síos! (2)

Solutions to ASTIR Crossword No. 2401

ACROSS	DOWN
1. Water chestnut	2. Assassins
10. Heeds	3. Era
11. Antisemite	4. Cotopaxi
13. Imposed	5. Epsom
15. Pimpernel	6. Tim Weed
16. Trevi	7. Upton
17. Wexford	8. Christmas tree
19. Sun	9. Reappeared
20. Arrested	12. Pliny the Elder
21. Reverent	14. Downers
24. Ted	18. Overlap
25. Miscall	19. Sterilised
26. Prime	22. Esperanto
27. Enveloped	23. Aardvark
30. Partial	25. Militia
31. Bratislava	28. Virgo
33. Niece	29. Pasta
34. Rowan Atkinson	32. Aon

**Did you miss?**

AI and education 16

Better in a trade union 19

**CONGRATULATIONS**

Congratulations to the winner of Crossword No. 2401: Mary Lysaght, formerly of Patrician Presentation Secondary School, Fethard, Co. Tipperary Tipperary Branch

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