

ASTIR

ASSOCIATION OF SECONDARY TEACHERS, IRELAND

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Annual Convention 2025



- | Convention report
- | Senior Cycle campaign update
- | Check your Croke Park Hours

ASTI

POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMMES AT MIC

EDUCATION POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMMES

- Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology
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- M Ed in Educational Leadership & Management
- M Ed in Education for Human Rights & Equality
- M Ed in Education for Sustainability & Global Citizenship
- Graduate Diploma/M Ed in Inclusive Special Education
- Graduate Diploma/M Ed in Adult & Further 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 san Iarbhunscolaíocht Lán-Ghaeilge & Ghaeltachta
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Learning; Society & Religious Education; Language & Literacy Education; Arts Education & Physical Education; Reflective Pedagogy & Early Childhood Studies; Educational Psychology; Inclusive & Special Education; STEM Education

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

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

Ensuring sound curricular change

In her address to ASTI Annual Convention, Emeritus Professor of Education Áine Hyland warned that at a time of significant global uncertainty, Ireland cannot afford to risk its reputation as having a top-class education system. The Leaving Cert is internationally recognised as a reliable and independent statement of young people's competencies. However, it is not perfect. Teachers always want the best for their students, and that includes implementing educationally sound curricular change as appropriate.

Teachers are best placed to understand what will work and will not work in the classroom. This is why, when the Senior Cycle Redevelopment Programme was first announced in 2022 by then Minister for Education Norma Foley TD, the ASTI expressed concern about educationally problematic aspects. Some of these were removed from the redevelopment plans due to, among other things, potential unintended negative consequences. Other problematic aspects remain, and indeed new ones have arisen, including a decision in 2023 to accelerate the implementation of Senior Cycle redevelopment.

We were dismayed when the new Minister for Education and Youth Helen McEntee TD communicated her intention to forge ahead with the accelerated programme, despite evidence that schools and teachers are lacking in key resources. A recent RedC survey, commissioned by the ASTI, suggests that half of all schools do not have an adequate number of labs for the introduction of the revised science specifications. As this *ASTIR* goes to print, the ASTI and TUI are participating in intensive talks with Department of Education on significant issues of concern to teachers. A joint ASTI/TUI motion adopted by our respective annual conferences means that whatever the outcome of these talks, it will be teachers in the classroom who get to decide what happens next.

A ballot will take place as soon as possible.

Work-life balance

Another big theme at ASTI Convention was workload and lack of work-life balance in teaching. A forthcoming ASTI survey will demonstrate that teaching is a stressful occupation with a significant proportion of teachers experiencing debilitating levels of stress. This is exacerbated by initiative overload, the Croke Park Hours (which are often unproductive and wasteful), high class contact hours, and lack of flexibility regarding schemes such as parental leave.

This is my last *ASTIR* editorial. It has been an honour for me to serve as your President and to lead the union, along with my fellow officers, at a time when teachers' voice is so crucial. Pdraig Curley will take over as President from August. Having worked closely with Pdraig over the past year, in his role as Vice President, I have witnessed his unwavering commitment to protecting teaching and education. I can confirm that you are in safe hands, whatever may arise.



Donal Cremin

ASTI President

Contributing to national education debate

Elsewhere in this *ASTIR*, there is abundant reportage on all aspects of the business that transacted at ASTI Annual Convention 2025. It was particularly pleasing to see several new delegates at Annual Convention this year, many speaking at the podium for the first time. New voices in any organisation always add vibrancy and lead to fresh thinking.

It was a successful Convention, overarched by several themes, with a particularly long shadow being cast by Senior Cycle redevelopment. One other recurring concern relates to the digital rights of teachers. The ASTI has been very active over the last year regarding the digitalisation and social media space and, in particular, had a sub-committee of ASTI Standing Committee working to produce resources for members to combat cyber-bullying of teachers. An initial poster and associated guidance on prevention will be in schools for September, while work continues on the production of detailed information on what members should do in the event of being targeted online. There is ongoing engagement with a range of bodies to best inform this process, including Coimisiún na Meán, An Garda Síochána, the National Association for Principals & Deputy Principals (NAPD), the Joint Managerial Body (JMB) and the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS). I can assure you that anything the ASTI can do to support members in this regard will always be done.

National Education Convention

One of the more intriguing announcements made by the Minister for Education and Youth, Helen McEntee TD, at the teachers' annual conventions was that a National Education Convention, to begin in the coming school year, is to be established. The last such Convention reported in 1994 and was a precursor to the enactment of the Education Act of 1998.

We are told that "this will be the largest national conversation on education in the history of the State" ... "with opportunities for all members of the public to contribute". It will examine the needs of the teacher workforce into the future, how schools' leadership can be supported to deliver for and support students, and how we can achieve an inclusive education system with the best outcomes in the world for all students, regardless of background or ability.

Minister McEntee has stated that she wants the Convention to address the impact of technological advances and how we can best equip young people to "thrive and succeed in a rapidly changing world".

Key questions will be addressed by a number of groups, each with their own chair, representing children and young people, and education stakeholders, including teachers and parents. The outcomes of this process could be very significant in the long term.

The ASTI has never shirked its responsibility in seeking to influence the national debate and will, no doubt, make a substantive contribution.



Kieran Christie

ASTI General Secretary

Dungarvan Branch retirement event



The Dungarvan Branch held a retirement event recently in Lawlors Hotel, Dungarvan, Co. Waterford. The event was organised to mark the retirements of Jim Power, Marian Joy and Carmel Mulcahy from St Augustine's College, Anthony Kelly and Michéal O Cionnfhaoilaidh from the CBS, and Kimberly Gleeson from Ard Scoil na nDeise. Back row (from left): Conor Walsh, Michael O'Sullivan, Padraig Curley (then ASTI Vice President), Michael Kavanagh, Michéal O Cionnfhaoilaidh, Kieran Christie (ASTI General Secretary), Michael McGrath (ASTI Honorary National Organiser and Branch Chairperson), John Cunningham, Jim Power, Padraig MacCraith, Seamus MacCraith, Richie Cosgrave, Éamonn Cashin, Pádraig Murphy (ASTI Honorary Treasurer), Pat Knightly (Standing Committee Regional Representative Region 7 and Dungarvan Branch member), and Donal Williams. Front row (from left): Marian Joy, Carmel Mulcahy, Karen Murphy, Donal Cremin (ASTI President), Margo McGann (Dungarvan Branch secretary), and Breda Lynch (ASTI Industrial Relations Official).

Dundalk Branch retirement event



The Dundalk Branch held a retirement event recently in Ballymascanlon Hotel in Dundalk, Co. Louth. Back row (from left): Geraldine O'Brien (ASTI Past President), PJ Ó Náraigh, John McCourt, Catherine Shevlin, Nóilín Ní Dhulaing, Monica O'Kane, Padraig Hamill, and Padraig Curley (then ASTI Vice President). Front row (from left): Mary Gilmore, Gillian Johnston, Stephanie Ledwith, Eithne Hamill, Yvonne McDermott, Lorraine Quigley, and Orla Drumgoole.

Requesting digital publications through MyUnion

MyUnion, the members' only area of the ASTI website, allows members to decide if they would like to receive our publications digitally.

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

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

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

ASTI Sickness Benefit Committee

The ASTI Sickness Benefit Committee is responsible for overseeing the allocation of funds from the Sickness Benefit Fund. The fund provides financial assistance to members eligible for illness-related assistance, as well as optical, dental and hearing aid treatments.

For more information on the Sickness Benefit Fund and to apply please see: www.asti.ie/member-benefits/financial-benefits/



Members of the ASTI Sickness Benefit Committee (from left): Geraldine O'Brien, Ed Byrne, Margaret McGagh, Gerard O'Donoghue, Mary Lyndon, David Briscoe, and Róisín Doyle.



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SYNGE STREET – IT’S NOT TOO LATE!

The school community in Synge Street CBS continues to be ignored, by-passed and disregarded in the plans by the school’s patron, the Edmund Rice Schools’ Trust (ERST) to change the status of the school from all-boys through the medium of English, to a co-educational Gaelcholáiste.

To introduce this confirmation with zero consultation and practically no sharing of information was always, and remains, unacceptable.

At this late stage, the ASTI members in the school continue to call for a pause in this unilaterally imposed process, to allow for consultation with the staff, parents and students of the school.

A pause for a year would allow for the legitimate concerns of teachers in the school to be addressed, for alternatives to be explored, and for a full consideration of what is best for the current school community – and for those seeking a Gaelcholáiste in the area.

The treatment of the staff by the ERST has been as far removed from their professed ethos of care and respect as can be imagined. The ASTI is now calling

on the ERST, and on the Department of Education, to remember their mission and to defer any decision on the future of the school until after a proper and just approach to that decision has been implemented.



Synge Street teachers Claire Hatton (left) and Katie Delany (right) are pictured with ASTI Deputy General Secretary Diarmaid de Paor.

ASTI global solidarity event at Convention 2025



Dr Brendan Ciarán Browne, Associate Professor of Conflict Resolution and a fellow of Trinity College Dublin, was a guest speaker at the ASTI global solidarity fringe event at Convention 2025. The theme of the event was ‘The right to education: teachers, learners and education in and on Palestine’. Dr Browne is pictured with Moira Leydon (ASTI assistant General Secretary, Education & Research).

ASTI anti-racism/migration event at Convention 2025



Philomena Obasi, a divergence and inclusion facilitator (National Youth Council of Ireland) was a guest speaker at the anti-racism and migration fringe event at Convention 2025. The theme of the event was ‘Including migrants in our schools’. Philomena is pictured with Diarmaid de Paor (ASTI Deputy General Secretary).

Access your Teaching Council vetting disclosure

Teachers can now access their vetting disclosure through their ‘My Registration’ account on the Teaching Council website. The Teaching Council has enhanced its online services for vetting. The additional functionality is now available to users and brings a more efficient and user-friendly service for teachers in accessing, viewing and sharing their vetting disclosures.

To access your vetting disclosure, please see:

www.teachingcouncil.ie/vetting/accessing-your-vetting-disclosure-2/

More information on vetting can be found on the Teaching Council website at: www.teachingcouncil.ie/vetting/vetting-faqs/

SENIOR CYCLE – YOUR VOTE IS YOUR VOICE

Intensive talks with the Minister for Education and Youth and her Department will lead to a ballot of members on Senior Cycle redevelopment.

As this *ASTIR* goes to print, the ASTI and the TUI are in intensive talks with the Department of Education on the serious concerns of teachers around the accelerated pace of Senior Cycle redevelopment. Whatever the outcome, there will be ballots of ASTI and TUI members. The ASTI website will include a section 'Senior Cycle Ballot', where members can get all the information on the ballot. Please keep an eye on the ASTI website for updates.

Senior Cycle talks

In April the new Minister for Education and Youth, Helen McEntee TD, communicated her decision to press ahead with the accelerated delivery timetable for the Senior Cycle Redevelopment Programme. The Minister invited the ASTI and the TUI to enter a talks process regarding issues raised by the two unions with the Minister and the Department of Education. ASTI Standing Committee considered this invitation and agreed that the ASTI would participate in the talks, which began on April 15. The following week, at ASTI Convention 2025, a number of motions on the Senior Cycle Redevelopment Programme were adopted, including a joint ASTI/TUI motion (which was also adopted by the TUI at its Annual Congress 2025). **This motions states:**

Convention notes the decision of the Minister for Education on 8th April 2025 to proceed with the phasing in of the Accelerated Senior Cycle Redevelopment (SCR) by allowing all of Tranche 1 subjects to proceed, despite reasonable calls from the ASTI and the TUI for a pause to allow for proper consultation, planning, and resourcing. Given these circumstances, Convention acknowledges the intensive talks that commenced

on 15th April 2025 and supports Standing Committee's decision to mandate ASTI negotiators to participate fully, proactively, and constructively in these negotiations which are focussed on issues such as;

- Adequate time and resources for planning and delivery.
- Comprehensive CPD for all affected teachers.
- Staffing and timetabling implications.
- Infrastructure and assessment support.

Convention instructs Standing Committee that any document or proposal arising from these talks will be put to a ballot of affected members.

However, Convention instructs that, in the event that these intensive talks fail to deliver an acceptable outcome that can be put to ballot, the ASTI, in conjunction with the TUI (where possible) will utilise all mechanisms available to the Union, up to and including a ballot for industrial action, to defend professional standards and protect student outcomes. Convention asserts that the ASTI's position remains principled, student-centred, and rooted in the defence of quality public education.

See Annual Convention 2025 report on pages 16-27.

See ASTI Senior Cycle campaign timeline at: www.asti.ie/news-campaigns/campaigns/seniorcycleredevelopment/

See Senior Cycle Ballot web page at: www.asti.ie/ballot

Teachers entitled to 10 discretionary Croke Park Hours

Full-time teachers are entitled to 10 hours of the 33 Croke Park Hours at their own discretion, as approved by management. All teachers are reminded to check their Croke Park Hours for the academic year 2025/2026 with their school principal. Under the terms of the Public Sector Agreement 2010-2014 (The Croke Park Agreement), teachers are required to work an additional 33 hours per year. These additional hours are known as 'Croke Park Hours'. Teachers who are job-sharing must fulfil the Croke Park Hours (33 hours) commitment on a pro rata basis, i.e., 16.5 hours per annum. Under this agreement, school management may designate the use of the 33 hours to provide additional time to deal with some or all of the following:

- school planning and policy development (including subject planning),
- staff meetings,
- parent-teacher meetings (in line with the agreed formula for such meetings),
- induction,
- nationally mandated in-service/continuous professional development (CPD), e.g., new programmes or syllabi,
- approved school-arranged in-service/CPD,

- appropriate further education activities as set out in Appendix 1 of the Agreement, or
- substitution and supervision.

Following representations from the teacher unions, the Circular setting out the Croke Park Hours was amended, and now 10 of the 33 Croke Park Hours are available for planning and development work on other than a whole-school basis.

This means that full-time teachers are entitled to 10 hours at their own discretion and as approved by school management. Part-time teachers have a pro-rata entitlement. Teachers are advised to keep a record of their Croke Park Hours.

For more information on Croke Park Hours please visit:

www.asti.ie/your-employment/terms-and-conditions/croke-park-hours/

<https://circulars.gov.ie/pdf/circular/education/2016/45.pdf>

CATEGORIES OF ASTI MEMBERSHIP

ASTIR explores the different types of ASTI membership available to second-level teachers at various stages of their careers.

A number of different ASTI membership options are available to teachers, depending on their stage of career.

ASTI student membership

ASTI student membership is available to individuals currently studying to become post-primary teachers.

ASTI student membership is available to students enrolled in recognised Bachelor of Education programmes, as well as students enrolled in concurrent Bachelor of Science programmes that include the study of education, and to students enrolled in Professional Master of Education (PME) programmes who, upon qualification, would be entitled to register as post-primary teachers. Student membership is free for the duration of their studies. Student members are entitled to the same rights and privileges as fee-paying members with the exception of: student members cannot act as an officer of a branch, as a representative on the Central Executive Council (CEC) or as a member of Standing Committee.

Paid membership

Paid membership is a category of ASTI membership available to teachers who have graduated from a recognised teacher education programme.

Paid ASTI membership is available to teachers who hold a valid degree or qualification as recognised by the Teaching Council of Ireland, the regulatory body of the teaching profession in Ireland. Qualified teachers working in voluntary secondary schools, community and comprehensive schools, and Education and Training Board (ETB) schools are eligible to apply for ASTI membership.

ASTI membership is free for members for the first year after joining.

For more information on ASTI membership and membership rates, please see: www.asti.ie/join/

Emeritus membership

Emeritus membership is available to teachers who have retired from teaching, but who still wish to maintain their ASTI membership.

This membership type is available to all serving teachers who were deemed to be members and who have retired from teaching on the following grounds: having reached retirement age, or on medical grounds as approved by the Department of Education. Teachers who wish to apply for emeritus membership must have been paid-up members of the ASTI immediately prior to their retirement on medical grounds. Emeritus members have the power to exercise all the rights and privileges of paid members except the rights:

- to act as a branch officer, as a member of Standing Committee, or as a representative on the CEC,
- to vote in any ballot on industrial action or to be a candidate in any election for Trusteeship of the Association, and
- emeritus membership shall not confer entitlement to benefit under the Sickness Benefit or Benevolent Fund Schemes.

Emeritus membership of the ASTI is free for approved applicants.

Honorary life membership

Honorary life membership is a category for members who have made a significant contribution to the ASTI.

This membership is conferred in recognition of outstanding service and grants all the rights and privileges of full membership, including the ability to hold office. Annual Convention is empowered to elect a member an honorary life member on the recommendation of the CEC.

In recognition of their service to the union, honorary life membership recipients are entitled to free ASTI membership.

Member on leave

Member on leave is a category of membership available to teachers who are already ASTI members, but who are on leave as approved by the Department of Education.

Teachers who were in receipt of incremental salary and who for the time being are on approved, unpaid leave of absence under the terms approved by the Department of Education are eligible for “member on leave” membership of the ASTI. Members on leave are eligible for ASTI membership rights and privileges subject to the following provisions:

- a “member on leave” is not entitled to act as an officer of a branch, as a representative on the CEC or as a member of Standing Committee, and
- a “member on leave” is not eligible to benefit from ASTI Sickness Benefit while on leave. However, entitlement to benefit from this fund shall recommence without penalty on resumption of full membership.

Members on leave have to pay a once-off payment of €28.80, which covers them for a full or part of a school year. A member on leave can opt to continue full membership by continuing to pay full subscription.

Benefits of ASTI membership

Members of the ASTI can avail of the following benefits:

- advice, support and legal representation, as needed,
- a range of negotiated financial benefits,*
- consultations with members on a range of issues in the form of surveys, ballots and questionnaires,
- information on a range of issues through the ASTI website, publications, emails and texts, and
- ASTI training and seminars.

Join the ASTI using the following link: www.asti.ie/join/

**For the full list of financial benefits, please see: www.asti.ie/member-benefits/financial-benefits/*

SCHOOLS NOT RESOURCED FOR NEW LEAVING CERT – SURVEY

The first part of a two-part ASTI survey finds that schools are not resourced or equipped for new Leaving Cert changes, and that more engagement is needed with teachers.

A RedC/ASTI survey has found that schools will face significant challenges when nine new or revised Leaving Cert subjects are introduced in September. The survey shows that many school leaders do not feel ready for the proposed changes being implemented at Leaving Cert level and need further resources.

In relation to revised Leaving Cert science subject specifications (Biology, Chemistry, and Physics) being introduced in September, 47% of all principals and deputy principals said they have teacher supply problems for science subjects, and 44% believe their science laboratories are not well equipped (Figure 1). Half of principals and deputy principals surveyed said they do not have a sufficient number of laboratories for the revised specifications. When asked what schools need to support the wider Senior Cycle Redevelopment Programme, school leaders cited an increase in middle management positions in schools, addressing the teacher supply problem, and more training and resources for teachers (Figure 2).

Workload and well-being

The survey results showed that there is a need for further middle management positions in schools, with school leaders saying they are working long hours. Nearly three-quarters of principals told the survey they work more than 50 hours per week; over one-third work for 56 hours or more.

Donal Cremin, ASTI President, commented: “Following the decimation of middle management structures in our schools more than a decade ago, excessive workloads and working hours have become the norm. Many school leaders who participated in the RedC survey expressed concerns about the sustainability of their roles, with some contemplating leaving the profession altogether”.

The lack of resources and support was a major theme of respondents’ answers, and one point raised in the survey was that the current allocation model of in-school leadership posts is widely regarded as inadequate to meet the complex organisational needs of schools. More posts are needed to ensure that team structures – as required under many whole-school policies, special educational provision, new curriculum programmes – are in place. School leaders are also aware of teachers’ workload and their experience of stress and burnout and are reluctant to delegate additional duties and roles to them. Unsustainable workloads and a relentless stream of new initiatives and policies were also highlighted as preventing school leaders from focusing on key leadership duties. A total of 78% of school leaders say they feel under pressure all the time, 72% do not have time to relax and unwind, and 64% feel burnt out and exhausted. Some 69% said that administrative tasks take up most of their working time, and that they would much prefer to be leading teaching and learning (Figure 3) with 63% saying this is the most valuable aspect of a school leader’s role. This involves focusing on school culture to

“Schools are now providing meals, books, copies, emotional support, SEN provision, wellbeing supports, academic supports, vaccination stations ... and we are simply not equipped to do so”.



FIGURE 1: A majority of school leaders felt that their school did not have the capacity to facilitate new science specifications.

One of the major sources of concern for school leaders is curriculum change at Senior Cycle, largely driven by teacher supply problems and an inadequate number of in-school leadership posts.



sustain high-quality teaching and learning, fostering inclusion of all students, and overseeing curriculum planning and implementation.

Sources of concern

One of the major sources of concern for school leaders is curriculum change at Senior Cycle, largely driven by teacher supply problems and an inadequate number of in-school leadership posts. The survey results expanded on these anxieties, with many leaders feeling unprepared and

under-resourced for the changes, citing insufficient whole-school training, lack of clarity on the curriculum and a rushed implementation schedule. They are also worried about the practicalities of the new assessment components, the impact of over assessment on student well-being, and the potential for increased workload for teachers. There is a sense among school leaders that their concerns are not being listened to by the Department of Education, with many saying the need for teachers to have the full suite of examination-related materials available in advance of the introduction of



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For further information contact: Helen.Fitzgerald@ul.ie

HEA Performance Funding [2020-2022] awarded to
EPI•STEM National Centre for STEM Education, School of Education, University of Limerick





“Croke Park Hours are a massive issue, so many teachers are stressed and exhausted by late evenings for parent-teacher meetings.”

Top five resources needed for successful curriculum change at Senior Cycle

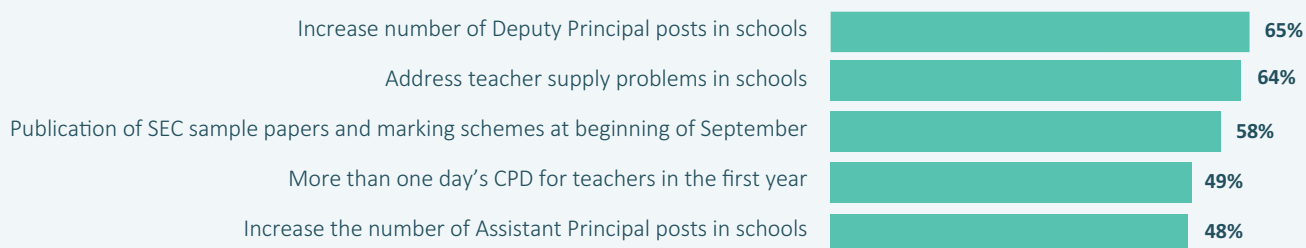


FIGURE 2: School leaders highlighted the need for an increase in middle management positions in schools, addressing the teacher supply problem, and more training and resources for teachers.

What takes up school leaders' working time?

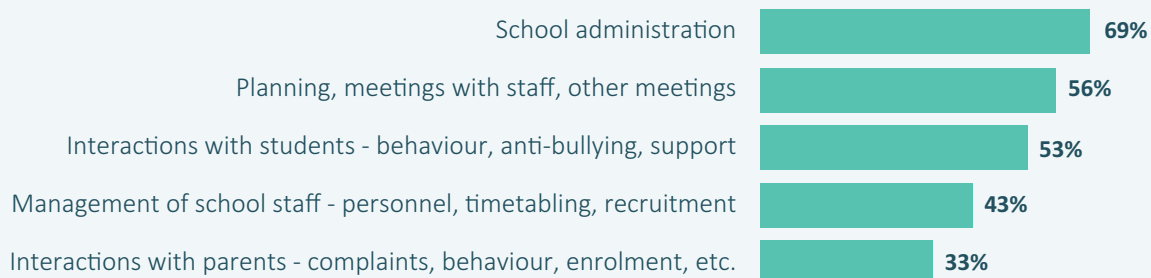


FIGURE 3: A significant majority of school leaders stated that administrative tasks take up most of their working time.

“Small schools with deputies who teach are compromised constantly; they have massive issues in rural deprived areas.”



new subject specifications is not sufficiently appreciated by the Department. Leaders are also concerned about the potential for AI to degrade the continuous assessment portion of Senior Cycle. There is a widespread belief that AI-generated content could compromise the authenticity of students' project-work.

There are also concerns about the increased administrative burden of digital uploading of project work to the State Examinations Commission. These fears are not assuaged by the lack of guidance on AI from the Department. The challenges AI presents have not been sufficiently addressed. School leaders are also of the view that insufficient account is taken of their concerns that students from disadvantaged backgrounds will be disproportionately impacted by the increasing use of digital technologies in the state examinations process.

To ensure a fair and effective assessment system, school leaders are calling for clearer policies, better safeguards, and a reconsideration of the weighting of project work.

Suggestions for improvement

School leaders have identified things that would help them, and teachers and students. The main resources needed to support Senior Cycle curriculum change are an increase in the number of leadership posts in schools, in particular deputy principal posts, addressing the teacher supply problem, and ensuring the availability of examination materials to subject teachers at the beginning of the school year.

Proper training of the teachers who will be implementing the new Senior Cycle is also critical. Having more than one day's in-service training in the first year for teachers of the new subject specification was also identified as important.

Comments from school leaders

Respondents were asked for individual comment as part of the survey and what they had to say will be familiar to all teachers. One commented on increasing workloads and initiatives: “We have Bí Cineálta, new TY spec., Senior Cycle subjects, new SET guidelines and also will be engaging, most likely, with new CoB guidelines. It's too much for all to productively engage with properly”.

School leaders could desperately do with more resources to lighten the load, especially now that schools are being asked to do more than ever:

“Schools are now providing meals, books, copies, emotional support, SEN

provision, well-being supports, academic supports, vaccination stations ... and we are simply not equipped to do so”. Having adequate teacher numbers would be a massive help for school leaders, with one saying the teaching profession is under pressure from all sides:

“Initiative overload, teacher supply and retention, lack of parental support, aggression from students and parents, behavioural issues among students and the lack of respect for the teaching profession have made this career a very difficult one in recent years”.

This year we're celebrating the classes of

1950
1955
1960
1965
1970
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1995
2000
2005
2010
2015
2020

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SENIOR CYCLE CONCERNS

In their contributions to media at ASTI Convention, delegates and Officers highlighted their concerns at the accelerated Senior Cycle Redevelopment Programme and other pressing issues.

"[On the Senior Cycle Redevelopment Programme] The ASTI did a survey of our principals who are telling us that in excess of 50% of them are just not ready. The facilities aren't there, the lab space isn't there and so on. The whole thing has been rushed and it is quite regrettable that the Minister isn't calming it down. We're in favour of it, [change] but let's calm it down."

Kieran Christie, ASTI General Secretary

Morning Ireland, RTÉ Radio 1, April 22, 2025

"[On the ASTI/REDC survey] What school leaders are actually saying, is the old 80/20 rule, "we spend 20% of our time on the most important dimension of our role, and 80% on the infrastructure, the compliance, the regulations, the GDPR, managing staff and teaching supply problems"."

Moira Leydon, ASTI Assistant General Secretary:

Education & Research

Drivetime, RTÉ Radio 1, April 16, 2025

"[On the Senior Cycle Redevelopment Programme] The more equitable things are, the better it is for the overall group of students who are coming out in 2026 – it's new to them, it's a new process. As time goes on, students will have seven different assessment components coming in around the same time in their final year. Doesn't that put a lot of pressure on students?"

Donal Cremin, ASTI President

Newstalk Breakfast, April 23, 2025

"I'm in a voluntary secondary school. I'm lucky. We have four labs, but we only have equipment for two and we divide it up. There is a school in my town that has 330 boys and one science lab at present with no prospect of a new lab for years... And at present, Junior Cycle Science is taught from a trolley – anything they can bring like weights and measures and, maybe, measuring a volume of liquid. But there is no such thing as a Bunsen burner; they never light a Bunsen burner until Leaving Cert."

Michael McGrath, Honorary National Organiser and Dungarvan Branch member

Irish Times, April 23, 2025

"It is my firm belief – and the belief of the vast majority in this room – that we now stand on a cliff edge when it comes to the future of Irish education ... The decisions we are about to make will shape not just our education system, but the very fabric of Irish society and our financial well-being, for the next 20 years – and, quite possibly, much further into the future."

Donal Cremin, ASTI President

Irish Times, April 23, 2025

"The previous Minister for Education used the words 'accelerated implementation', and we think this acceleration of implementation is going to be detrimental. There's a total of nine new subjects coming in September at Leaving Certificate level, on top of a system that's bursting at the seams with initiative overload – it's just not ready."

Kieran Christie, ASTI General Secretary

Ireland AM, Virgin Media, April 24, 2025

"When you're going through IVF or recovering from a miscarriage, you're dealing with fatigue, pain, anxiety, and often, grief. And yet, under the current system, we are forced to use sick leave, unpaid leave or beg for understanding from management who may or may not fully grasp what you're going through. That's not good enough. Teachers deserve compassion. We deserve recognition that fertility treatment and miscarriage are not optional extras – they are real, life-impacting experiences."

Amy O'Keeffe, ASTI member

Irish Times, April 24, 2025

"Is múinteoir mé sa Synge Street agus táimid ag athrú go Gaelcholáiste i 2026 ach ní raibh comhairliúchán ceart déanta idir pátrúin na scoile agus múinteoirí, tuismitheoirí agus scoláirí na scoile so ní raibh clú ar bith againn go mbeidh an t-athrú seo ar siúl. Tá gach duine ar an leathanach céanna ní raibh comhairliúchán ceart déanta agus táimid míshásta leis an seisiún eolais ó thaobh an Ghaeilge a fhoghlaim."

Claire Hatton, ASTI member and teacher in Synge Street CBS

Adhmhaidin, RnaG, RTÉ, April 25, 2025



"[On the DCU survey on teacher stress] I would concur with the DCU survey findings because the ASTI has carried out surveys that have correlated with the findings of the DCU survey. Teachers' workload has increased drastically over the past several months and years, and even now it is being increased into the future. For example, the new Leaving Certificate has been fast-tracked and this is causing major problems and concerns for our teachers because they are trying to get everything ready for September when they themselves don't know exactly what's happening."

Donal Cremin, ASTI President

Ireland AM, Virgin Media, April 11, 2025

"[On the new Junior Cycle grading bands] With the old system, the top band was over 90% and only 2% were allowed to get that mark, which was disgraceful. Now, anything over 85% will be a distinction, which is much fairer for students who work hard and deserve it."

Ann Piggott, ASTI Cork South Paddy Mulcahy Branch

Cork Echo, April 22, 2025

"The ASTI is now able to highlight and report content that could be considered harmful or in violation of TikTok's community guidelines via TikTok's community partner channel. This community partner channel gives the ASTI access to an escalation process in the event that the normal TikTok reporting channel has not resolved an issue for an ASTI member, and once ASTI Head Office deems that the issue is of a threshold that requires urgent and immediate attention."

Kieran Christie, ASTI General Secretary

Irish Examiner, April 23, 2025

"I have concerns about the use of AI in education and especially in the area of assessment. Generative AI is working at a pace that is faster than the people who check these things can keep up to date with".

Maria Markey-Greene, ASTI member and Standing Committee

Representative Region 16

Irish Times, April 23, 2025

"You are competing with other schools and, when you do find a teacher and they are interested in joining, you suddenly find that, weeks before they are to start, they find another school closer to where they're from. How can you blame them when you consider the cost of accommodation and housing in Dublin?"

Sinéad Corkery, ASTI member and Standing Committee

Representative Region 18

Irish Independent, April 23, 2025

"We decided that both unions would propose this motion; we're working very much in tandem with our sister union the TUI, that if a meaningful response is not achieved from the talks in May then we will ballot on industrial action up to and including strike action — that's very much a last resort for us."

Siobhán O'Donovan, ASTI member and Standing Committee

Representative Region 5

Cork Echo, April 25, 2025

"[On the Minister's decision to proceed with the Senior Cycle Redevelopment Programme] In terms of the Senior Cycle, disappointment would be a minor way of putting it. The Minister refused to revert to the original schedule of the introduction of the new Senior Cycle and kept the accelerated process that her predecessor Norma Foley had announced last year. We think it was very reasonable to look for a pause to allow for proper consultation and also planning and resourcing. We launched a survey last week of principals and 49% of them said that they don't have enough labs to introduce the new science curriculum with its project element, which counts for 40% of the exams. We can't see any way that that's going to be done over the summer. New subjects are going to be introduced in September — the system isn't ready for it and teachers aren't ready for it".

Diarmaid de Paor, ASTI Deputy General Secretary

The Agenda, LMFM, April 23, 2025

ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES

Speeches at this year's Convention addressed teacher shortages, workload and stress, and Senior Cycle change.

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

ASTI President Donal Cremin addressed Senior Cycle, the pressures faced by teachers, and a range of solutions to the current recruitment and retention crisis.

In 1985, 20,000 teachers descended on Croke Park demanding a pay rise at a time of great industrial unrest in the educational sector. Forty years later, we are facing similar unrest once again because powerful people in the educational sector won't take a deep look, won't listen, and definitely won't learn from previous errors.

Senior Cycle

Teachers are being forced to embark on a process that is flawed, with no proper training, inadequate and poor facilities, no quality assurance, no health and safety audit, and no indication of marks on examination papers. Teachers are not afraid of change, but change cannot succeed without being open to question and challenge. Projects conducted outside the classroom are vulnerable to outside influence. Other jurisdictions either restrict project work or significantly reduce its impact on final grades. Research suggests that anything above a weighting of 18% can distort outcomes. And yet, in 2025 – at a time when AI tools are widely accessible – you are implementing a model with a 40% weighting for project work. In the present circumstances teachers cannot possibly take responsibility for signing off on any AAC as the students' own work. Research consistently shows that students from wealthier backgrounds perform better in project work. Whether it is access to additional help, better technology, or simply more resources, the outcome is the same: you are baking inequality into the system.

Workload

Teachers should be able to work in a positive environment where they are respected, valued and affirmed, yet instead they are forced to spend excessive time on non-teaching tasks including paperwork, form filling, emails, and out of hours tasks that have little effect on the quality of teaching and learning. In a forthcoming ASTI survey, 83% of teachers are experiencing stress; 41% described this as "a high level of stress".



The Croke Park hours must be removed. Teachers are flexible and willing to undertake necessary activities, such as:

- meeting parents to discuss their children's progress,
- a planning day at the start of the school year, if it is of high quality,
- three one-hour staff meetings for the running of the school, and
- an open evening of four hours.

All other hours must be on a trust basis, where the teacher has the autonomy to manage these hours in a way that best suits their individual circumstances.

Education and social change

Our country and our society are changing at a rapid rate. We say 'céad míle fáilte' to all the students entering our country from many parts of the world. However, the welcoming of different nationalities in recent years has created an unprecedented amount of work and pressure. Resources are stretched to breaking point. Students are becoming isolated, spending more time on devices rather than socialising. Social media and social media influencers are causing havoc for the young generation and the Government is doing little about it. Urgent action is needed from the powers that be to help adolescents manage an unregulated and deeply dangerous online system. We are one of the richest countries in the world, yet the lack of housing and support for young parents is appalling. One student goes home to a regular home environment while another goes to a hotel room where they are squashed with other family members into a single room. The education system is expected to fix all ills and teachers try valiantly to cover over the cracks by trying to create a safe, supportive and comfortable environment in their classrooms.

Teacher shortages

Minister, I will put forward five solutions to the recruitment and retention problem.

- Your initiative on CIDs needs to go much further. From day one, teachers must be offered a permanent full-time contract, on full hours, subject to probation. This would allow teachers to settle into teaching early in life and be more likely to stay in the system.
- When teachers return from teaching overseas, their experience, knowledge and expertise should be immediately recognised and acknowledged within the incremental pay scale.

- The 27-year incremental scale needs to be reduced to, at most, 20, so that teachers will have a reasonable pension when they reach 66 years, as pension levels are now based on career average earnings.
- Year two of the PME course should become an apprenticeship model, where student teachers are attached to a school for 15 hours per week and paid for their work. This will bring around 3,000 PME students into the education system.

- Teachers must be allowed to take parental leave on a one day per week basis, rather than only en bloc. This would allow students to have consistent teaching. It is cost neutral and would bring teaching in line with the rest of the public service.

The full speech is available at: www.asti.ie/document-library/president-donal-cremin-address-to-convention-2025/

GENERAL SECRETARY'S REPORT

Kieran Christie's address covered a range of issues from teacher recruitment and retention and investment in education, to Senior Cycle and public service pay talks.



Senior Cycle redevelopment

The issue that has stayed at the very top of our priorities has been Senior Cycle redevelopment. While welcoming some aspects of the plan, we have sought to panel beat it into something workable, sustainable and educationally sound. We have scored some successes in that regard. A vigorous campaign leading to the then Minister's row back on proposed plans for teacher-based assessment components and for students to sit Leaving Certificate Paper 1 in both English and Irish at the end of fifth year was another major advance that shows how decisive and co-ordinated action works.

ASTI survey and teacher workload

The ASTI recently undertook a survey: School Leaders: Workload, Wellbeing, and Curriculum Change. In relation to the introduction of new science specifications in September, just under half of schools consider their laboratories to be well equipped. School leaders were explicit in stating that difficulties in recruiting and retaining teachers are in large part attributable to the declining attractiveness of teaching as a profession.

Recruitment and retention crisis

There must be increased investment and a reversal of the relentless onslaught on teachers' terms and conditions that has been in train over many years. A proper promotional structure will have to be put in place. There must be a restoration of allowances that were abolished in 2012 for new beneficiaries. The move by the Minister this week whereby permanency can be achieved after one year is acknowledged and is at last a move in the right direction.

ASTI/TUI amalgamation talks

On April 26, 2024, the results of a survey on amalgamation between the

ASTI and TUI were published. Members in both unions stated that they are in favour of unity in principle, and that amalgamation talks should continue. The results of this survey provided a clear indication of sentiment on the broad issue of unity and indicate a desire for one union with one coherent voice. It is no more than that. The next stage of the process requires extensive discussions, and both unions have been engaging with each other in that regard.

Public Service Agreement

The current Public Service Agreement continues to run until June 2026. Chapter 4 of the agreement provided for local bargaining. Under the bargaining arrangements, employers and trade unions may negotiate additional changes in rates of pay and/or conditions of employment up to a maximum of 3% of the basic pay cost. This may include proposals involving changes in structures, work practices or other conditions of service. We are seeking clarity on how the current negotiations regarding Senior Cycle fit into this process. Detailed arrangements for local bargaining units were set out as to be agreed by the parties. In June 2024, the ASTI and the TUI were established to be a local bargaining unit. The parties will endeavour to reach agreement through direct negotiation. Implementation of adjustments will be on a phased basis. The first instalment, equivalent to 1% of the basic pay cost, will be implemented on September 1, 2025, and the balance will fall to be addressed in any successor pay agreement. Progress in the wider context regarding the implementation of the provisions relating to local bargaining has been extremely limited. It is also worth recalling that CEC adopted a motion in February 2024 that stated:

That ASTI shall not accept a local bargaining offer as part of the Public Service Agreement 2024 – 2026 without a ballot of members.

Hopefully we will see intensification on this very shortly, and our current discussions regarding Senior Cycle redevelopment may become relevant.

Croke Park Hours

Perhaps the largest bugbear issue we have in the ASTI has been the dreaded Croke Park Hours. Last year, you adopted a motion that stated as follows:

"That the ASTI ballot members with a view to taking industrial action, up to and including strike action, if the unpaid 33 Croke Park Hours are not terminated before the beginning of the 2025/26 school year."

Strong pressure applied on foot of that motion led to the opening of discussions on a review of the usage of these hours. The terms of reference state that: It is intended that the review will have regard to teacher professional judgement, system and school requirements, and experience to date of best practice in the utilisation of the hours. The review will make

recommendations to optimise the most professional and valuable usage of the additional hours by teachers. That work is now underway and we will see what outcome it brings. Our membership numbers are at an all-time record, smashing the 20,000 barrier in fine style for the very first time – Our union has never been stronger.

The full speech is available at: www.asti.ie/document-library/general-secretary-kieran-christies-address-to-convention-2025/

HELEN MCENTEE TD, MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND YOUTH

Minister McEntee outlined her plans for her Department, including addressing educational disadvantage, and curriculum reform.

I welcome the opportunity not just to set out my priorities, ambitions and goals as Minister, but to listen to your priorities, your goals, your ambitions, and the challenges you face.

I intend to implement a major programme of work to tackle educational disadvantage. At the end of this year, I will publish and set out a new DEIS Programme. I'm committed to not just building on the success of the DEIS Programme, but making sure that we introduce a new DEIS Plus, and also that we reach the students who are not in our DEIS schools.

As you know, the majority of young people with special educational needs are supported to attend mainstream school with their peers. I want to take this opportunity to sincerely thank you for the huge amount of work that is done in our schools in supporting those with additional needs and working with our special education teachers and SNAs.

While we need to ensure that for the most part, students are supported in mainstream, we have to acknowledge that there is an increased need for special education classrooms, for special schools.

We have 3,330 special classes already, and over a third of these are at post-primary level, which brings us to just under 1,100 post-primary schools. In the coming years, we want to increase that further, that there would be four classrooms for each school.

I acknowledge that this is a huge change, and I will do everything possible to support you. I will establish a new National Therapy Service for our schools.

What I've announced this week really is with an ambition to try and



address the issue around teacher supply. That's why new teachers, following Droichead, who have taught for one year and successfully interviewed for that post in that school the following year will immediately be offered that permanent contract at the start of the year. To further assist with teacher supply challenges, I'll also work with the Teaching Council on proposals to enable eligible teachers who have qualified outside Ireland to apply for registration and complete their induction here.

My Department will lead a workforce development plan, which will look at more immediate actions, as well as a medium- to longer-term outlook, to make the teaching profession more sustainable, more agile, and a much more attractive career.

In terms of curriculum reform, and to turn to Junior Cycle, the changes that I've made have come about because I've listened to what you have said. I want to make sure that students' results and grades reflect the work that they do throughout the year. I will not hesitate to implement further changes if they are needed. What I also intend is that any changes to Senior Cycle will include early enactment reviews at the earliest stages possible, because I'm very open if something is not working, if we need to change something, that we change it.

I believe that there is real momentum in the Senior Cycle redevelopment. I believe that so much of what has happened to date has only come into effect because of the fact that you, as an association, and your

stakeholder partners have engaged in the way that you have with the Department. The next step is to move on this tranche. I will work with you and support you and do everything that I can to make sure that this is a success.

I'm very aware that there is a concern around science, that schools feel that they don't have the resources that they need. I want to make sure that every single school has the resources, that you have the support that you need to be able to support your students. We need to make sure in terms of AI, that every clarity that needs to be provided for you but also for students, that that is done.

Finally, in the coming weeks, I'll be announcing a new education convention. We had a positive and important exchange almost 30 years ago, setting out a vision for education in this country. I think it's time that we set that out again. I look forward to working with you as we set out that ambition in the time ahead.

The full speech is available at: www.asti.ie/document-library/minister-helen-mcentees-speech-at-convention-2025/

PROF. ÁINE HYLAND – GUEST SPEAKER

Prof. Hyland added her voice to concerns at Senior Cycle redevelopment plans.

If I have one piece of advice to Ministers and policymakers, it is this: listen to the teachers – *éist leis na múinteoirí*. It is the teachers who are at the chalk face, and who know what will work and what won't work in the school and in the classroom. In March 2022, Minister Norma Foley announced a "reimagined Senior Cycle". New Leaving Cert subjects as well as revised curricula including Biology, Chemistry, Physics, and Business, would be introduced in "network schools" and rolled out to all schools later. Some 60% of the total marks in all subjects would be awarded for the written examination paper with 40% awarded to an additional assessment component (AAC).

The proposal that in each subject, 40% of marks would be allocated to an AAC caused and continues to cause concern among some students, teachers, university representatives, and members of the general public. This was particularly the case regarding Biology, Chemistry and Physics, where issues such as health and safety, inadequacy of laboratory facilities, equipment and resources have been highlighted. As well as having concerns about the feasibility of 24 students in a class with one science teacher (and no laboratory technician) undertaking individual experiments, I would question whether a written narrative report is a valid way of assessing a practical experiment or investigative project?

The requirement for students and schools to write and submit projects and/or reports for most if not all of their Leaving Cert subjects in the second term of the final year, around the same time as oral examinations and music, is likely to cause considerable stress for students and teachers, not to mention for school principals and management, who will have to ensure that the resources, including computer hardware and software and internet access, will be available to enable this gargantuan task to be successfully undertaken. And as more time will be spent on preparing the assessment tasks there will be less time for teaching and learning.

The introduction of 40% for AACs will inevitably widen the gap between the educationally disadvantaged students and their more advantaged peers.

I will conclude by making the following suggestions.

1. The introduction of 40% of marks for AACs for subjects where teachers have identified AACs as problematic, should be postponed. The proposal



that the new and revised specifications should be piloted in network schools should be revisited. This does not mean that the updated subject specifications should be delayed – everyone is in agreement that updating of specifications is required.

2. When issuing Leaving Cert results in subjects that have AACs, the SEC should provide separately the students' results in the written examination and in the AACs. This will provide useful information for employers, and for further and higher education. It will also provide a useful research database. Where there is a major discrepancy between the grade in the written examination and the AAC grade, further analysis might be carried out.
3. Teachers should not be asked to authenticate students' AACs. Student self-authentication should be introduced – if authentication by a legal adult is deemed necessary, parent/guardian authentication should be considered.

The full speech is available at: www.asti.ie/document-library/professor-ine-hyland-asti-convention-speech-2025/

Watch key Convention speeches online at: www.asti.ie/news-campaigns/latest-news/convention-2025-speeches/

TEACHER UNITY NEEDED TO CHALLENGE SENIOR CYCLE CHANGE

A joint ASTI/TUI motion called for a united stance on accelerated Senior Cycle redevelopment plans, while other motions called for indemnity for teachers submitting coursework on behalf of students, and the provision of sample papers and marking schemes in advance of changes to State exams.

A number of motions at Convention addressed teachers' significant concerns regarding the Minister for Education's stated intention to continue with the accelerated implementation of the Senior Cycle Redevelopment Programme. In particular, an urgent motion submitted by Standing Committee was adopted. This joint ASTI/TUI motion acknowledged the talks process that has begun between the Minister and the teacher unions, and instructed Standing Committee that "any document or proposal arising from these talks will be put to a ballot of affected members". However, the motion also stated that, "in the event that these intensive talks fail to deliver an acceptable outcome that can be put to ballot, the ASTI, in conjunction with the TUI (where possible) will utilise all mechanisms available to the Union, up to and including a ballot for industrial action, to defend professional standards and protect student outcomes". The passing of this motion meant that Motions 48 and 41 fell from the Clár, and were not debated at Convention. In regard to the current plan that teachers will be expected to verify students' work for Additional Assessment Components (AACs) at Leaving Cert, Motion 14 asked that the ASTI demand that all teachers be indemnified against any actions or legal cases taken as a result of the State Examinations Commission withholding results due to suspected cheating with the aid of AI or other means. Motion 51, meanwhile, stated that no change to State examinations should be introduced until a minimum of two years after sample papers and marking schemes have been published and training for teachers has commenced.

Urgent joint ASTI/TUI motion

"Presenting a united front to the Department was considered very important, and this was done in the initial negotiations. But now it becomes necessary. Unfortunately, the Minister declined the opportunity to pause Senior Cycle redevelopment, which was our joint approach. It now becomes necessary to adopt this motion from both our ASTI Convention, and hopefully TUI's Congress, to strengthen our hand in future negotiations. All parties have agreed to a continuing process of active talks, and with the drip feed from the media in the last few days, we can see that some of the issues are being addressed. So the motion provides instruction in terms of those talks, if the talks are fruitful or if they're not."

Padraig Curley, Donegal Branch, President Elect



Padraig Curley, Donegal Branch, President Elect.

"We do not have time to train teachers in. We do not have time to put infrastructures in place to make sure that our students are not using AI to do their assignments. We need to ballot to postpone this so-called redeveloped Senior Cycle for at least, I think, two years. That's what we need to be looking for."

Sinéad Moore, Fingal Branch

"Helen McEntee is taking an Orwellian approach to the new Senior Cycle, treating every subject in the same way, even though there's massive conceptual differences across the board. As a teacher of chemistry, biology, and maths, I have serious concerns about the challenges involved in delivering the new curriculum. In Leaving Certificate Chemistry, mandatory experiments still need to be carried out in conjunction with a project worth 40%, leading to increased stress levels for both pupils and teachers."

Ian Mc Colgan, Dublin North West Branch

Indemnity for teachers

"We need an indemnity because the flawed AAC model, which assigns 40% of the marks for a report, asks us to do the impossible. We have been asked to authenticate that work submitted by our students to the SEC is entirely their own. There is no mechanism for detecting if work has been completed with the aid of generative AI or with the help of others. We need an indemnity to protect ourselves from the consequences that may arise after students have submitted their work. A minimum of 40% of total marks for an AAC that is open to cheating in a high-stakes exam puts teachers in an impossible position."

John Conneely, Clare Branch and Standing Committee Region 4

Sample papers

"In Senior Cycle reform, there are a great deal of problems. I'm here to propose a solution to one of those. No student should sit and no teacher teach one minute of one class in fifth year until we have sample papers. It's just not fair on anybody."

Odhran O'Donovan, Galway Branch

FOCUS ON TEACHER HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Several motions at Convention 2025 addressed health and well-being issues for teachers. Teacher pensions were also addressed, as well as Croke Park Hours and greater fairness for post holders.



Galway Branch delegates Margaret Keville, Maura Greaney and Christina Kennedy are pictured at Convention 2025.



Dublin North East Branch members Ciarán Kavanagh, Thérèse Glennon, and Mark Walshe are pictured at Convention 2025.

A large number of motions at Convention addressed teachers' terms and conditions of employment, with a particular focus on issues of health and well-being. Motion 19 called for research into physical aggression in the classroom, while Motions 23 and 30 asked for the exclusion of weekends and public holidays from sick leave, and a doubling of current sick leave entitlements, respectively. Motion 20 called for paid leave for members who have suffered a miscarriage, or who are undergoing IVF treatment, while Motion 21 called for the introduction of menopause leave.

Motion 10 asked that the ASTI commission independent research into pension options for teachers. Motion 7 asked that all vacant AP1 and AP2 posts advertised should include details of the duties within each post.

Other motions sought to reverse pay inequalities for teachers, with Motion 3 seeking that teachers' pay scales be shortened in line with those of other public servants, and Motion 6 seeking affiliate union support for a reversal of the increment freeze imposed on ASTI members as a result of FEMPI legislation. Motion 15 asked that the ASTI demand that job-sharing teachers not be timetabled for more than three days per week, if that is their preference.

Physical aggression in schools

"It is imperative that appropriate measures are put in place to support teachers and SNAs who have been assaulted or who suffer an injury in the workplace through no fault of their own. This change is essential to support the well-being and financial stability of educators who face workplace assault. Their sole focus should be on their recovery. They

should not be in a position where they can't pay their mortgage or rent, where they're worried about their medical bills and maybe struggle to put food on the table."

Ray Nolan, Drogheda Sean Higgins Branch

Sick leave

"I believe that this new motion would be a concrete stepping stone in our efforts to return to the situation prior to 2008. The current sick leave arrangements of 90 days over a four-year rolling period are completely inadequate. With the counting of weekends and public holidays, this amounts to just under 13 weeks. However, if weekends and public holidays are excluded, those 90 days would constitute 18 full weeks, i.e., an increase of five full weeks in sick leave."

Louis Callaghan, Drogheda Sean Higgins Branch and Standing Committee Region 12

"Our motion this year is a motion for restoration of sick leave entitlements from pre the 2008 crash. This year, we talk about the doubling of the current sick leave entitlements. It is shocking to tell you that doubling the entitlement does not even get close to full restoration. Our entitlements were quartered in two steps by two different governments in 2010 and in 2014. The crash is long over, and this is a wealthy country. We perhaps are not angry enough, we're not demanding enough, and perhaps we have to take further steps around this."

Philip Irwin, Dublin South 1 Branch

Pensions

"Specific pension-related schemes have certainly become more important for teachers who joined the profession since 2013 and have their pension based on average career earnings. Therefore, it makes practical sense for all these teachers, and other teachers as well, to look into the best option available. It's up to us as a union to ensure we support members in helping them to make the best and most informed decision in their interest. An independent report will potentially open up more favourable options for pension investments, and teachers can then make a more informed decision, choosing the best options available to them."

Enda Whelton, Clare Branch

Paid leave for miscarriage and IVF treatment

"Paid leave for miscarriage and IVF reflects a humane and empathetic approach to the personal challenges faced by teachers, recognising the emotional and physical toll involved in both miscarriage and IVF treatment. If you're going through IVF treatment, the last thing you need to be worrying about is your leave and whether to take sick leave. Similarly, with miscarriage you're worried about leave. It is not something you should have to worry about. Introducing this leave helps to address gender-based disparities in the workplace. It supports female teachers' reproductive health and family planning without paralysing their careers."

Catherine Horan, Drogheda Sean Higgins Branch

Menopause leave for teachers

"Menopause leave will help teachers manage symptoms without compromising performance, reduce burnout and early retirement, and promote the long-term retention of experienced educators and ensure positive outcomes for our students. Let's help foster an inclusive workplace culture and empower our members to seek support without stigma. As a union, we protect, we advocate, we lead. Let's continue to lead the way in building a more inclusive, responsive, and compassionate system for teachers and for students. We owe it to the dedicated members who show up every day, even when their bodies seem to thwart their intentions. We owe it to ensure our members are seen, supported, and treated with the fairness they deserve. Menopause is not a taboo, but it is a workplace issue. It's time we recognise this and act accordingly."

Dave Carolan, Drogheda Sean Higgins Branch

Teachers' salary scales and increments

"As a teacher appointed to an Oireachtas-paid position, it is expected that 27 years will pass me and my colleagues by before we reach the top of our scale. To me, this strikes at the heart of the well-recognised and reported-on teacher supply crisis that we see in this country. Other public and civil servants have much shorter scales, with staff nurses and midwives taking 13 years, while graduate-entry civil servants at executive officer level have an approximately 8- to 10-year lead-in time to receive the top of their scale salary and the much-coveted long-service increment. Yet teachers who are mandated to both hold degree and now master's-level qualifications and to work under ever-growing demands by 'stakeholders' are left behind. Delegates, if it is our wish to retain and attract the best, we must demand the same treatment as other public servants. We must insist that our scale be shortened for fairness, for retention, and to seek a stop to the erosion of our working conditions."

Graham Geraghty, Dublin South 2 Branch

"This is in relation to the increments freeze in 2017 during the pay equality campaign. It was a petty and vindictive Government decision to not restore

that payment freeze eight years ago, and it remains a petty and vindictive move to have not done anything about it since. The purpose of this motion is to put this on the agenda and to give a mandate to our representatives at the ICTU conference to keep raising this and to ask for solidarity. Our campaign for pay equality was a campaign that was rooted in solidarity. It was a difficult campaign for this union, but it was carried out for the best possible reasons, which was that we were being asked to look the other way while some members of our union were being treated differently. I'm proud of the fact that we didn't do that. However, the legacy of that is we've had an increments freeze in place that affects our members. I think it's time to give our representatives a refreshed mandate to raise this and keep raising it."

Donal McCarthy, Wexford Tony Boland Branch

Time provisions for post holders in Voluntary Secondary Schools

"We are seeking the same time provisions as those in ETB and Community and Comprehensive Schools. I have been an AP2 in my Voluntary Secondary School for the past five years, with the role of being a year head... The role starts from about 7.30 each morning with texts, calls and emails from parents. At 8.10 I check the morning detention room for my year group and check their detention notes. Once school starts half an hour later, I speak to individual students about a wide variety of things such as interactions with others, lack of work ethic, bullying, absenteeism, falling out with friendship groups, behaviour in class, uniform breaches, skipping school, etc. Weekly, I would have two or three meetings with the principal and parents or other stakeholders such as social workers. All of these duties are on top of teaching my classes – two full sixth-year classes. A time allowance would begin to help me and those other postholders."

Helen Eccles, Stillorgan Branch

AP1 and AP2 job posts should include details of duties

"After talking to other post holders that I know there seems to be a lot of chopping and changing of posts, and more concerningly, there seem to be other duties added to the post after a teacher receives the post. If the job specification is given before the job application process, then managers would be less likely to change or add to it, and teachers could refer back to it. I don't have a post and I am not going to go for one because I do not feel comfortable making an uninformed decision around my career. I know who I am, I know my strengths and the areas I am most interested in. If I apply for a post like many I know, I could be given a role that doesn't work towards my strengths or a role I have absolutely no interest in."

William Browne, Carbery Branch

Job-sharing teachers

"Most teachers job share for personal reasons, often as a result of difficult circumstances in their life, which can often result in a widely-scattered timetable throughout any given day. In a worst-case scenario, a teacher could be on first class in the morning and last class in the evening. At the very least, that is a major inconvenience for someone living close by, but it is no help to teachers who have a long commute. It is certainly no help to any teacher hoping to save on expensive childminding services. It can become another stressor in the job and its current 'one size fits all' approach like the Senior Cycle Additional Assessment Component (AAC) doesn't work in reality for every teacher and in every case."

John Byrne, Cork South Paddy Mulcahy Branch and Standing Committee Region 6

PRESSING MATTERS

A number of motions at Convention dealt with issues around Junior Cycle, students with additional educational needs, procedures with regard to curriculum design, and CPD for new subject specifications.



Kerry Branch delegates Siobhán Slattery, Marina Mulvihill, Michelle Costello, and Jennifer Brosnan are pictured at Convention 2025.

Motion 43 at this year's Convention asked that higher and ordinary level examination papers be made available for all subjects at Junior Cycle. Motion 11 asked that the ASTI negotiate with the Department that the role of Additional Educational Needs (AEN) Co-ordinator be ex quota, in order to fully meet the needs of AEN students. Motion 35 called for an independent review of the quality of aspects of curriculum design and procedures undertaken by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, including aspects preventing subject development groups from accessing submissions made as part of a public consultation process. Finally, Motion 39 asked the ASTI to partner with the TUI in seeking to ensure a comprehensive programme of subject CPD in the year prior to the implementation of subject specifications in schools.

Availability of exam papers at Junior Cycle

"The levels which previously existed must be restored at Junior Cycle. Currently, we have two levels in core subjects and one level in others. This means that many students are destined to fail ahead of their exams as there is no level suitable for them. The Minister told us that she wants to do everything she can to support those who are at risk of educational disadvantage. If we have to keep grading some students as failures the education system is failing them. If we do not offer all students a suitable level for their ability, we are doing nothing to enhance their self-esteem, their potential proficiency or their well-being...I am calling on the Minister to do all that she can for the students who need exam papers that are suited to their needs so that they do not have to be branded failures."

Ann Piggott, Cork South Paddy Mulcahy Branch

Ensuring the role of AEN co-ordinator is ex quota

"The role of the AEN co-ordinator is a vital leadership position in every school but the current demands of the role are physically impossible to meet within the timeframe afforded to carry out the work. The AEN co-ordinator constantly liaises with multiple stakeholders about each student, with outside services, or often the lack of these services, with psychologists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, parents, guardians, school managers, the NCSE (National Council for Special Needs

Education), the SEC (State Examinations Commission) and the Department of Education. Let us make it possible for AEN co-ordinators to carry out their vital work, to ensure that the needs of AEN students can be advocated for, and that the role of AEN co-ordinator is ex quota."

Anne Loughnane, Carbery Branch

Review of Irish curriculum design

"Despite all of the evidence and warnings the Junior Cycle was rolled out by the NCCA (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment). Unsurprisingly, this flawed Junior Cycle soon began to unravel. The number of CBAs (classroom-based assessments) has been reduced from two to one. The assessment task has been abolished. The organisation of SLAR meetings is in disarray in schools. The Junior Cycle grading bands are being changed back as they are not fit for purpose. Frustratingly, all of these issues and others were raised by the ASTI 10 years ago. But, because the NCCA does not listen to teachers, they rolled out the not fit for purpose Junior Cycle. An independent international review would bring a fresh perspective and expertise to the evaluation of the NCCA's practices including curriculum design, the consultation process, and subject development groups."

Adrienne Healy, Dublin North West Branch and Standing Committee Region 15

CPD for teachers

"Teachers are entitled to be familiar with the specifications that they are expected to teach. However, teachers all across Ireland now face the prospect of beginning to teach specifications they are not familiar with. In lots of cases teachers have had one day of subject-specific CPD training and one whole-school day. In many cases, the whole-school day involved vague planning tasks and an inability of facilitators to answer any specific questions. On top of this lack of preparation, teachers also face the prospects of preparing students for an AAC they know almost nothing about. It's not fair on teachers, it's not fair on students and it needs to change. We believe that comprehensive subject-specific CPD needs to be a priority for our union in terms of Senior Cycle redevelopment."

Joe Cummins, Wexford Tony Boland

MOTIONS ADOPTED AT CONVENTION 2025

Motions adopted at ASTI Convention become the union's policy.

The following motions were adopted by Annual Convention 2025:

Urgent motion – Standing Committee

ASTI/TUI Motion: Senior Cycle Redevelopment

Convention notes the decision of the Minister for Education on 8th April 2025 to proceed with the phasing in of the Accelerated Senior Cycle Redevelopment (SCR) by allowing all of Tranche 1 subjects to proceed, despite reasonable calls from the ASTI and the TUI for a pause to allow for proper consultation, planning, and resourcing.

Given these circumstances, Convention acknowledges the intensive talks that commenced on 15th April 2025 and supports Standing Committee's decision to mandate ASTI negotiators to participate fully, proactively, and constructively in these negotiations which are focussed on issues such as;

- Adequate time and resources for planning and delivery.
- Comprehensive CPD for all affected teachers.
- Staffing and timetabling implications.
- Infrastructure and assessment support.

Convention instructs Standing Committee that any document or proposal arising from these talks will be put to a ballot of affected members.

However, Convention instructs that, in the event that these intensive talks fail to deliver an acceptable outcome that can be put to ballot, the ASTI, in conjunction with the TUI (where possible) will utilise all mechanisms available to the Union, up to and including a ballot for industrial action, to defend professional standards and protect student outcomes.

Convention asserts that the ASTI's position remains principled, student-centred, and rooted in the defence of quality public education.

Motion 14 – Senior Cycle

In view of the fact that teachers are required to certify that Additional Assessment Component coursework submitted to SEC is solely that of the student, that the ASTI demand that all teachers be indemnified against any subsequent actions or legal cases taken by students against teachers as a result of the SEC withholding results due to suspected cheating with the aid of AI or other means. **(Clare)**

Motion 51 – Senior Cycle

That, no change to State examinations be introduced until a minimum of two years after sample papers and marking schemes have been published and training for teachers has commenced. **(Galway)**

Motion 19 – Health and safety

With regard to physical aggression in the classroom, that the ASTI conduct a survey of its members with regard to physical aggression experienced in the workplace and negotiate with the Department of Education to provide the following measures for injured school staff, namely:

1. immediate financial assistance to cover expenses relating to medical bills, therapy sessions and medication.
2. assault leave for teachers for the duration of their medically certified leave.
3. a comprehensive support system for teachers who have become victims of violence.
4. research the correlation between mental health issues and physical escalation by students and establish a best practice model for teachers, should such a correlation be found. **(Drogheda Sean Higgins)**

Motion 23 – Sick leave

That, as a matter of priority, the ASTI negotiate with the Department of Education with the aim of amending the sick leave scheme, as outlined in Circular 0013/2024, so that sick leave days exclude weekends and public holidays. **(Drogheda Sean Higgins)**

Motion 30 – Sick leave

That, in order to support teachers who fall ill, the ASTI seek a doubling of the current sick leave entitlements as a step towards the restoration of the arrangements pertaining before the economic crash of 2008. **(Dublin South 1)**

Motion 10 – Pensions

That the ASTI commission an independent report into the different options that are available to members so that they can make a more informed choice in choosing the best possible option available to them to improve their pension. This would consider associated costs and benefits for specific pension schemes (AVCs, PRSAs and Notional Service etc). **(Clare)**

Motion 43 – Junior Cycle

That the ASTI demand that higher level and ordinary level exam papers are available for all subjects in the Junior Cycle examination, except for Irish, English and Maths where higher, ordinary and foundation levels will be available for examination. **(Cork South Paddy Mulcahy)**

Motion 11 – Additional educations needs

That the ASTI negotiate with the Department of Education that the role of Additional Educational Needs Coordinator (AEN) is ex quota to ensure the full needs of all AEN students be met. **(Carbery)**

Motion 35 – Composite motion – Curriculum design

That the ASTI demand that an independent review be carried out by an international organisation, outside of Ireland, into the quality of all aspects of curriculum design and procedures being undertaken by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, including aspects that prevent subject development groups having access to submissions made as part of the public consultation process. **(Dublin North West) (Clare)**

Motion 39 – CPD

That the ASTI, in partnership with the TUI, seek to ensure that a comprehensive programme of subject-specific CPD take place in the year prior to the implementation of subject specifications in schools. **(Wexford Tony Boland)**

Motion 7 – Posts of responsibility

That the ASTI negotiate with the management bodies that all vacant AP1 and AP2 posts advertised include details of the duties within that post. **(Carbery)**

Motion 20 – Miscarriage and IVF leave

That the ASTI negotiate with the Department of Education with the aim of introducing paid leave for members who have suffered a miscarriage or who are undergoing IVF treatment. **(Drogheda Sean Higgins)**

Motion 21 – Menopause leave

That the ASTI negotiate with the Department of Education with the aim of introducing menopause leave which will allow teachers to request suitable workplace adjustments such as flexibility, time off to attend medical appointments and work task adjustments when teachers are experiencing symptoms. **(Drogheda Sean Higgins)**

Motion 3 – Teachers' salary scale

In order to address the worsening teacher supply crisis, the ASTI, in conjunction with the other teacher unions, urgently demands that teachers' salary scales be shortened in line with other public servants' pay scales especially in light of the negative impact of such long salary scales on teachers' pensions. **(Dublin North West)**

Motion 6 – Reversal of increment freeze

That the ASTI seek the support of all affiliate unions of ICTU to ensure a reversal of the Increment freeze imposed on ASTI members as a result of FEMPI legislation. **(Wexford Tony Boland)**

Motion 15 – Job sharing

That the ASTI demand that job sharing teachers not be timetabled for more than 3 days per week, if that is the job sharer's preference. **(Cork South Paddy Mulcahy)**

ELECTIONS AT ANNUAL CONVENTION 2025

OFFICERS ELECTED AT CONVENTION



President Elect
Padraig Curley



Vice-President
Richard Bell



Honorary Treasurer
Noelle Moran

COMMITTEES

Business of CEC Sub-Committee

John Byrne
John Conneely
Richard Egan

Michael McGrath
Elena Quintanal
Kevin Wall

Pensions Sub-Committee
Results of this ballot will be available online at www.asti.ie

Education Committee

Éamonn Cashin
Joe Cummins
Niall Duddy
Aodán MacCárthaigh
Niall Mahon
Jennifer Mannion
Jacinta McGarry
Sinéad Moore
Conor Murphy

Rules Committee

Louis Callaghan
Philip Irwin
Anne Loughnane
Michael McGrath
Geraldine O'Brien

Safety, Health and Welfare Committee

Keith Cassidy
Helen Cunniffe
Paul Glynn
Barry Hazel
Niamh Loftus
Ian Mc Colgan
Michael McGrath
Sinéad Moore
Eóin Ó hAodha

Standing Committee Regional Elections Committee

Margo McGann
Lorraine Finn
Jimmy Staunton

Steering Committee

Richard Egan
Deirdre Mac Donald
Máire G. Ní Chiarba
Seán O'Neill
Mark Walshe

Equality Committee

Marina Carlin
Pamela Conway
Mairéad Dineen
Maura Greaney
Eimear Holly
Bill Lonergan
Róisín MacCarthaigh
Pauline Nagle
Philip Synnott

Investment Committee

John McDonnell
Tony McGennis
Padraic McWeeney
Pádraig Murphy

Non-Permanent Teachers' Advisory Committee

Helena Cunniffe
Carmel Egan
Niamh Kelly

VOX POPS – AI AND ADDRESSING TEACHER SHORTAGES

Teachers at ASTI Convention spoke to *ASTIR* about the impact of AI on education, and what the Minister for Education should do to address teacher shortages.

As a teacher, what do you think will be the key benefits and challenges of AI for education?



Kieran O'Farrell,
Dublin North
West Branch

"AI isn't coming, it's already here. What's changed recently is how fast it's integrated into our everyday lives – as

teachers we can't pretend that it doesn't exist. There are clear benefits to using AI in education: it can help break down reading barriers, generate study notes, simplify tricky concepts, and even inspire creativity. But it's not all rosy. Regulation needs to come from the top down, with the valued input of teachers.

We must recognise that regulations will be difficult to effectively implement given the nature of AI and how fast it is evolving. Another issue is whether AI is being used as an effective tool or completing work for students.

We risk drifting away from teaching and learning, and instead becoming human AI detectors, and that's not the role we signed up for. As a science teacher, I'm particularly concerned about how AI might impact project-based work, especially with the new specifications rolling out in September. The importance and gravity of the Leaving Certificate cannot be left in the hands of AI. AI has serious potential to support teaching and learning but only if we are proactive, thoughtful and keep the human element at the core of education."



Elena Quintanal,
Mullingar Branch

"AI can enhance teaching through personalised learning, differentiation, time-saving tools, and lesson planning. As well, it can be a useful tool for senior students to fly

solo; for example, I encourage my Spanish students to have a conversation in Spanish with AI and get straightforward feedback or

clarification instead of having to wait one or two days to meet me again in class, which can delay student progress. Challenges include the lack of creation, ensuring privacy, and addressing ethical concerns around academic honesty. Even though AI proves handy when you are facing a blank sheet, it can affect the development of creativity and independent thinking skills.

Besides, we cannot forget that unequal access to AI tools may widen the gap between students. So, professional training and clear policies will be key moving forward. AI is here, and we should learn how to get the best from it."



Ryan Keeney,
Donegal Branch

"AI can tailor learning to students' individual needs, which is a big help in mixed-ability classes. It can help reduce administration and improve planning, and with creating

differentiated resources. AI can make learning more interactive, which is great for students with additional needs. You can have real-time feedback, which can help students improve before a high-stakes exam, for example. The key challenges include equity and access.

Not all students have equal access to devices/Internet, or to paid versions of AI software. Then there is plagiarism and integrity. AI tools can write essays, solve problems, etc., and it then becomes more difficult to assess a genuine student understanding from the teacher's perspective. How can teachers be expected to sign off on a student's project work for Senior Cycle without the use of plagiarism software?

Then there is curriculum fit. The higher system is still very exam focused. AI might not align well with the current assessment style. So obviously, there'll be more room needed for project-based plus skill-based work. However, this change should be gradual with CPD and appropriate teacher training, listening to feedback from teachers. In terms of ethical and data privacy, AI systems collect data, but who owns the data? Is it GDPR compliant? Are students being profiled or tracked unfairly? AI should be used with, not instead of, strong pedagogy. It's a tool, not a teacher. The focus has to stay on human connection, critical thinking, and well-being, the things AI can't replicate."

If you were Minister for Education, what three steps would you take to address teacher shortages?



Christine Salmon,
Dublin North
Central Branch

"I would firstly reduce the two-year PME to a one-year PME. I think it would be more attractive for students to think about becoming a secondary school teacher if it was only one year.

Also, I would create more posts of responsibility in schools, to have career progression for new teachers. Lastly, I would make affordable housing available for teachers in Ireland."



Dylan McKeever,
Stillorgan Branch

"I wouldn't change the PME from two years back to one, but I'd reduce the cost of the PME. At the moment, it's €15,000 to become a

teacher in Ireland, and that's a huge barrier to entry for any aspiring

"At the moment, I think teacher retention is difficult. The first step I would take would be to bring back pay parity – it's crazy to be working alongside someone who's on a different pay scale and you're doing the same work."

"I would remove the second CBA from the Junior Cycle because having to do 20 CBAs over two years takes away from class time."

person who wants to become a teacher. The second thing is I would like to guarantee some form of guaranteed subbing hours for student teachers, a minimum amount of subbing that has to be done on the placement, so student teachers are receiving some income and not having to work a second job to pay those fees.

The last thing I would do is I would remove the second CBA from the Junior Cycle because having 20 CBAs over two years takes away from class time.

In my own school at the moment, we have hour-based classes. For history, I only see my class twice a week, and trying to cover the entire course, and do CBAs on top of that, takes a huge amount out of time to actually complete the Junior Cycle courses."



Mairéad Dineen,
Carbery Branch

"At the moment, I think teacher retention is difficult.

The first step I would take would be to bring

back pay parity – it's crazy to be working alongside someone who's on a different pay scale and you're doing the same work.

A friend of mine, we qualified a year apart, but we were born on the same day and she is a few scales ahead of me because she's with the TUI and her salary increments weren't frozen.

My second step would be to unfreeze the increments that were frozen for ASTI members.

The third thing I would do is create full-time contracts because it's impossible to retain teachers in the country if you're only offering them three- or four-hour contracts."



FIVE YEARS ON: IRISH SECOND-LEVEL EDUCATION POST COVID



The Covid-19 pandemic caused major disruption to education, but also highlighted the resilience and creativity of teachers and students. Article by Éamonn Cashin.

The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted our education system like never before. Yet, through it all, the spirit of teachers and our students shone brightly, paving the way for renewed hope and transformation. As Dr Áine Hyland, a renowned Irish education scholar, stated: “Education in Ireland always evolved in response to societal challenges, and the pandemic has been no exception, offering us an opportunity to rethink our approaches to teaching and learning” (Hyland, 2021, p.5). As we stand on the other side of this crisis, it is essential that we celebrate our achievements and recognise the profound impact of teachers and students during these trying times.

Adapting to a new world

The ability to adapt is the hallmark of a great teacher. As educational researcher Dr John Hattie noted: “Teachers who keep learning, learning about their teaching, learning about their students, are the ones who are more successful” (Hattie, 2009, p.112). When schools were forced to close, teachers across Ireland rose to the occasion, swiftly transitioning to remote learning. It was extremely challenging – embracing new technologies and collaborating with one another to create the best possible learning experiences for our students.

We exhibited extraordinary creativity. Many teachers utilised online platforms to maintain meaningful connections with their students, crafting virtual classrooms, recording instructional videos, and facilitating engaging discussions. Even in isolation, the flame of education continued to burn brightly. As one teacher aptly put it: “In every challenge lies an opportunity to innovate and inspire”.

However, it was not just the dedication of teachers that carried us through; the resilience of our students played a crucial role. The Education Minister highlighted the resilience of our students and how they adapted to new forms of learning (Department of Education, 2021). A study by the Economic and Social

Research Institute (ESRI) in 2022 found that 67% of students reported feeling more independent in their learning compared to pre-pandemic times (ESRI, 2022). They learned to be self-directed, harnessing technology to take charge of their education – a skill that will serve them well beyond the classroom.

Challenges

Yet, the challenges that we all faced were immense. According to the Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland (ASTI), over 70% of teachers reported increased levels due to the rapid shift to online learning, while nearly 60% expressed concerns about student engagement (ASTI, 2021). The lack of proper digital infrastructure in some areas meant that students and teachers alike struggled with unreliable internet connections, outdated devices, and inadequate technical support. The ASTI also noted that disparities in digital access exacerbated existing educational inequalities, particularly among students from disadvantaged backgrounds (ASTI, 2022).

The emotional toll of the pandemic was equally significant. Many teachers reported burnout due to increased workloads, as they juggled both in-person and remote instruction. A 2022 ASTI survey revealed that 65% of secondary school teachers felt that student motivation had declined, leading to greater challenges in maintaining effective learning environments (ASTI, 2022). As another teacher stated: “We weren’t just teaching, we were supporting, mentoring, and trying to bridge the gap caused by the crisis”.

After the initial shock of the pandemic, schools prioritised not just academics but also the mental well-being of students and staff. Initiatives to promote mental health became a core focus, recognising that educational and emotional support go hand in hand. Dr Éanna O’Connor, a psychologist specialising in education, remarked: “Creating a supportive environment is critical to facilitate not only academic success but personal growth” (O’Connor, 2021, p.42). Research from the Irish Psychological Society (IPS) in 2023 further highlighted the importance



A seminar for subject and programme representatives took place remotely during the pandemic in 2021 to discuss the impact of transitioning from remote learning to in-person teaching in schools.

of school-based mental health programmes, with 72% of students reporting positive effects from counselling services (IPS, 2023). However, there is an inadequate supply of counselling and guidance in schools. Vital work through the enhanced provision of guidance counsellors is necessary for students in order to make informed decisions about the here and now, but also about their futures. A holistic approach to education must remain at the forefront of our educational policies moving forward.

Looking to the future

We acknowledge the challenges that remain. The disruption caused by Covid has led to learning gaps that we must work diligently to close. The pandemic has also highlighted educational inequalities, emphasising the urgent need for continued investment in our schools and communities. As Nelson Mandela once said: “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world” (Mandela, 1994, p.67). It is our responsibility to ensure that every student, regardless of background, has access to quality education.

The ASTI has highlighted several ongoing challenges in secondary education. Our General Secretary Kieran Christie explained that our education system is under enormous stress and at a critical point, citing issues such as work overload, unequal pay, underinvestment, lack of promotional posts, and the housing crisis (ASTI, 2023). Furthermore, a RED C/ASTI survey revealed that only 22% of mainstream teachers supporting students with special educational needs (SEN) have received recent training, with significant challenges including lack of allocated planning time and large class sizes (ASTI, 2023).

Over 30,000 secondary school teachers protested in late 2024, campaigning for a postponement of the implementation of the Senior Cycle redevelopment programme, expressing concerns over changes that could undermine educational standards and fairness. We are mindful of academic integrity regarding Senior Cycle Additional Assessment Components (AACs), the use of artificial intelligence (AI), hurriedly devised subject specifications, and concerns regarding equality and equity of access to facilities and resources (ASTIR, 2024 and 2025). The ASTI has also reported that teachers are experiencing higher levels of stress and administrative burdens than ever before. ASTIR has highlighted that teachers feel that administrative tasks have significantly increased in the past three years, reducing their ability to focus on direct student engagement. Furthermore, ASTIR has highlighted the growing concern over teacher recruitment and retention, with newly qualified teachers struggling to secure stable positions due to inadequate salary structures (ASTIR, 2023, 2024 and 2025). Moving forward, we must embrace a culture of collaboration among teachers, students and parents. The

The ASTI has highlighted that teachers feel that administrative tasks have significantly increased in the past three years, reducing their ability to focus on direct student engagement.

Department of Education supporting us with the tools and resources we need will be key to ensuring that we can meet the diverse needs of our students. Together, we can build a resilient educational framework that not only fosters academic achievement but also prioritises well-being and inclusivity. As Dr Emer Smyth, an education scholar, noted: “The post-pandemic period represents an opportunity to reshape Irish education, ensuring a more equitable and sustainable system for both teachers and students” (Smyth, 2023, p.56). Let us continue to inspire, uplift, and educate – for the future of Ireland depends on the strength of its students and the dedication of its teachers.

Éamonn teaches in St Augustine’s College in Waterford. He is a member of the Dungarvan Branch and serves on the ASTI Education Committee.

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ASTI STEERING COMMITTEE

ASTI Steering Committee has a vital role in the preparations for Annual Convention, the ASTI's supreme governing body.



ASTI Steering Committee. Back row (from left): Diarmaid de Paor (ASTI Deputy General Secretary), Padraig Curley (ASTI President Elect), Donal Cremin (ASTI President), Seán O'Neill, and Kieran Christie (ASTI General Secretary). Front row (from left): Dierdre Mac Donald, Mark Walshe, Máire G. Ní Chiarba, Richard Bell (ASTI Vice President), and Richard Egan.

What is Steering Committee?

Steering Committee looks after the motions and agenda for ASTI Annual Convention. Steering Committee has an important role in ensuring that there is a clear and logical agenda set out and adhered to for each ASTI Annual Convention. This is vital because Annual Convention sets ASTI policy agenda for the coming year.

Members are elected to Steering Committee each year at Annual Convention. In May 2025, the members of Steering Committee are:

- ASTI President,
- ASTI President Elect,
- ASTI Vice President,
- ASTI General Secretary,
- ASTI Deputy General Secretary,
- Deirdre Mac Donald,
- Máire G. Ní Chiarba,
- Richard Egan,
- Seán O'Neill, and
- Mark Walshe.

How does Steering Committee select motions for Convention?

Branches submit their draft motions for the following year's Annual Convention to ASTI Head Office by November 30. The first meeting of Steering Committee is held in early December.

Steering Committee could receive as many as 300 motions for consideration each year, and must determine whether or not each motion submitted is 'out of order'. The guidelines that determine if a motion is 'in order' or 'out of order' are available in the Convention Handbook given to delegates each year. In brief, the guidelines state that motions must:

- arrive in ASTI Head Office before the deadline (November 30),
- ask Convention to declare an opinion, or call for a course of action, or both,
- be properly worded and factually correct,
- conform to the objectives of the ASTI, and
- be capable of implementation as set out in the ASTI Rules and Constitution.

All motions sent in by branches that meet these criteria are sent back to branches as a preliminary agenda. Branches are then asked to choose their eight preferred motions and to list any amendments they wish to make to the motions. Steering Committee then meets again in early February to consider the motions prioritised by members in branches and amendments suggested by branches. They consider the popularity of motions and discard any amendments that are out of order, or that significantly change the meaning of a motion. Then they choose between 15 and 20 motions for discussion at Convention that year. They usually defer to the views of the members and pick the most popular motions. However, if an issue has recently become relevant they may choose a motion relating to that issue for inclusion in the agenda. Steering Committee then draws up the final agenda for Convention and the motions are placed into the relevant areas of the agenda, e.g., a motion on an equality issue would be taken after the report from the Equality Committee.

What happens if two branches have the same idea for a motion?

If several branches send in motions that are very similar, for example if five different branches propose a motion asking for a new system of balloting members, Steering Committee will combine these into one composite motion and the composite motion will be listed in the preliminary agenda.

What happens if there is an urgent issue that needs to be discussed at Convention?

If something very important happens in the time between the submission of motions and Convention, or even during Convention, Standing Committee may submit an urgent motion on the issue for consideration for inclusion in the agenda by Steering Committee. This motion must be approved by Steering Committee before it can be included in the Convention agenda.

What do Steering Committee do during Convention?

Steering Committee meets a few times during Convention, to ensure that the agenda is being followed and to rearrange the agenda if necessary; for example, if there was not time to take a motion on Tuesday it may be moved to Wednesday's session.

OBITUARIES

Sligo ASTI Branch members were deeply saddened recently to learn of the deaths of two much-loved and respected colleagues – Brendan Duggan and Lionel Gallagher.

Brendan Duggan



Former Sligo ASTI and RSTA Branch Chairperson and Sooeey, Co. Sligo, native Brendan Duggan died on February 14 at the North West Hospice, Co. Sligo. Brendan was a former Deputy Principal and teacher at Summerhill College Sligo.

Brendan served the ASTI in his role as ASTI Standing Committee Regional Representative for Region 1 from 1994-2000, and as a member of the Central Executive Council (CEC).

At branch level, Brendan served Sligo Branch as Chairperson for many years. Brendan's requiem mass took place in St Patrick's Church, Strandhill, Co. Sligo, on February 17, and was followed afterwards by burial in St Patrick's Cemetery, Scarden, Strandhill Road, Co. Sligo. Predeceased by his son baby Brendan, parents and siblings. Sadly missed by his wife Carmel, daughters Lorna, Olivia and Ruth, sons Bryan and Alan, brother Rory, sister Nora, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, grandchildren, brothers-in-law, sister-in-law, nephews, nieces, relatives, neighbours, and many friends.

May Brendan rest in peace.

Lionel Gallagher



Carrick-on-Shannon native Lionel Gallagher passed away peacefully at St John's Community Hospital, Sligo, on January 16.

A long-serving Deputy Principal and teacher at Sligo Grammar School, he was a dedicated member of the ASTI.

Lionel was also an active member of the Sligo Branch of the RSTA, and regularly contributed a column to the *Retired Secondary Teachers' Journal*.

A founding member and Director of The Hawk's Well Theatre, he played a key role in its establishment and operations from its foundation in 1982. He was also involved with the Sligo Drama Circle and served on the board of the Arts Council for many years. Lionel's requiem mass took place in the Nazareth Chapel, Chapel Hill, Sligo, on January 16, and was followed afterwards by burial in Sligo Cemetery.

He is sadly missed by his wife Joan, daughters Fionnuala, Clodagh and Darina, sons Conor and Fergal, brother Brian, foster son Tommy, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, grandchildren, former colleagues, and his wide circle of friends.

May Lionel rest in peace.

Better together: joint action between retired teachers' groups

Members of the three retired teachers' organisations came together in Sligo in March for the latest in a series of well-being events.



Re-connecting: retired teacher groups at The Model in Sligo.

Local branches of RTAI (primary), and RSTA and RMAUI (post-primary) co-hosted and jointly funded a well-being night to a packed theatre of close to 200 people. The event was supported by the HSE's Connecting for Life and representatives from each of the educational sectors, including Kieran Christie, ASTI General Secretary, attended.

Retirement opens a 'golden chapter of opportunities' but the loss of the natural work collegiality with former colleagues can bring a contraction of social circles. This was compounded by the enforced isolation imposed on older people during Covid. Retired teachers' organisations found that when their meetings recommenced post Covid their numbers were significantly reduced. Being acutely aware of the adverse mental health effects of isolation they got together to organise what has since become a highly successful annual event with a focus on mental health and well-being. Retired teachers are welcomed to an evening of reflection, wellness, engagement with friends and colleagues – and fun!

The theme of the inaugural event in October 2022 was 'The Best is Yet to Come'. The keynote speaker was Shane Martin, whose unique mix of psychology, poetry, storytelling and humour has sold out theatre venues throughout the island. In March 2024 the audience was riveted by a *tour de force* performance by psychotherapist, actor and author, Gerry Farrell, entitled 'The Wisdom of Our Ages'. This was followed in March 2025 by an entertaining presentation of 'Making Sense of Humour' by Sligo broadcaster and playwright Tommy Marren. Each event concluded with music and refreshments. "The craic, the rekindled friendships, the re-connecting has been truly a source of happiness and spiritual nurture."

Making sense of humour

Tommy Marren is a well-known broadcaster and playwright who hails from the parish of Tourlestrane, Co. Sligo. He has worked in local radio for 34 years as a current affairs broadcaster in both Mayo and Sligo, and his plays have toured Ireland, the UK and America. In the event in March 2025, he

shared some of the highlights of his broadcasting career and presented a number of extracts from his comedy writings.

Through this very enjoyable night we accompanied him through his childhood days growing up in rural Ireland when life was less complicated, when 'health and safety' hadn't been invented, when words had simpler meanings, when we listened to the sponsored programmes on radio (two stations versus 35/36 now), and *The Riordans* was the sign of the end of the weekend. His presentation was interspersed with music and hilarious sketches from some of his shows. The laughter from the audience proved that he had definitely hit the right note.

After the show people mingled in the foyer and enjoyed some delicious light refreshments while they met up with past colleagues and old friends. A great night was had by all.

JOINT RSTA – RMAUI membership application forms

To facilitate retiring teachers in all second-level sectors, RSTA and RMAUI have collaborated with the Department to arrange for a joint RSTA/RMAUI membership application form to be included in the retirement packs that are distributed to post-primary teachers retiring in 2025. The application forms can be submitted immediately to the respective Associations. Annual subscriptions paid will apply to the 12 months beginning September 1, 2025. In the meantime, retiring members are welcome to participate in branch activities of the RSTA or RMAUI.



Members of both the RSTA and ASTI pictured at the event in March this year at Hawk's Well Theatre in Co. Sligo. From left: Frances Horan, Donal Gallagher (HSE), Imelda Harte, Tommy Marren (broadcaster and playwright), Carmel Heneghan, Pádraic O'Doherty, Ann McKiernan, and Jimmy Staunton.

For branch contact details, events and general information, see the respective websites: www.rsta.ie and www.rmatui.ie

BeLonG To LGBTQ+ Quality Mark initiative



BeLonG To – LGBTQ+ Youth Ireland has opened applications for this year's intake to the LGBTQ+ Quality Mark initiative to support schools and Youthreach centres to foster well-being and inclusion for LGBTQ+ students in schools across the country.

Through the LGBTQ+ Quality Mark initiative, BeLonG To provides whole staff training, one-to-one support, guides, toolkits and other resources to support your school.

The LGBTQ+ Quality Mark provides a comprehensive approach to promoting LGBTQ+ well-being and inclusion, which covers:

- ensuring that staff are equipped to support LGBTQ+ students,
- creating a supportive LGBTQ+ inclusive culture and environment,
- developing and implementing effective policies and plans, and
- implementing a curriculum that supports inclusion and respect.

For details of upcoming webinar info sessions for schools and Youthreach centres, or for more information, please see: <https://tinyurl.com/5cks2zdp> or get in contact with the BeLonG To team directly at luke@belongto.org.

To access the LGBTQ+ Quality Mark application form for 2025/2026 please see: <https://tinyurl.com/4tjdbveb>

The closing date for applications for the 2025-2026 academic year is Friday, May 30, 2025.

Supporting students with dyslexia: free webinars



Wyn McCormack, a retired member of the ASTI, is offering help and resources to mainstream classroom teachers and parents of dyslexic students in the form of self-help videos and webinars on YouTube.

These webinars are designed to support mainstream subject teachers at second level, equipping them with practical strategies to help students with dyslexia who may not qualify for special education support. These webinars offer advice to teachers, parents, and students, covering topics such as:

- how dyslexia affects students at second level,
- creating a dyslexia-friendly school,
- study skills, memory and organisation, and
- self-esteem and student support strategies.

Four webinars are specifically aimed at parents, offering guidance on how to support their child's learning and confidence. There is also a dedicated study skills session for Senior Cycle students, drawing on practical strategies that have proven effective over the years.

The full list of webinars is available at:
www.youtube.com/@wynmccormack

For more information, visit www.dyslexiacourses.ie or contact Wyn at wynmccormack@sky.com

Classified advert

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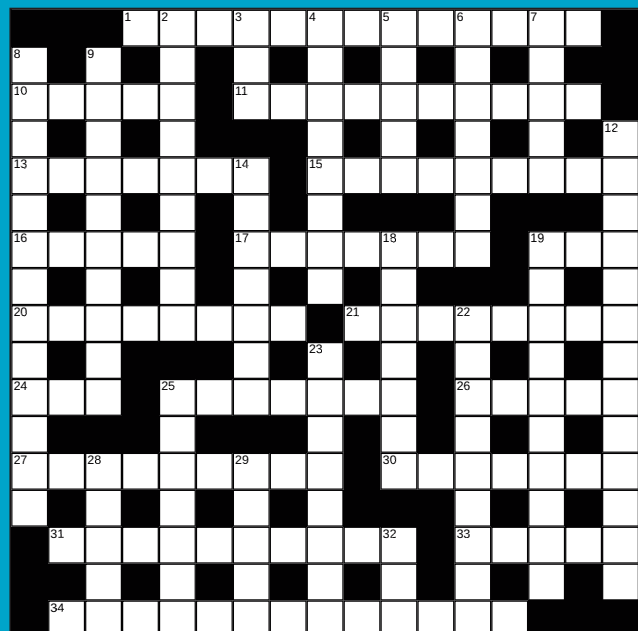
Website: <https://www.dcu.ie/courses/postgraduate/school-english/ma-childrens-and-young-adult-literature>. Blog: <https://dublincityuniversitychildrensandyaliterature.wordpress.com/>

Supporting Traveller students

A new information guide 'A Tome Booklet for Traveller Students Misilin to Post Primary School', was recently launched by the Kerry Campus of Munster Technological University (MTU) to support Traveller students and their families in navigating the transition from primary to post-primary education. The guide provides essential information on enrolment, educational rights, available supports, and pathways to education and employment. Katie Coffey, one of the Traveller Liaison Officers in MTU says: "We are proud to use our Cant language in the title of this booklet. 'Tome' means 'good' and 'misilin' means 'going'". The guide aims to provide Traveller students with the necessary information to successfully progress through the school system and beyond. It includes practical advice on school admissions, open days, student support services, and information about further and higher education and apprenticeships. The guide also introduces the Traveller Peer Educators service and the Star Pupil Traveller Access to Education Programme, through which students from the Traveller community can avail of mentoring and educational support. These programmes aim to encourage students to stay in school, support academic success, and promote access to further and higher education and employment. Students, parents, guardians, teachers, community members and agencies are encouraged to use this resource to ensure every Traveller student has the support and guidance they need to succeed.

For more information or to request a copy of the booklet, please contact: accesskerry@mtu.ie.

Win €250



ACROSS

1. Putnam remakes funfair (9,4)
10. "..... hath put a spirit of youth in everything" – Shakespeare (5)
11. Niall Bongo flying without wings (10)
13. Stray from archaeological site concerning Schutzstaffel (7)
15. Historically, armed ship owned by individuals and authorised for the capture of merchant shipping (9)
16. Could be A, picture, or freeze (5)
17. Type of leave sought under point 2 of motion 19 (7)
19. Kwik-E-Mart owner from The Simpsons (3)
20. Hawker, peddler, hustler (8)
21. "..... Innocent" – 1990 film starring Harrison Ford (8)
24. Forerunner to SOLAS (3)
25. One type of eligible treatment under the Sickness Benefit Fund (7)
26. Relationship between two groups or amounts (5)
27. Acetamide due to hunger or illness (9)
30. Measured Eastern Standard Time for least speedy (7)
31. Disappointing end after something exciting (10)
33. UFO lionised large book (5)
34. Celt magnified between two Poles (8,5)

DOWN

2. Smart eels make chocolate sweets (9)
3. Short underwater vessel (3)
4. Marker at roadside showing distance to various places (8)
5. Campbell, fashion model (5)
6. Writer, father, national teacher hanging around the neck (7)
7. Sweep in anger, weirdly (5)
8. Fondle feather in America (4,2,3,4)
9. Perfumes, scents, aromas (10)
12. 1969 conversation between Major Tom and (6,7)
14. Oldest, most dried out (7)
18. Opens out international organisation baps (7)
19. Honestly, actually, really (10)
22. One of the Mysteries of the Catholic rosary (9)
23. Relating to schools, especially colleges and universities (8)
25. Position of raindrop in ioniser (7)
28. Temporary cessation of breathing (5)
29. Sign seldom seen outside of houses these days (2,3)
32. Regnal number of Eugenio Maria Giuseppe Giovanni Pacelli (1,1,1)

Did you miss?

ASTI Convention 2025 report 16
Education five years post Covid 28

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Think Media, The Malthouse, 537 NCR, Dublin 1.

To arrive by: Friday, June 20, 2025.

Réiteach do chrosfhocal No. 2502

SIAR

1. Eaglach
5. Moing
8. Clagarnach
9. Cu
11. Loch
13. Amarach
14. Hallai
15. Scrios
18. Radharc
20. Imigh
22. Ab
23. Impireacht
26. Donal
27. Fellini

SÍOS

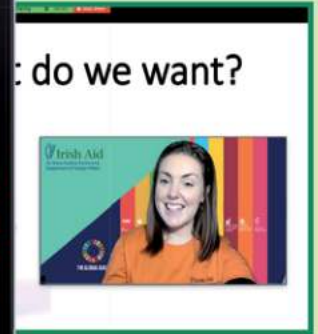
1. Excel
2. Goa
3. Ar an tra
4. Hanlai
5. Mecca
6. Il
7. Gauchos
10. Tahiti
12. Caladh
14. Harvard
16. Caireal
17. Scairf
19. An mol
21. Hatai
24. Chi
25. Zn

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Chrosfhocail 2502:
Pól Mac Donnchadha,
Abbey Community College,
Abbey Road, Ferrybank,
Waterford. Port Láirge



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