**President’s Address – TUI Annual Congress 2017**

**Tuesday 18th April 2017**

A chairde, is mór an onóir dom a bheith anseo inniu in éineacht libh mar Uachtarán ar Aontas Múinteoirí Éireann.

Colleagues – fellow members of the Teachers’ Union of Ireland - friends and distinguished guests, I am honoured as President of the TUI to address you at this Annual Congress which, as you are well aware, is taking place at a critical time for education in Ireland across all sectors.

**May 2016 agreement – prelude and since - Key issues**

The TUI, colleagues, is a campaigning union motivated by a commitment to our society and our profession. In the past year, we have continued the strategic approach developed over the previous years. The strategy, endorsed by TUI members in ballots, has entailed using mandates for industrial action on key issues to secure meaningful negotiations with the Department of Education and Skills. Through these intensive, ongoing negotiations, considerable progress was made in 2016, and since, on the key issues identified by members, in the form of significant gains across all the sectors that we represent.

In every case, we have advanced, as far as it could possibly be advanced, the particular issue at that moment. At all times, our approach was informed by the daily, practical realities of teaching and lecturing as outlined by you, our members, through the union’s various structures and fora, including Annual Congress.

Of course, as much as we would all like it to be otherwise, the reality always is, that not everything can be achieved immediately. Progress is incremental: we start at base camp, gain one foothold then the next, with the summit our final objective. Nevertheless, colleagues, the incremental progress we have made is real, tangible progress, providing increases in pay and improvements in conditions, making a difference to the lives and circumstances of members.

Instead of mandating this incremental approach, the Union could have chosen to be absolutist. We could have said that unless everything was achieved, nothing was achieved. We could have remained outside the tent. If we did, members would not now be in a position to benefit from the following gains and protections.

* Reinstatement of the value of the Honours Primary degree allowance *(By 1/1/18 the starting salary of a new entrant to teaching will have increased by 15% compared to 18 months previously)*
* A CID –after two years for teachers and lecturers. This is a major and vital advance. Remember, colleagues, that 50% of members under 35 were previously on temporary fixed-term contracts and/or less than full hours. TUI fought the war on casualisation and this time the war didn’t win.
* Our armoury includes the Ward recommendations for teachers and, now, the Cush recommendations for lecturers.
* Immediate permanency for Youthreach Co-ordinators and Resource Persons – a measure that, if anything, is better than Ward or Cush.
* A process to convert, to teachers, those members working in the BTEI who are qualified as teachers.
* An entitlement for every teacher involved in Junior Cycle to 40 minutes of professional time every week, to be accommodated by a reduction in weekly class contact. TUI strategy has resulted in the creation, so far, of 550 WTE jobs to support this professional time – that is an additional 40,250 hours annually.

You and I know that more WTE posts will be needed to reflect and support fully the professional time and the TUI is actively pursuing this issue. However, let’s be clear about one thing. What we have already secured, using the mandate members gave us, is substantial and tangible progress.

* Re-designation of half of the flex hours since 1st January of this year. This is a clear acknowledgement by the Department that one hour of lecturing involves much more than one hour of professional work – that a multiplier does apply. The second hour is in our sights.
* A review of workload at third level which will not only consider the workload of our members but also the consequential effect on the education experience of our students.

Without question, colleagues, the TUI continues to be a campaigning union using the mandate provided by ballots and, as necessary, engaging in industrial action, to secure resolutions of key issues. This is borne out by the fact that four national ballots late in 2015 were followed up by three national ballots early in 2016 in pursuance of our strategy across the sectors in which we represent members.

**Pay - equality, restoration and increase**

Delegates, the TUI is determined to continue to deploy this effective strategy which seeks to address the best interests of the profession, the public education system, and the diverse cohorts of learners that it serves.

In this context, our next focus will be on the pay talks that are due to commence in May. The rallying cry that “Europe needs a pay rise” is neither trite nor self-serving. It is a valid statement of a societal and economic necessity if we are to throw off the muddy traces of austerity, give hope to citizens and stimulate sustainable growth.

Therefore, the €1,000 increase in members’ pay earlier this month –accelerated by five months - was welcome. However, it is merely a step in the right direction. Perhaps its symbolism is as important as its monetary value – after too many years of cuts and austerity, it finally represents a changing of the tide, however modest.

**Pay Talks**

In the coming weeks, TUI will almost certainly be party to the next set of negotiations on a national pay agreement. As always, the union’s negotiators will seek the best possible outcome from this process for all TUI members. You, the members, will then decide, by ballot, on the acceptability or otherwise of what emerges from this process.

TUI will bring our principled priorities to these talks. Our key demand remains pay equity - Equal Pay for Equal Work.

TUI has led this campaign. We raised the issue before any other teacher union. We secured a mandate for industrial action before any other teacher union. We secured the backing of the ICTU for our principled position. We used our mandate to have the issue and our intentions referenced in last May’s agreement with the Department of Education and Skills. We subsequently, as a necessary step on the path to full pay parity, negotiated restoration of the value of the Honours Primary Degree Allowance for post 1st February 2012 entrants by its incorporation into a revised scale.

We have made progress towards pay parity but we have never pretended, nor do we now, that we have arrived at the end of the road. Achievement of our overall aim of pay parity for all based on the pre-2011 pay rates implies a logical sequence of further steps, the first of which is restoration of the H. Dip. allowance to bring those teachers employed on or after 5th December 2011 into line with the pay of those appointed between 1st January 2011 and that date.

Our message to government is clear and unambiguous: this issue is urgent, as a matter of justice. It is also urgent in pragmatic terms. As our economy recovers and the attraction of other careers increases, there is an acute and increasing shortage of teachers in some subject areas, particularly Irish, modern languages, Home Economics and Physics. There is also evidence of an exodus of teachers to England and Middle East.

Our Taoiseach often tells of meeting a man with a pint in each hand who praises the work his Government has done. I have met many young men and women - with a degree in each hand on the emigrant trail who would beg to differ!

In the context of restoration of the H.Dip. allowance, the TUI can, in combination with the other public sector unions then push to secure pay parity between those appointed before and since 2011.

Bear in mind, colleagues, that in addition to the 10% pay cut applied to the pay of all new entrants on or after 1st January 2011, those new entrants also had two points added to the bottom of scale. They had a lower starting salary and a longer scale to climb. This was exacerbated for teachers by the abolition of incremental recognition for the years of unpaid, pre-service training. This flurry of discriminatory hits drained morale, sapped enthusiasm and engendered division. It is our avowed intention to undo the damage done by government.

While teachers may have suffered most blows, other grades represented by the TUI also took a pummelling. Additional points were added to the scales of Assistant Lecturers, Resource Persons in Youthreach and several grades in adult and further education.

**Pension**

These longer scales also affect members’ pensions. The Single Public Service Pension Scheme introduced career averaging which has a disproportionately pronounced effect on those with a long salary scale. In January of this year, along with our colleagues in the INTO, we asked Trident Consulting to assess the value to new entrant teachers of the “Single” Scheme. Having examined the scheme using actuarial assumptions, Trident described its value as “modest”.

The term ‘Single pension scheme’ is a misnomer. It is not in fact a single scheme at all as it disadvantages any employee who has a longer pay scale. In our submission to the Public Service Pay Commission we asked that, with immediate eﬀect, those in the Single Pension Scheme no longer be required to pay the Pension Related Deduction. I reiterate that call today.

**Pay Restoration**

We must also recognise that others, apart from new entrants, have suffered very significant loss over recent years as a consequence of cuts and freezes. We have members who have significant outgoing and commitments, who have families whose needs must be attended to. These members have, to a large degree, suffered in silence. Their silence is about to give way to a loud demand and that demand will be expressed by TUI at the talks.

**FEMPI**

A further key target for the TUI in the context of pay talks will be to have the oppressive and grossly unfair FEMPI legislation fully rescinded. The stranglehold of this punitive legislation must be broken. This formed a significant element of our submission to the Public Service Pay Commission.

**Casualisation**

The General Secretary has outlined how Circular Letter 59/2016 at second level and CL41/2016 at third level will assist members in securing permanent, whole-time, work much faster than has been the norm in recent years.

Colleagues, casualisation of the profession has come with a casualty list – teachers and lecturers lost to the profession and, indeed, to the country; others living hand to mouth, and all compromised in terms of where they can afford to work and live. This leads inevitably to delayed key life choices. TUI has relentlessly focussed on this scandal and we have negotiated real, concrete measures to tackle casualisation.

At third level, the Cush Report and the implementation of Circular – 41/2016 -, took longer to issue than should have been the case but, we now have them and must ensure delivery of the entitlements they bestow on academic staff in Institutes of Technology. It is only due to the persistence of the TUI, that there is a Cush report.

**Management Structures - PoR**

As anybody with common sense will confirm, a successful and well-functioning school is based on a culture of collegiality and respect rather than on over-bearing managerialism. It speaks volumes for the professionalism of our members that, in our schools and colleges, we have retained that essential collegial spirit through the harsh year of austerity. That said, it is also obvious that schools and colleges need the capacity and resources to sustain that spirit and to provide the broad and rich educational service and experience that our students and our communities require.

Specifically, we urgently need and demand restoration of the in-school and in-college management structures that the moratorium has stripped away. Our members too need to know that there is a career structure with an appropriate range of professional opportunities.

As the General Secretary has said, in the May Agreement, we got reviews that hold out hope. Budget 2017 did begin the process of restoration – if too timidly. In September, for the first time in 8 years – a tranche of what we have known as Assistant Principal and Special Duties posts will be filled. More will be needed, without ado or delay.

The union’s campaign in this area has also seen the Department fund the creation of 170 second deputy principal positions for schools with a minimum of 700 students. Recruitment has already commenced in this regard.

**Further Education**

* **BTEI**

The TUI is proud of its diverse membership. It is a real strength of the union that our members serve all of our citizens, whatever their circumstances. For many adults – young and not so young - further and adult education is the pathway to a better future, to a sense of personal liberation and fulfilment and to greater economic independence and opportunity.

Far too frequently the state has only the vaguest acquaintance with the more marginalised of these citizens and, it seems, looks with undeserved suspicion at the dedicated educationalists who serve them. The TUI has, for many years, been striving to win recognition for our members in this neglected, but vital, sector of the public education system. It has also fought tenaciously to improve the terms and conditions of those members.

For example, we have brought cases to the WRC, seeking teachers’ terms and conditions, for members working in the Back to Initiative Initiative (BTEI). Some we have lost but, importantly, most we have won.

In order to deal generically with this issue, once and for all, we succeeded in having a provision included in the May Agreement and have now secured a conversion process.

Those qualified as teachers and registered with the Teaching Council will convert to and receive all the benefits of second level teachers both in terms and conditions and in pay. Those not qualified as teachers can convert to a new grade – provisionally termed Adult Educator - that has an incremental pay scale and terms and conditions attached. Over 1,000 staff working in the BTEI will benefit from the major improvements negotiated by the TUI.

* **Adult Education – Tutors / Adult Educators**

Many of our members in Adult and Community Education do not have written agreed contracts. They are engaged as ‘tutors’, a term used with the cynical purpose of paying our members a fixed hourly rate of pay - the same rate of pay, throughout their career. They have virtually no terms and conditions and are obstructed, in many instances, if they even seek permanency by way of a CID.

The TUI is currently engaged in negotiations to address and remedy this wrong.

Using the services of the WRC - as provided for under the LRA - the first phase of these talks, which has focussed on the award of CIDs to our members, is almost complete. The second phase involves securing appropriate terms and conditions for our members who deliver courses in various adult education programmes - including literacy, community education and training services.

Delegates, I can assure you that, we will not countenance any continuation of the shameful yellow-packing of the important work of our members in this area of the public education system.

* **Youthreach**

In relation to Youthreach – which is barely tolerated by the powers that be – we are making headway.

Within the last few weeks we have reached an agreement with the DES and ETBI that will make all resource persons and co-ordinators permanent with immediate effect. Irrespective of length of service, our members who have hours in their own right will have their present fixed term contracts replaced by permanent contracts. They will not have to wait the 4 years required under the Fixed Term Act; not even the two years stipulated in the Ward and Cush Reports.

Delegates, you have made and heard the call at successive Congresses for fair and equal treatment of staff in Youthreach Centres. We have heard this most recently at the Youthreach Consultative Conference in March of this year. The principled position of the TUI is crystal clear; what Youthreach Resource Persons and Co-ordinators do is teach.

The Education Act 1998 acknowledges that one size does not fit all students. It recognises that the formal school system does not provide the educational solutions that meet the needs of every person in the State. To meet different needs, the Act allows the Minister to designate *centres of education* which, though distinct from schools, have an equally important, complementary role to play in the education of our sons and daughters, neighbours, fellow-citizens. In 2004, all Youthreach Centres were designated as centres of education.

The proportion of those working as Resource Persons and Co-ordinators who are qualified teachers is significant, has grown and is growing.

Any fair comparison of the duties of Resource Persons with those of second-level teachers, will demonstrate that the main focus of all concerned is on delivering the curriculum and facilitating and supporting students’ learning. Their common core role is to prepare and deliver classes, provide feedback to students on their progress and manage classrooms – in other words, to teach.

It is also as strikingly obvious that the core role of a teacher is incorporated into the job description for Resource Persons. However, the role of Resource Persons extends beyond this to include a quantum of administrative hours, a spurious argument often advanced as evidence that the grades are fundamentally different. This, in our view, is mere nonsense.

In our submission to SOLAS and the DES on the forthcoming review of the Youthreach programme, we will forcefully make this point and demand a rare outbreak of rationality. Colleagues, the debate on Youthreach at this Congress will also input to that submission.

* **VTOS**

A review of the VTOS programme is also to commence later this year. We have already met with SOLAS in relation to this review and we will be consulting with our members in VTOS in order to prepare a written submission to the review group.

Let us be clear from the outset on one issue - we will demand that the allowances payable to learners in the VTOS Programme will not be seen as a core expense – the allowance is not relevant to the quality of education on offer, and neither is it relevant to the cost of running the programme. It is simply a different form of social welfare benefit which presents no extra cost to public finances – if the allowance was not paid from the DES, a similar value would be paid from the Department of Social Protection. As such, it should be viewed as entirely separate to the cost of running the VTOS programme.

**Technological Universities**

Over the past year no issue has been more keenly contested between the Government and the Department, on the one hand, and the TUI on the other than the Technological Universities Bill and its implications. Given the context, the Union is pleased to acknowledge advances that have been agreed by the DES.

Over recent weeks the Department has confirmed that it is willing to make amendments to the Bill that will provide more explicit protection for our members’ conditions of service. We have, as you know, already received assurances regarding superannuation.

The Department has also provided us with possible amendments in respect of another major concern for the union – regional provision. These amendments are designed to safeguard the regional provision of higher education and, in particular, to maintain the broad range of courses from level 6 to level 10 in **all** the regions.

We also particularly welcome the confirmation by the DES that it will amend the Bill so that there will be no requirement to merge, unless and until, Technological University status is guaranteed. This removes the mongrel from the hall. However, the large elephant, is still in the room. To date, the DES has held fast to the position that in order to form and become a technological university there will still be a requirement for two or more institutes to merge. That is a problem for TUI.

Remember colleagues, that the TUI has taken a cold dispassionate view of the concept of a technological university. The question for us is - will it work? – for students, for communities, for the regions and of course, for our members - the resident professional experts. Will it improve the quality of the public education system? The TUI’s objective analysis suggests that the Technological Universities project has a better chance of doing this if ungainly mergers are not required.

We are justly proud of what the IoTs have achieved, of how responsive they have been to local and national needs. They deliver a high quality third level education and student experience in places and to people who would otherwise have been neglected. They are engines of equity and we will not have what they do undermined. We will support change that enhances equity and quality, change that makes sense. We will unapologetically oppose change that does not.

A further complication, entirely avoidable, has been the miserable inadequacy of the consultation provided by some Institute managements. This inadequacy has been exacerbated by the absence of a well-defined robust national negotiation structure in regard to the technological universities project generally and the Bill, in particular.

For this very reason, our members balloted in order to secure a national negotiation forum – a single forum that would address all our issues. If the Department really wants to engage meaningfully with the TUI, the establishment of this forum, without preconditions, must be a priority. In this regard, the offer made in recent days of an intensive engagement over a short period of time in order to establish the terms of reference for a National forum represents progress.

If government is genuine and serious about facilitating and legislating for positive equity based change, let it demonstrate that seriousness of intent by investing properly in the IoT sector. Nothing can be done on a shoestring and nothing will be.

Everybody knows that funding has fallen to critically low levels whilst student numbers have risen sharply and staff numbers have been cut. This cannot continue without the necessary investment - the current structures are unsustainable and Technological Universities impossible.

**Junior Cycle**

Investment is the polygraph test of government intent. We insisted on it in relation to Junior Cycle and government took the test and passed. It invested. Professional hours were secured. They were funded, to the extent of 550 extra posts, in Budget 2017. That, colleagues is quite a lot but not, regrettably, quite enough as it does not fully cover the professional hours entitlement.

We have raised this issue with the Department and most importantly we have a robust mechanism through which to do so – the Implementation Committee. This, by the way, is instructive and the Department needs to integrate its learning to develop cross curricular perspective and hone its transferable skills. It needs to see that the approach it has taken in relation to Junior Cycle – investment, rugged consultation, joint problem solving – can usefully be applied to third level - to the Technological Universities conundrum and elsewhere.

Regarding Junior Cycle, the TUI will act honourably as is our custom. An agreement is an agreement. TUI members balloted on this. We will honour our commitments and fully expect that the department and other agencies will honour theirs.

Of course, there are issues. – that is no surprise. This would be the case in any significant reform of any element of the education system. There are thorns among the roses, but all parties are committed to working to resolve them. There is, for example, major concern about the direction being taken in respect of Gaeilge. There continue to be periodic missteps in the delivery of CPD, however these and other issues can be addressed and remedied if good faith engagement continues through the Implementation Committee.

**Future issues - Teaching Council - Droichead**

As we look forward to the year ahead, I can say with certainty that we will remain true to our principles – equity, social justice, empowerment of the profession. Informed by these principles, there will be a consistency in our approach both to resolving outstanding challenges and addressing new ones. We will be prepared to negotiate but ready to take action, if necessary. Where we need a mandate for action we will ask you, the members.

A case in point is Droichead. This induction programme for newly qualified teachers is conceptually a good idea. It will remain a good idea if adequate resources are made available for its implementation. We have clearly signalled to the Department that the TUI is more than willing to discuss and negotiate for such resources. We have also made it clear that in the absence of such resources – chief among them, time – implementation will not be possible. Within a matter of weeks, we will be balloting members for a mandate in this regard.

**Guidance Counselling**

Just as teachers require the support of a fully resourced induction programme, so too do learners of all ages require the support of a professional, system of guidance counselling. One of the more pernicious cuts of the dark days of austerity was the savage and senseless curtailment of guidance counselling. The fact of the matter is that learners suffered and the most marginalised suffered most.

Thankfully, pressure from many quarters – not least from the TUI – has persuaded government to begin the process of repairing the damage that was done. However, this process is taking too long and needs to be accelerated to completion as a matter of urgency. Once again, investment by government is necessary to restore ex-quota provision.

**NCSE Allocation Model**

Drawing on past and often painful experience, the TUI is taking a very keen interest in the new model for allocation of teaching resources for children with special educational needs that is to be implemented this September.

The TUI has raised concerns about excessive devolution of responsibility to schools which are simply not resourced to take on that extra responsibility - heretofore discharged by the local SENO, the field officer of the NCSE. We will not allow our schools to be further swamped or your time, colleagues, to be plundered.

It would also be useful – to say the least – were the Department to show cause by resuming payment of the SEN allowance for SEN-qualified teachers so that principal teachers could call on their professional expertise. Concrete measures by the Department are needed to ensure a high-quality service for students with Special Educational Needs; lip-service will not suffice.

**Privatisation**

In championing, high quality in the public education system, we must logically be resolute in opposingprivatisation and the lowering of standards and quality that it invariably involves. For a very pertinent example we need look no farther than the yawning gulf between the gold-plated standards in terms of Further, Adult and Community Education – tried, tested, proven - in the public (ETB) system as represented by your colleges and centres around the country and the unacceptably diminished standards of the opportunistic, for-profit providers lured into the sector by the ill-conceived bidding battles presided over by SOLAS. Quality is related to commitment to the public good and the privateers do not have that commitment. By contrast, we in TUI do.

**Conclusion**

The unavoidable reality for the TUI is that, by virtue of the broad scope of our membership, we fight on many fronts. We constantly have to adapt and frequently improvise. Each year brings its own quirks and nuances. Earlier this year, for example, our members in St. Angela’s brought to conclusion a lengthy campaign for stable contractual status but, as matters transpired, they will have a new employer - in the university sector. That of itself promises interesting times ahead.

Before concluding, I want in particular to welcome to this Congress those delegates whose first Congress this is. You are the most important people here. Your issues must in conscience be ours, as you represent the hope of the country, the future of the profession and the lifeblood of the union.

I also want to welcome representatives of researchers and other grades that are new to the TUI. Ours is a broad church and all the better and stronger for that.

Colleagues, over the three days of Annual Congress 2017, you – representing a broad swathe of the community of education professionals in this country – will consider and debate matters of real consequence for our schools, colleges, centres and institutes and the communities they serve.

You will bring to bear the views of those members who have invested their trust in you as their delegates. You will make decisions that will shape a path for the TUI for the next twelve months. You will, as always, have regard to the implications of those decisions – their effects on our members, our schools and our communities. In planning for the immediate future, you will take account of what we have learned from the past.

On behalf of the Union, I thank each and every one of you for the commitment that your presence here represents.

Friends, colleagues, guests, you are welcome to this Annual Congress of the TUI.

Joanne Irwin

**President, Teachers’ Union of Ireland**