**Presidential Address**

**on the opening day of Congress 2015**

 **Delivered by Gerry Quinn

Pleae check against delivery – embargo 1.55pm 7th April 2015**

Colleagues, we convene at our Annual Congress to assert our rights as teachers, lecturers, other educators and trade unionists. Inspired by our predecessors, we are determined to continue their work of protecting and enhancing our livelihoods, our profession and public education.

In this endeavour we face opponents who have been encouraged by the many cruel years of austerity. This opposition is committed to exploiting us and undermining the provision of a properly funded and resourced public education service for Irish society. The forces lined up against us are, on the one hand, disparate in terms of their location and organisation but, on the other hand, they are united, consciously or unconsciously, by neo-liberalism.

This dangerous and insidious ideology seeks to promote austerity and managerialism at all levels of the education system, bureaucratise our vocation and erode our conditions of service. Managerialism aims to stifle or silence, depending on what`s expedient, our collective voice as practitioners at both local and national levels. All of this is at variance with the objectives of the TUI which seeks to articulate the voice of our members and promote equality and inclusion generally but, in particular, among our own members.

Those technocrats who have signed up to managerialism think, like the doomed 18th century French aristocracy, that they have blue blood in their veins when in fact it is mercury which runs through their system. But for all of their hubris, they have very sophisticated methods, including propaganda, to try to achieve their goals. Always watch for their code. So, for example, they use the term educational reform when they`re really talking about educational cuts, they use the term restructuring when they`re actually talking about rationalisation and they use the term flexibility when they`re really referring to the casualisation of our profession. All of this is to help to provide a smokescreen for their socially and educationally corrosive objectives. But, colleagues, you are aware of this attempt at subterfuge and it is our disgust at these tactics, among others, which has helped to energise us.

While we should always be vigilant, we should take confidence from our collective intelligence, capacity and strategic thinking to strongly resist the threats. What drives our trade union activism are the values which underpin this proud union. Values of collegiality, fairness, social equity and a commitment to the well-being and education of our students. In that regard, colleagues, as part of the collective leadership of the TUI you are to be commended both for your attendance here and for your commitment to the TUI. Many of you hold positions in workplaces and branches or are otherwise active in any number of ways. Such work is vital to the organisation of our union as is the work of our Executive members and head office officials. All of us together ensure that the necessary organisation is in place to advance our aims and objectives.

This year TUI has, and continues to be, engaged in a number of industrial action initiatives. There has been two days of national strikes at second level accompanied by ongoing implementation of directives banning co-operation with Junior Cycle planning and training. These actions have been conducted in unison with our colleagues in the ASTI and have led to significant progress in this unfinished dispute. At third level, branches have conducted ballots for industrial action which have resulted in overwhelming support.

The St. Angela`s College Branch has already held a one day strike and another is scheduled for the 18th April in opposition to a number of threats and hostile actions. Foremost among these is the refusal of NUIG, their prospective employer, to talk to the TUI. This is an affront to democratic principles and we commend our colleagues in St. Angela`s for taking their strong stand. Our College Advisory Council has, as an act of solidarity, called for lunchtime protests throughout the Institutes of Technologies on the day of the second strike.

Previously, Cork Colleges` Branch and Dundalk IT Branch held ballots for industrial action which had successful outcomes with respect to local disputes which have national implications. Cork Colleges` Branch secured the removal of the flex hours for those who are engaged in the delivery of e-learning. This is a significant first step which should encourage others who are faced with the significant challenges of e-learning to conditions of employment and education. Similarly, Dundalk Branch won an important local battle against the use of the flex hours in the calculation of the Employment Control Framework for the purposes of reassignment. Their academic colleagues who would otherwise have been reassigned into non-academic posts have, as a consequence of this local action, been retained in the academic field. Both of these branches have taken an important lead regarding the issues which they addressed.

Cork Colleges`, Tralee IT and Waterford IT branches have secured strong mandates for industrial action in opposition to the forced mergers of the Institutes of Technology. These branches have well founded reasons for the stand that they are taking. Mergers in their regions present a significant threat to the regional missions of IoTs and programme provision as well as to the future location of employment for our members. The Heads of Bill indicates that ITT and ITB will be dissolved on enactment of the legislation. This separate provision differs greatly to the more protracted provisions for the rest of the sector and must be resisted. Branches have not been consulted with adequately. TUI is opposed to mergers as a prerequisite to securing Technological University status, local renegotiation of the current academic contract and any move towards a two-tier academic employment with lesser conditions for future entrants. TUI is involved in ongoing lobbying of members of the Oireachtas and senior civil servants with a view to shaping the third level restructuring legislation. Such legislation should not contain a requirement to merge before seeking Technological University status nor should it contain any reference to “transfer” of staff to any employer other than that formed by Technological University designation. The legislation should also protect existing pensions and conditions of service. Apprenticeship provision should be expressly provide for. With regard to governance there should be federal structures and respect for local identities of any merged IoTs.
We are not opposed to TUs but for a TU to operate properly, significant additional funding and resources are required including the recruitment of additional staff.

TUI is the primary union representing educators in Further Education and Training in Ireland. The Adult and FE sector has been a success story in Irish education over the last 30 years. Despite this and our repeated representations, including direct contact with the minister, calling for a TUI nominee on the board of SOLAS; there continues to be a dismissal of our democratic demand. The door remains closed with a sign saying no to nominees from TUI or any other representational organisations. We have been told that it is Government policy to move from representational boards to those comprising people who are described as having the requisite expertise. Such a policy results in boards being handpicked by Government and prevents proper participatory and industrial democracy; it is yet another example of managerialism.

TUI continues to defend Further Education as an important part of public education. We are conscious of the dangers of Government policy in this sector which threatens to undermine or remove educational provision for the allure of a rationalised training model. It is vital that education provision remains, that continuity of employment and stability of teaching are maintained and that proper conditions for educators and students are provided by a strong public education system.

TUI is opposed to valuable public funding being diverted into the marketing and profit accounts of private providers. Alternatively, the sector requires formal recognition and real reform along the lines of the Mc Iver report in 2003.

The TUI is consistently working to bring about grade reclassifaction for so-called “tutors” in areas where the work is comparable to mainstream teaching. We have secured agreement that the tutor grade is not appropriate in Youthreach and – depending on qualification- the conversion to teachers or resource persons of those who have heretofore been regarded as tutors. In VTOS and BTEI we must ensure that quailified teachers are treated as such.

As I mentioned earlier colleagues, the Junior Cycle Dispute remains unfinished business. We have made very considerable progress from the position in the Autumn of 2012 when the previous Minister unilaterally announced the complete dismantling of the Junior Certificate examination system and its replacement with a school-based assessment model. There was no intention or willingness on the Minister`s behalf to negotiate directly with the teacher unions about the consequences of his decision for us professionally or for our terms and conditions of employment. This state of affairs lasted for about a year and a half and can be seen as the lowest point in the highhanded austerity and managerialist approach to the teaching profession. It can be seen as such because there was no attempt by the then minister to engage in real negotiation. But, colleagues, we in TUI broke the logjam by formulating a clear policy of opposition to school-based assessment for the Junior Cycle; laying the foundations for an alliance with our teacher colleagues in the ASTI and subsequently holding a joint ballot for industrial action in March of 2014. The initial internal developments were low profile but subsequently proved to be major body blows for those who believed that we could be rolled over on the issue. We had laid the necessary ground work for a major industrial relations dispute.

Since the ballot, now a little over a year ago, we have incrementally restored the externally set, superintended and assessed Junior Cycle terminal examination. We have restored the terminal exam to the month of June and also relocated projects, of those subjects which currently have them as 50% or more of the assessment, into state certification. Teachers will not now be required to assess their own students for state certification purposes. All of these are huge steps forward.

How have we succeeded in achieving so much? There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, we got our policy right with regard to school-based assessment and communicated the assessment problem to a sympathetic and supportive public. Colleagues, I believe we can say with credibility that we won the assessment argument. In doing so we, the teachers, assumed the mantle of national leaders in an education debate and many people followed our lead. In this, and other respects, the alliance with the ASTI has been, and continues to be, of critical importance. I want to take this opportunity to thank the leaders of ASTI who work closely with us on this historic campaign. In particular, I want to acknowledge their President Philip Irwin and their General Secretary Pat King.

Teachers are speaking with one coherent voice and acting together, not just in terms of our conditions of service but also in the name of equitable, high quality education. We have secured credit for acting in the name of our students in a very public and determined way. But of course no one should be surprised as the potential for such a public demonstration of commitment was always there, given the huge daily, indeed lifelong, dedication to the education and welfare of our students which is lived by teachers.

Colleagues, there is another very important reason for the progress we have made to date and that is the use of both the threat and the delivery of industrial action. The tactical combination of the threat and the use of strike action with the ongoing implementation of our directives has been vital. Our joint TUI/ASTI directives against co-operation in new Junior Cycle planning or training remain in place because this dispute is not over. At this critical stage in this long dispute it is vital that the directives are kept.

The Dr Travers’ document contains flaws despite its inclusion of the progress that we have made. We cannot move forward, as is being demanded of us at this time, to further talks on resources, teacher time and implementation because that would involve bringing the flaws in the Travers’ document with us. We cannot have these flaws carved on a tablet of stone. These flaws include the inconsistency and inequity between subjects which have or do not have, as the case may be, a project for state certification. Including a project for all subjects in the externally assessed state certified examination system would give that system further fairness, strength and durability. As in the case of King Solomon, we are being asked to cut the baby in half but unlike those in the DES who are agreeing to such a division, we, the teachers, want the child preserved. We need to ensure against the Travers’ document being used as a Trojan horse.

Accepting the Dr Travers’ document in the current circumstances would also mean placing teachers of English into CPD in preparation for a second year oral communication project, the conception and format of which has met with trenchant criticism from their subject association. Teachers of English are on the front line and need to be given protection. Their subject representatives and unions need to be included in a serious engagement on curricular reform before it is fully implemented. We need a mechanism, if we are to move forward, which will ensure that our outstanding problems are resolved. We never said that we are against real reform but we will not tolerate poor education planning and preparation or measures which undermine equitable and fair treatment of students.

The directives remain in place and we will be picketing the centres where CPD is planned to take place. A national lunchtime protest will take place later this month. Both unions will issue a joint statement tomorrow.

Colleagues, the TUI workload surveys conducted at second and third level have revealed very worrying results about excessive workload, stress and time pressures on teachers and lecturers. for many of us the surveys confirm what we already knew or suspected. But there is no doubt that our members in second level, Adult and Further Education and Third Level have dangerously unsustainable workloads and professional pressures. Education cuts, casualisation, unequal pay, Bureaucratisation, very challenging student behaviour in schools, the so-called flex hours and problematic social changes are all part of a lethal cocktail.

Our profession is in crisis.

Colleagues, all of us in TUI are faced with serious challenges to our conditions of service and to education. In order to meet these challenges with the maximum level of resistance possible we need to work together but also with others of likeminded or common concern. Those who wish to exploit us hope that we will become divided. They also hope that we will remain apart from those outside of TUI who share our aims. At every level possible we must work with others no matter how difficult it may at times become. This means continuing to co-ordinate our Junior Cycle campaign with ASTI and preparing to work in a similar fashion with the IFUT. Organisational structures will need to be developed to make such activity effective and procedurally efficient. In doing so we would be laying the foundations for future success as trade unionists and educational leaders. There are other levels where we must also push for concerted action. This includes the ICTU where there is a heavy onus of responsibility to show leadership and ensure that imminent talks on pay must be about pay restoration, particularly for the most adversely affected by the pay cuts. Such pay restoration must not be allowed to become entangled with productivity or the unfair additional workload which has a shelf life under Croke Park 1 and the HRA.

Colleagues, TUI is a trade union on the move. Let’s keep it that way. Let’s fight for equal pay for equal work. Let’s fight the education cuts. Let’s fight against forced mergers. Let’s fight for the education ethos of FET. Let’s fight for our livelihoods, our profession and public education.