

Address by Michael Gillespie, TUI General Secretary

TUI Annual Congress 2021

Tuesday, 19th April 2022



Introduction

A chairde, delegates, guests and members of the press, I would like to welcome you all to Wexford for the TUI Annual Congress 2022 - at long last a Congress that is in person. There were doubts and alternative plans had been drafted – just in case -, but we are here now for a regular Congress, after three long years.

Since we last met in-person we have lost colleagues, TUI members and loved ones. On behalf of the TUI, I offer sincere sympathies to their families, friends, and colleagues as we honor their memory at Congress 2022.

COVID-19

We must also remember those members who are still suffering from COVID-19 and its various after-effects. The pandemic, let us not forget, is still with us.

In our schools, colleges and centres, TUI members, by action and accomplishment and by keeping the needs of their students to the forefront, maintained and delivered a quality education service. All TUI members should be rightly proud of what was achieved, given the limited resources available and where we started from in March 2020.

In January 2021, driven by a determination to protect the health and welfare of our members, their students, and their communities, we won the moral argument and forced government to do a U turn on its plan to re-opening schools prematurely and we negotiated a phased and safer reopening that had regard to the phasing of the vaccination programme. TUI made sure that our most vulnerable members were protected by demanding – successfully - that they not return to face-to-face teaching. Because of our work and representations, high risk teachers, teachers over 60 and pregnant teachers were better protected from COVID

Challenges

However, COVID-19 is not the only issue that we are facing. The challenges are many and varied - the pay discrimination suffered by some of our members, reform agendas in all our sectors, a chronic lack of the necessary funding, threats to conditions of service are still with us. So too are pointless bureaucracy, excessive workload, and the erosion of discretionary and personal time. We, together in TUI, will take on these challenges and will succeed in making improvements for our members, just as Patricia Hurley, whom we remember today, did for the members in Wexford that she, as TUI Vice-President, represented in 1972.

Ukraine

Colleagues, what occurred on the 24th of February 2022 is having and will have a major impact on all our lives. On that day, ordinary people like us had their lives changed in unimaginable ways. The appalling devastation visited on the people of Ukraine is both brutal and shocking. Millions have been forced from their homes and homeland. Their plight must be the concern of our nation and our profession. Ireland is playing its part by offering a safe sanctuary to the people of Ukraine. Irish educators, including TUI members stand ready to do all

we can to provide an appropriate education service to all who need it who arrive on our shores.

As we witness the atrocities and the devastation in Ukraine, we know that democracy cannot and should not be taken for granted. We need our united voice to be heard. We must be true to our values. Autocrats and demagogues – in Russia, or anywhere else for that matter - must not succeed

I ask you now to stand for a minute in solidarity with the people of Ukraine - in the hope that peace will soon be established and that the Ukrainian people can rebuild their country and their lives.

As we welcome students from Ukraine, strategic planning is needed so that we have the capacity in September to deal with the numbers who almost certainly will be arriving over the next couple of months. We know that, already, thousands have arrived who will be looking to attend school in the last term. We also know that even larger numbers will be with us by September. An effective plan and contingency arrangements need to be available before schools close at the beginning of June. Sufficient, targeted investment must be made available to assist Ukrainian students when they arrive in our schools.

This must be additional to the resourcing required to assist those students who are struggling and will continue to struggle due to the lost opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Stakeholder Advisory group that worked to good effect during the pandemic has been re-established to deal with the issues related to the Ukrainian situation. Planning and preparation are being dealt with at regular meetings of the Advisory Group and TUI representative will, as always, be guided by the TUI's core values and will represent members so that a quality public service education can be maintained for all learners, taking fully into account the diversity of their needs.

Assessment

While matters of global importance – of life and death - must take precedence, the Union - on your behalf and with your active input has been vigilant in safeguarding the quality and high standards of our public education system.

Junior Cycle

We are currently awaiting a report on junior cycle reform and its implementation. We all know its shortcomings, subject specifications that fall

short of achieving the required learning outcomes, CPD that did not deliver the quality of training and support that teachers deserve and need, other unintended consequences of the way the junior cycle reform has been rolled out. To be credible, the report must highlight the shortcomings and faults; practitioners must be listened to. Junior cycle must adapt and change to make up for any deficits identified. This should be done on a subject-by-subject basis, if necessary. The junior cycle must be fit for purpose, as the very foundation of senior cycle and of any worthwhile reform.

Senior Cycle Reform

Senior cycle reform will be addressed at this conference. The TUI welcomes many elements of the recent announcement by the Minister in this regard - the removal of ring fencing of LCA and LCVP, access to transition year for all students who wish to avail of it, with no artificial limits being applied in schools.

However, the changes being proposed require additional resources if they are to be successfully delivered and the Minister was very short on detail in this respect. TUI has long favoured second and additional components of assessment where they are appropriate, meaningful and assess something that cannot be assessed in a written exam.

TUI fully supports the use of orals, aurals, projects, day practicals and portfolios as additional components of assessment. TUI wants to keep the second and additional assessment components in the 27 (of the 41) subjects at senior cycle that already have them and build on this where appropriate. The new second components of assessment for the remaining 14 subjects must, like the 27 already in existence, be organised and externally assessed by the SEC for reliability validity and integrity.

In any reform process, we have a duty to maintain public trust and the international reputation for excellence that the leaving cert enjoys.

Let us be clear as we in TUI have always been. We are opposed to the Minister's suggestion that second components of assessment should be marked by the students' own teachers at school level, with the role of the State Examinations Commission reduced to moderation. TUI is opposed to the dilution of objectivity and the compromised standards that this would involve.

In the post primary ecosystem, all the elements are inter-dependent. Foolishly remove or damage any one element and it can have major implications for the ecosystem. The fact that 94% of students participate all the way to and through

senior cycle could be damaged forever by ill-advised fad and interference. Plant the right wildflowers and you attract the bees but lose the bees and you lose all the flowers.

Equity and Fairness

It's obvious that changes require resourcing, time being the biggest resource needed in our schools. To generate that time, schools need their teacher allocation enhanced – to allow, for example LCA students the flexibility to do maths from the traditional leaving cert programme. Increased allocation and flexibility will be needed so that all students can avail of transition year. Delaying the issue of allocations by the Department – they issued over the Easter holidays - is not the way to inspire confidence.

A simple example illustrates the lack of balance and fairness in the current allocation model. Schools with over 900 pupils have three deputy principals. This would suggest a ratio of one DP for every 300 pupils. However, a school with 300 pupils gets only half a deputy principal in the allocation that issued over the Easter holidays.

Workload

Excessive workload, much of it bureaucratic in nature, is eroding the morale of teachers and is driving fine teachers from the profession. The changes that are proposed at Senior Cycle cannot be allowed in any form to increase this already severe workload of teachers, deputy principals, principals, and any post holders.

What is urgently needed is a very significant increase in the schedule of posts of responsibility. Without this, schools simply cannot meet the pastoral, administrative and curriculum needs in our schools, not to mention the critical emergent needs - to deal with the fallout from the pandemic, to provide appropriately and generously for our new Ukrainian students. Add to all of this, the demographic increase in numbers entering our schools which begets its own demands and the proposed reforms at Senior Cycle.

Without additional posts, schools will not be able to cope with the multitude of demands; current post holders including principals and deputy principals, already swamped by administrative and bureaucratic overload, will not be able to meet the identified needs in this changing and rapidly **evolving** post primary system.

Schools cannot be expected - and should not be asked - to continue indefinitely to work on an emergency footing.

No Precedent

The TUI's view in this regard was made clear we demanded and secured for 2022, the running of the Leaving cert with modified examinations and second components of assessment and the running of junior certificate. The TUI stated very clearly that there was no possibility of a hybrid model. In 2020 and 2021, teachers had shown commitment, adaptability, and resilience in applying emergency arrangements. We carried out certain functions in relation to Calculated/Accredited Grades on a strictly "no precedent" basis.

This no precedent approach was agreed by government and by the department. However again this year we saw a chorus line calling for what were temporary arrangements to be made permanent. We correctly and resolutely opposed that opportunistic call.

It is therefore deeply disappointing that the Minister, in her recent announcement and without any consultation with the Unions has said that the orals and music practicals will stay placed over the Easter break. It is notable

that all has not gone to plan for the Minister. Easter was late and teachers who were exhausted could not commit to acting as examiners. Tired students were required to do three or even four orals and practical exams over a very concentrated period. The TUI is calling on the Minister to review and revise her proposal regarding the scheduling of the orals and practicals.

Inflation

Colleagues, we now face inflation, and it is inflation that arises from supply issues, which is harder to deal with than demand-led inflation. The practical manifestations of this inflation - increases in the cost of energy, fuel and even food, which we have not seen for almost two decades, are of grave concern to our members and to wider society.

Pay

Inevitably, given inflationary pressures, significant pay increases are reasonably being sought by workers, including teachers, lecturers, and other educators. Recently, the Public Services Committee of ICTU requested a review of Building Momentum due to the dramatic level of inflation being experienced. Energy, fuel, and food costs have all increased very steeply over the last several months. For example, teachers who moved outside the M50 in search of affordable

homes or affordable rents now find the cost of fuel prohibitive in making the necessary daily commute to work. It is costing them a lot to go to work. We await a meaningful response from Government on the issue.

Building Momentum – Pay Discrimination

For the TUI, the outstanding issue under Building Momentum – the sectoral bargaining negotiations – represents an opportunity to heal a deep wound inflicted by government – the scandal of pay discrimination.

It's 13 years since government began to apply a series of cuts to teachers' pay and 11 years since the shameful and discriminatory cuts to the pay of new entrants to the profession were imposed.

Although we have achieved a great deal in restoring much of the difference, we still have large numbers of members who earn less than their colleagues for doing the same work. TUI, under sectoral bargaining, has costed and agreed to forgo the 1% pay increase for teachers due on the 1st of February 2022 so that the equivalent monetary value can be used finally to eliminate pay discrimination against new entrant teachers. This money will allow payment of

the Professional Master of Education allowance - currently valued at €1,314 - to those who have commenced teaching since February 2012.

I am delighted to report to you, delegates, that a long-held aim of TUI has now been achieved. We have reached agreement with the Government in the Sectoral bargaining negotiations for the teacher grade that the H. Dip. /PME allowance will be paid to all post February 2012 entrants, back dated to the 1st of February 2022.

This is a major victory for you delegates. Your unfailing, principled solidarity with new entrant colleagues under-pinned and energised the TUI's campaign on this key issue.

We are still seeking a return to the pre 2011 system of commencing new fully qualified and registered post primary teachers on the Third Point of the scale in recognition of their (now longer) unpaid training periods.

The money to end this scandal, to right this wrong is available. It's our money and it's in the exchequer coffers. In effect, it is being donated by teachers themselves to solve this long-standing issue. It shouldn't have to be, but it is.

You have shown integrity and a sense of justice where government has failed to do so. It is bizarre and perverse that the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is dragging its feet and is delaying the final resolution of this issue. Is telling teachers that we cannot use what is definitively, under Building Momentum, our money in an ethical manner of our choosing. This crass opposition by DPER to resolution of the scourge of pay discrimination must stop now, not least because pay discrimination remains a central cause of the teacher recruitment and retention crisis in second level schools.

Building Momentum – Further Education

In Further Education, the sectoral bargaining circular has already issued, giving a 1% pay increase to all grades as, unfortunately, there was not enough money available given the numbers in the grades to make a meaningful difference for new entrants. All relevant grades have now received the 1% pay increase.

Building Momentum – Third Level

At third level, although we sought information on staffing number and costs, by grade, as early as March 2021. Unbelievably, we are still awaiting accurate and dependable costings so that the final decisions can be made about the use of the 1% fund for our third level members.

Strange as it may seem and surely is, the powers that be in the colleges and the relevant Departments are claiming not to know how many staff they have employed and what they are being paid.

Haddington Road Hours

In one other respect the negotiations under the terms of Building Momentum have been very frustrating. The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Michael McGrath, announced last Thursday approval of the report from the Independent Hours Body in relation to the Haddington Road Agreement.

TUI welcomes the fact that our colleagues in Youthreach and in other relevant grades will be restored to their pre 2013 working hours with effect from the 1st of July 2022. That involves a return to 35 hours a week from 37 hours per week.

However, we are, to say the least, very disappointed that the Body did not see any basis to adjust the additionality introduced under the Haddington Road Agreement for post primary teachers and our third level academic staff members.

Our third level members had to relinquish long established closure days which resulted in additional working days and 78 hours per year on top of the flex hours of two hours per week required under the Croke Park Agreement. Evening work that was weighted by 1.5 was reduced to a weighting of 1.25. The independent body states that this should be dealt with under a review of the academic contract. TUI demands that the review must be based on the pre 2013 contract, not the inferior austerity-based contract.

On top of the 33 hours imposed on post-primary teachers by the Croke Park Agreement, the 2013 Haddington Road Agreement made further impositions. The Supervision and Substitution allowance of €1,769 was abolished. The annual quantum of hours was increased from 37 to 43 hours. There was also a new rostering system introduced increasing the maximum delivery from 1.5 hours per week to 3 hours per week. The rostering also introduced the nomination of five class periods for greater flexibility and availability. The Lansdowne Road Agreement restored a payment of €1,592 (the new entrant cut rate) to all teachers who undertake S&S. This was not an allowance but a pensionable increase to every point on scale so that S&S is now built into our contracts.

The Independent Hours Body stated that, as teachers are being paid a restored allowance, it would not look at the additionality imposed under the Haddington Road Agreement. TUI has two major issues with this - the payment should be restored to the pre 2013 value, and the hours of availability should be restored to the pre 2013 model. Restoration is needed so that we have equality from next July with all other public servants who have been restored to their 2013 working hours and status.

Unresolved issues – a running sore

In the Further and Adult education sector, it is simply unacceptable – an indictment of the management authorities and the Department - that many members of our Union still do not have agreed terms and conditions and an incremental salary scale. Tutors are a case in point. We have an agreement – referred to as the Chairman’s note – that tutors will be provided with a long-overdue career structure. Implementation of this agreement on fair terms has been serially frustrated by the departments. This is intolerable. The TUI has, at recent meetings, been assured that this matter will be addressed, and TUI will relentlessly pursue this abject failure of management to address this issue.

Technological Universities

At third level, the project to establish 5 new Technological Universities is now close to completion after many years of work, effort, and contention. The TUI has a very ambitious vision for the creation of a vibrant TU sector, and we will continue to work with those who share our determination to develop and build on the strengths, rich traditions, and achievements of the technological sector of Higher Education. To achieve this ambition, there must be unstinting practical commitment by the government, DFHERIS and managements. The Technological University sector must be properly funded resourced and supported.

We note with growing concern that DKIT and IADT have not yet been included in this evolution of a TU sector. This is deeply disappointing to our members in the affected branches and to the membership nationally. We will pursue this matter with vigor until the two institutions are appropriately brought into and accommodated within the TU structure.

Funding

Additional resourcing far beyond what is currently available is essential if our policymakers generally want to ensure that every learner is provided with a level

playing field and the clear opportunity to achieve to the maximum of potential. The latest OECD Education at a Glance report in 2021 shows that out of 36 countries for which figures are provided none spends a lower proportion of national wealth on education than Ireland. The pandemic has brought the effects of this sustained underinvestment into very sharp focus.

As always, the Annual Report pays attention to the nuts and bolts of the Union's operation.

TUI Head Office

We had changes in Head Office in 2021 - both in terms of the appointment of new staff and the departure of long-term colleagues. Aidan Kenny, Assistant General Secretary took a career break and we wish him well in his new role. The resulting vacancy for an Assistant General Secretary on a fixed term specific purpose contract was advertised publicly in accordance with rule 68. Ann Mulcahy was the successful candidate, and her position is for ratification at Annual Congress 2022.

Elizabeth and Seamus Whoriskey who have maintained the gardens in Head Office for a long number of years and who are former TUI Members announced their intention to retire. We wish them well.

Mick O'Rourke who, as a service provider, created the Union's membership database and maintained it for over 30 years also informed us of his intention to retire. He has undertaken to maintain the current service until the TUI has commissioned and implemented a new system. I would like to thank Mick for his service to the TUI over many years.

Membership Relationship-Management system

The pandemic has shown shortcomings in our IT provision, in our phone system and in the hardware that we use in the TUI currently. The servers we use are now coming near to end of life. This has led to a full review of our needs and the formation of a modernisation plan. The review was carried out after looking at the situation in its entirety and taking professional advice.

A decision to create a whole new system seemed the best solution given the circumstances. Piece-meal upgrades and replacements would delay, rather than provide, a solution. The purchase of a system that is integrated and linked seems

the prudent option. After much consultation and consideration, it was decided that TUI will build a new Membership Relationship Management (MRM) system - an integrated membership relationship management system to be built on a framework like many CRM systems. The MRM system will encompass a new membership database system (moving all our data into the cloud), a new integrated phone system and the hardware necessary to support this move.

The TUI engaged Hartsquare - a consultant with extensive experience in this area - to advise on this change and help us to select a partner capable of achieving our aims and objective. Hartsquare - after an intensive analysis of how TUI works - put together a very detailed tender document to help select a partner to create a TUI MRM system.

The TUI looks forward to this significant change and the benefits it will bring for our membership. We hope to have the system fully operational by September 2023. This will require a large investment of both time and money. The staff is supportive of this initiative and is prepared to put in the significant effort and engage with the change management required to deliver this project with a partner.

Executive Committee

Again, this year your Executive Committee responded to the many challenges and issues that arose and made decisions in good faith, designed to serve the best interests of members. The use of virtual meetings – because of the pandemic - has increased the level of interaction and participation by members and has also increased the availability to Branches of Area Representatives and Officials. This has meant a very serious investment of their time which ultimately benefited the members and the long-term evolution of the union. I thank them for their effort and commitment to the membership and the union.

TUI Head Office Staff

The past year – 2021 - was an extraordinary year for the Union. TUI had learnt a lot in 2020 and had to implement (rapidly and with little or no advance warning) new work models and roles. The union further adapted in 2021 and built on this experience. We are continuously evolving to meet the new challenges and the situations that they create.

The new MRM system, when it comes to fruition, will further change the way we communicate and how the union operates in the future. The level of work this year placed a huge demand on all TUI staff.

These heavy demands and changes were met efficiently and effectively and for that I sincerely thank all the TUI staff. TUI staff will continue to meet the needs of TUI members with efficiency and a high standard of service even while we undergo the planned changes in the year ahead.

RMA, PDA and AEOA

I also wish to commend the Retired Members' Association for the excellent service it provides and for the support it gives to those of our retired colleagues who have encountered difficulty. The RMA is a valuable part of the TUI family.

So too are the other two associations that are constituent parts of the TUI. The Principals' and Deputy Principals Association (PDA) continues to ensure that the perspective of the TUI is rounded and broad-based, cognisant of the wide range of difficulties facing all our members at post-primary. The insights of the PDA have been especially useful in the context of the pandemic and the associated assessment challenges. The same applies to the Adult Education Officers' Association and the expertise it brings to bear in relation to the Further and Adult education sector.

Branch Officers and activists

It is you, delegates, the Branch Officers, and TUI activists, who are the irreplaceable core of the TUI. It is to you our members first turn for advice and support. You are the embodiment of the TUI - its eyes, ears and voice at institution and branch level.

I want to thank you, one and all, for your truly exceptional commitment to the Union and its members in these truly exceptional times.

Conclusion

After the INTO, the TUI is the second largest Irish teacher union with over 20,000 teachers, lecturers, and other educators across second level, third level and further and adult education. This breadth of expertise and experience gives us a unique understanding of the needs and dynamics of the Irish public health education system, an understanding that we will share with Ministers Foley and Harris both of whom will address our Congress this year.

Finally, colleagues, I am pleased to report that – as you will see from the annual accounts - the finances of the TUI are in good order and that membership continues to increase.

Colleagues, the direction for the TUI, the analysis of risk and opportunity, the identification or confirmation of policy and campaign priorities will be set by you, the delegates, at this Congress. The issues are important – never more so. I know that by your deliberations and your coherent, strategic decisions, you will show the Union also to be in good operational order and fit and able to meet with confidence and conviction whatever challenges come our way.

It is my privilege to present to Annual Congress 2022, this Annual Report

Michael Gillespie General Secretary

19th April 2022