

# **Address by Michael Gillespie, TUI General Secretary**

**TUI Annual Congress 2021**

**Tuesday, 6<sup>th</sup> April 2021**



## **Introduction**

Delegates, colleagues, and invited guests, you are most welcome to TUI's Annual Congress 2021. Once again, we meet in a virtual setting owing to COVID-19. However, it is great to see Congress return to its traditional post Easter slot this year.

All going well, the TUI will return to a corporeal Congress in 2022 with the in-person debate and the social interactions that we all miss and now appreciate more than ever.

As is customary, Congress is being observed and reported upon by the media, who attend today as our invited guests. This ensures that the decisions you make over the next two days get the publicity they deserve.

## **Pandemic**

The Annual Report for 2020 was written and is being presented to you at a time like no other; the pandemic has brought about a national and world crisis. The circumstances have led in turn to numerous crises and challenges in the Education Sectors and, in turn, for TUI members.

The increased workload, the systemic change, adoption of new emergency work practices and changes in our physical workplaces all happened almost overnight. However, TUI members showed by action and accomplishment that they were capable of adapting, learning new skills and responding to the needs of our students and learners during the pandemic as those needs arose.

For that, you should all be complimented.

## **School Closures**

On the 12th of March 2020, the announcement of the closure of schools, pre-schools, further and higher education settings for a period until 29th of March 2020 was made to support efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19. This closure extended to the end of the 2019-2020 academic year. The ravages of austerity and the lack of consistent investment in education as a public good and public service at all levels were exposed.

TUI members are conscious of the impact that the closure of on-site educational provision has on students, learners, their families, and our wider communities. The importance of face-to-face teaching and learning and the importance of the social interactions in education have been highlighted by their removal and loss during the pandemic.

## **Inequality magnified**

The pandemic has taught us many lessons, one being that inequality is endemic in our society. The pandemic did not create inequality, but it did magnify it. This did not surprise our members - we have seen it and worked

against it for years. Maybe we might be listened to now. To tackle educational inequality effectively and decisively, society must invest in education as a public service and a key aspect for our future wellbeing.

### **Class Size**

A clear lesson of the pandemic is the importance of class size especially for those on the margins and those with additional educational needs. The quality of public education depends to a significant degree on having classes of a manageable size for teachers and for their students. Classes in Irish schools are currently too large, and this materially affects the service that our members can provide to their students. If we are to engage the disengaged, include the formerly excluded and if we are to give every student a fair chance, smaller classes are an imperative.

### **School Design**

There must also be a fundamental reappraisal and a new conceptualisation of what a school should look like. School design will now have to take account of what we have learned.

We always knew that ventilation and air quality were important. We now know just how important. Students learn better and teachers teach better when air quality in the teaching space is of a good standard. It has never been a requirement in our classes, but it must be now. This is a structural problem which can and must be addressed.

### **Air Quality Meters – a requirement**

To start with, we can make the installation of air quality meters or CO2 meters in every classroom and every teaching space a requirement.

### **Education – A ‘New’ Deal**

Today on your behalf and on behalf of the students we serve I am calling for a **“NEW DEAL”** for Education and the sustained targeted investment that is required to make the changes that a new deal would deliver.

Something else we learned from the pandemic is that broadband must be provided to every household. Being connected has its challenges but not being connected is a new species of disadvantage, an impediment to progress at an

individual, family and community level. Broadband must be a national asset rather than a private asset to be monetised. Dependency by the state on the private sector has authored failure in housing, health care, and now in broadband. A fundamental reappraisal of this approach is overdue.

### **Calculated Grades**

The Leaving Certificate and Junior Cycle Examinations were cancelled in 2020. TUI members agreed to alternative methodologies of assessment, due to the emergency. Teachers agreed to cooperate with the calculated grades process for the Leaving Cert and a school-based assessment model for junior cycle students. Alternative assessments were developed across the further and higher education sectors.

### **Misplaced Optimism**

The Academic year ended with what we now know to have been misplaced optimism. We all looked forward to a situation where things might improve over the summer break and we all could return to normal or near normal in September 2020.

## **Breach of Trust**

Delegates, you all know the sense of betrayal felt by teachers when the Minister and her Department - through the media - broke faith with TUI and abandoned the guarantee it had given not to release rank orders other than where a data access request had been received. This was a breach of trust as this was not what teachers had supported in the original agreement that TUI members had cooperated with fully. Teachers performed in an exemplary manner as could be seen by the lack of errors on the teacher side of the process when rechecks and other information on the process were released.

## **Accredited Grades**

Notwithstanding this feeling of betrayal and still motivated by the national interest and our commitment to our students, TUI members have agreed to engage in a process of providing Accredited Grades for the 2021 Leaving Certificate students.

This involves very significant additional workload as teachers seek to guide students through two simultaneous processes - an accredited grades process

and an actual Leaving Certificate Examination with second components of assessment. TUI, as you know, insisted on protecting the additional components of assessment.

### **No Precedent**

An absolute commitment that Leaving Certificate and Junior Certificate Examinations will run in 2022 and a clear acknowledgement that this year's examination arrangements are being carried out by teachers on a no precedent basis is expected from Minister Foley

### **Reopening**

The reopening of schools, colleges, centres, IoTs and Technological Universities to students created problems and issues that needed to be resolved in the latter end of the Summer and early Autumn. The opening of schools in September 2020 involved the stripping back of each classroom to the bare walls to make space for the appropriate social distancing, the introduction of the requirement for masks and the other mitigation measures put in place over August 2020. To achieve this required the full cooperation and effort of the



school community, including Principals, Deputy Principals, post holders, teachers, and ancillary staff, all working together so that schools could reopen safely and in a sustainable manner.

Similarly, arrangements for partial reopening and the continuation of emergency remote learning were agreed for the Further and Higher education sectors - to apply in September. Difficulties were experienced by TUI members.

It was teachers - not government, not the Department, not the HSE - that opened schools and kept schools open. When schools could not open, teachers kept the show on the road, kept students engaged, adapted to new and strange circumstances, to unfamiliar working environments, to emergency remote teaching, to supporting students and learning online.

### **Emergency measures only**

Teachers showed commitment, adaptability, and resilience. They did so on the basis that these emergency arrangements would not set a precedent. This “no precedent” approach was agreed by Government and by the Department. We

note the chorus of consultants now calling for the temporary arrangements to be made permanent.

Let me tell you; they will be waiting. We are not here to allow opportunistic dreams to come to fruition. We will not be fooled into accepting as permanent what we agreed to be temporary. We will not countenance the abandonment of the written, state certified exams, externally set and assessed. TUI will not yield to demands for a year-round, 24/7 work pattern.

### **September – December – not without its difficulties**

The period between September and Christmas had its problems. In October, the contact tracing became overwhelmed and there was the recall of products. The education sectors followed the rate of infection that was present in the community and there was no evidence of an amplification factor in our schools, colleges, and education centres.

Having “a bit of a Christmas” led to the complete change in circumstances in early 2021. We now know that the new variant had arrived in November 2020, which has had a major influence on what has happened post-Christmas 2020.

## **TUI Responds to Evolving Crisis**

Delegates, as the effects of the crisis evolved, the TUI Executive Committee members and TUI Officials were continuously available, working on responses to documents, attending stakeholder meetings, meeting public health representatives, meeting management bodies and the Department of Education and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science - throughout the whole period of the crisis from March 2020 through to December and into the current year. TUI members can be assured that they were represented very well in the consultation and negotiations that occurred over this period.

## **Communication**

In a member-based organisation, communication with members is key. Head Office and the Executive Committee must be in regular communication with the members, letting them know what is happening and what is being done but also listening to the members' issues and concerns.

Communications regularly issued to branches. In fact, this year more than ever, there was a continuous stream of information and detail being sent to branches electronically which branches passed on to the membership locally.

TUI News was also an important link with members and now has a distribution of over 20,000 copies.

### **Branch Meetings – moved online**

The way TUI interactions occur has changed this year. As in other areas, Branch meetings went online and, very notably, attendance has increased. TUI purchased Zoom licenses and Zoom has become the TUI platform of choice. At Zoom Branch meetings members attend from their own homes. This experience will influence how TUI engages and interacts with members in the future.

### **Sub-committees**

TUI this year-maintained close contact with the Principals' and Deputy Principals' Association (PDA). The TUI Vice President and I met the PDA

Executive regularly as issues arose and maintained good lines of communications.

Meetings of the Retired Members Association (RMA) and its management committee also transferred onto the zoom platform. The TUI provided the customary assistance to the RMA. The union also set up a new method of liaising with the Adult Education Organisers' Association.

### **Teacher Unity**

In agreement with Congress motions passed at successive Annual Congresses, it is still TUI's aim to strive towards Teacher Unity. I can report that, as outlined in the Annual report, an obstacle is close to being removed with the final resolution of ASTI's dispute.

### **Permanent Whole-time Appointments**

At every opportunity throughout the year and in every relevant forum, the TUI called for the removal of all obstacles to permanent wholetime appointments

at any time of year. The Union also sought the removal of job-share as an objective ground for not awarding a CID.

### **Posts of Responsibility**

The Department of Education is in clear breach of the agreement it made with the union in 2016 to restore posts of responsibility in our schools - this at a time when the posts that have been suppressed and removed were never more urgently needed in our schools as they struggle to cope with the huge and growing burden of administration and bureaucratic accountability that continues to be handed down to us from on high.

### **Lack of Career Progression**

Apart from the administrative and bureaucratic overload that is swamping function for our Principal teachers and Deputy Principals, the suppression of post of responsibility has created a barren landscape for teachers in terms of career progression. Putting it simply, for most teachers there is no career progression. This is caused an entirely predictable and justifiable anger and dissatisfaction amongst our members. Despite claims to the contrary, the

Department cares not at all for the morale of the teaching profession. The refusal to understand the central importance of posts of responsibility to the effective functioning of schools shows a catastrophic lack of vision and means there is no middle management experience available for people who want to progress to senior management. TUI's patience in this regard is exhausted. The TUI expects a real and measurable process of restoration of Posts of responsibility to be put in place and one that will operate to a quick timeline

### **Allocation**

TUI welcomes the recent announcement that the allocations to all schools will be maintained for 2021-2022. However, there is a clear necessity, as previously stated, for an increased allocation to deal with disadvantage, regression, and demographic increases.

### **New Entrants/Pay Inequality**

Delegates and guests, I want you to consider the effects of pay discrimination against those who entered the profession since 2011. A palpable anger at this gross injustice remains in place. Politicians of all parties bemoaned the

injustice but have done nothing to eliminate it. The victims of this injustice are our members, your colleagues, friends, and relatives. New entrants worry about precarious work, are anxious about bills and loans that must be paid, the extortionate rents that are demanded and feel a deep sense of frustration that reasonable and legitimate life decisions cannot be taken or must be delayed. These victims are intelligent, highly educated professionals, many of whom, entirely logically, make the decision not to stay victims. They decide - because they have transferable skills - to leave the profession or to leave the country.

### **Teacher Supply Crisis**

This scandal of discrimination has created the crisis in teacher supply and retention. **There is a clear cause and effect. There is a clear remedy: end the discrimination and end the crisis.** Pay the same professional rate; establish pay equality. Do it now because it is the right thing to do.

Minister Foley should state unequivocally that pay equality will be reinstated and must say when this will happen.



## **New Entrants – leaving the profession**

Our colleagues - the so-called new entrant teachers and lecturers - have endured a decade of pay discrimination. These are the professionals who, along with their colleagues, have kept schools open against all the odds, have served the nation's cause by providing high quality education for their students either remotely or on an emergency basis. They unfortunately are part of the growing proportion of our population who now cannot afford to buy a house, to rent an apartment or to remain in Dublin or other large urban areas. In some cases, they are forced by financial circumstances to give up full time jobs in our cities because they cannot get by on the lower wage imposed on them by previous governments and now maintained by this Government

## **Pay**

When we consider pay or, more precisely, restoration of pay in 2020, we note that on the 1st of January 2020 the additional superannuation contribution threshold increased to €34,500, which was worth €250 in a full year to members. On the 1st of October 2020 annualised salaries increased by 2%. In

addition, on the 1st of October, allowances that were cut by 5% in 2009 were fully restored by applying an increase of 5.25% to all allowances.

Although these are being carelessly referred to as pay increases, they are in fact pay restoration which brings the pay of members who are not new entrants back to 2008 levels for all those earning under €70,000.

### **Pay and Pensions – maintaining the link**

The restorations also apply to retired members who retired post 2009. The restorations bring their pensions into line with the pension paid to those who retired with equivalent pay and service in 2008. The applications of the restoration to retired members maintains parity between serving and retired members which is very important and is a core value of TUI.

When we look at pay restoration it brings the lost decade into focus for us all.

### **Building Momentum**

The Executive Committee recommended that the “Building Momentum - Public Service Agreement 2021-22” not be accepted because it does not end

the injustice of pay discrimination against our members appointed since 2011.

The TUI's campaign for pay equality will therefore continue. The TUI did recognise that the agreement provides the first actual pay increases for public servants in more than 10 years.

The Public Services Committee of ICTU, by the aggregate vote of affiliate unions, has recorded that it is accepting the Building Momentum Public Service Agreement 2021-22.

The position notified by the TUI is that we agree to be encompassed by and will not repudiate the "Building Momentum Public Service Agreement" and TUI members will therefore benefit from the pay increases.

### **Building Momentum – Sectoral Bargaining**

A Sectoral Bargaining process will commence shortly which will allocate the equivalent of 1% of pay to a fund that is available within the agreement. This 1% is in addition to the two 1% pay increases that will be paid in October 2021 and October 2022. TUI is committed to the elimination of pay discrimination against new entrant teachers and lecturers. Therefore, as far as teachers are

concerned, TUI has unambiguously prioritised the payment of the HDip/ PME allowance to new entrants as a key demand from the sectoral bargaining negotiations. If our colleagues in other unions have a different priority that is their business.

### **Further and Higher Education - DFHERIS**

On August 2nd, 2020, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) was established. It may prove a positive development and there are signs of promise. The TUI's ultimate view will be based on practical experience of its operation rather than hopes for its operation.

### **Protection of Terms and Conditions - DFHERIS**

The new Department took over responsibility for Further Education and Higher Education. This meant that our members in these areas transferred to a brand-new Department of Government. The TUI sought and received a series of assurances in relation to the terms and conditions of our members now transferred to the new Government Department. This included certain

assurances that TUI would be dealt with as a major stakeholder in the areas now covered under the DFHERIS.

TUI has met the new Minister directly on issues. One of the most crucial guarantees received was that teachers who have transferred to the new Department, mostly in Further and Adult education, will still be covered by the Teacher's Conciliation Council (T.C.C.)

### **Underfunding**

In 2021, the TUI has and will continue to highlight the lack of funding and the under investment across all the sectors where we represent members.

Successive governments have failed in this regard.

The latest OECD Education at a Glance figures show that only three countries spend a lower proportion of national wealth on education than Ireland. At second level the situation is worse with Ireland's spend the lowest of the 36 countries for which figures are provided. This leads us to be trailing unacceptably behind the OECD and European average. Enhanced investment

is particularly required to tackle disadvantage and to provide all learners with a level playing field.

Education spending must finally be seen as a necessary investment in the interlinked future of young people in our society and the future of our economy.

TUI has specifically requested from the new Department and from Minister Harris significant additional funding for Technological Universities. These new entities cannot and must not be treated as second rate universities.

### **Technological Universities**

There are problems associated with moving from Institute of Technology to Technological University status. However, there are far bigger problems associated with not moving to TU status. Just ask our members in Dundalk Institute of Technology and IADT. Expeditions into the wilderness by certain Presidents have delayed and impaired progress for these institutes. Both DKIT and IADT must be accommodated and assisted by the HEA and the Department to become part of Technological Universities. No President's delusions of

grandeur must be allowed to scupper legitimate aspirations or to impede the hopes of an entire region.

TUI will not accept theories about institutional autonomy that seek to dismantle centralised processes for IR bargaining. This is, of course, not to suggest that the functioning of the current IR forums is smooth and efficient. It is not.

### **Review of IR Fora**

TUI has demanded a review of their operation both at third level and second level. It is, for example, a disgrace the Department has unilaterally prevented the IoT IR forum meeting in an attempt to pressurise the TUI into abandoning its action on online learning. We have learnt a lot about emergency remote teaching and learning due to the pandemic and the benefits of face-to-face interactions in all sectors. The need for a sustainable and workable national agreement on online learning is evident. If such an agreement is to emerge, it must be in co-operation with TUI members.

## **Disregard TUI at your peril**

TUI is clear in warning managements of both recently formed and soon to be formed Technological Universities not to seek to disregard TUI. We will not be swept aside by a new broom management. There are agreements that management must respect and implement; procedures that have been negotiated and that must be applied. There is engagement that must occur if respectful relationships are to be built and maintained between the TU management and the academic staff represented by the TUI. If NOT, TUI will act and act decisively.

## **Review of Lecturing**

The Third level workload and contact time is unsustainable given increased student numbers and the changes in process. A clear path for advancing the review of lecturing, building on the first module completed by Prof. Tom Collins, is needed.



## **Apprenticeships**

TUI welcomes the recently announced move into the CAO process of apprenticeship applications but must be and wants to be consulted about future development of the plan.

TUI is the only organisation involved across the whole process of apprenticeships - from encouraging it as a pathway in our post primary schools and other education facilities to providing training in ETBs, IoTs and TUs.

## **Further Education Issues**

The TUI represents a variety of grades in ETBs, including AEO, CEF, Youth Officer, Adult Education Guidance Counsellor, ETB Directors. Therefore, the current negotiations on Organisation Design of ETBs are important to our members. The slow approach and questions as to how this fit into DFHERIS are concerning but be assured, we will push for structures that appropriately reflect the roles and responsibilities.

Maintaining and enhancing staffing and allocation in FE colleges is a priority.

When the Pandemic ends there will be obvious demands for Further Education

opportunities and the Government has already committed to this in terms of financial support needed. FE needs to be well placed to respond to the opportunities and needs when the pandemic is over.

## **SOLAS**

The lack of TUI representation on the Board of SOLAS remains an important issue for TUI. TUI has continuously lobbied for this. It makes no sense that TUI does not have a representative on the Board that oversees aspects of Further Education where TUI is the representative organisation of the workers.

## **Adult Education**

TUI has long-standing issues in relation to Adult literacy Tutors. The Department refuses to provide our members in Adult Education services with an appropriate and fair career structure and pathway. There has been an appalling unwillingness to recognise the critical importance of adult education for so many of our neighbors and citizens.

Government almost exclusively sees it as a means of massaging the live register figures and of disguising the unpleasant reality of unacceptably high unemployment and limited opportunity for certain socio-economic groups and age cohorts. The essence of adult education is the development of self-confidence and self-efficacy in the learner. It is, first and foremost, a process of personal development. This, of course, includes significant upskilling and preparation for entry to or advancement within the Labour market.

International Studies such as PIAAC make clear that Ireland needs to prioritise Adult Education. Minister Harris can make a real and lasting difference. I urge him to seize that opportunity. There needs to be a conclusion of the process agreed under the LRA Chairman's Note for all Adult Tutors.

### **Youthreach and VTOS**

The TUI has lost patience with the Department and SOLAS regarding the unconscionable delay in providing assurances about the future of Youthreach and of VTOS provision. These programmes deserve and need official affirmation from the new Department and sustainable structures. Mr. Harris

has quite rightly been complimentary of Youthreach and has met them virtually. That must be welcomed.

In relation to Youthreach, there is a need now to recognise explicitly that what our members provide to learners is education, that those providing it are teachers and are teaching. It is up to the new Department now to show that the disdain for and the neglect of this group are over.

### **Additional funding/supports for students who have fallen behind because of COVID-19.**

It makes no sense to TUI that students are supported in Post Primary Schools with resource hours and other supports, but that this does not follow them into Further and Higher Education. The new Department has an opportunity to provide enhanced links between FE and IOTs/TUs- to facilitate access, transfer, and progression.

### **Deceased Members**

I would like to take this opportunity to remember our deceased members who have passed away since we last met. I would also like pass on my sincere

sympathy to members who have suffered a premature loss of a loved one due to COVID-19 and to those of you who have not been able to give your loved ones the send-off they truly deserved due to the pandemic.

Unfortunately and regrettably, COVID-19 has affected us all in some way or another.

### **Delegates - the core of the Union**

To all of you delegates, I salute your work and the work of our colleague teachers and lecturers who have achieved so much in the last year under extremely difficult circumstances.

On behalf of the TUI, I want to thank you for your personal commitment to your colleagues, for your active participation in and leadership of the activities of the Union. Your activism has had a profoundly positive effect on your colleagues.

### **Membership increases**

Our membership has grown to where TUI now has more than 20,000 members and that is also thanks to you and your involvement in the recruitment of new

members. This membership is the reason that the Annual accounts show that the Union is in a sound financial position.

To Executive Committee members, Branch officers and the staff of TUI - the level of work and commitment in dealing with the issues and difficulties has been consistent and effective throughout 2020. I thank you all for that work and effort.

### **Appointments**

Following selection and interview processes under Rule 68 three new Head Office appointments were made. As set out in the Annual Report, Patricia Keating was appointed as Administrative Officer and Seamus Lahart and Anne Howard as Assistant General Secretaries.

These appointments are to be ratified at this Annual Congress. This will be done immediately following my address.

### **Conclusion**

Delegates, guests, and friends, I have no doubt that you will find this Annual Congress informative and engaging. You will make key decisions for the

members you represent and will shape policy for the year ahead. I wish you all the best in this important endeavour.

It is my privilege to present to you the Annual Report.

Thank you.