

Address of TUI President Seamus Lahart to Annual Congress 2020 –
Friday, 26th June – Please check against delivery

Hello Delegates, you are welcome to this, most unusual Annual Congress and I sincerely thank you for both your attendance and patience as we all try to navigate through these uncharted waters. The pandemic has presented us all with significant challenges that have required innovative ways to continue our business and continue to interact in our day to day lives. The TUI organisation has been similarly challenged and has met those challenges as you have, through innovation and technology and continues with your help, to represent the interests of its membership with our employers and other organisations.

This Virtual Congress is not ideal for any of us. It denies us one of the essential parts of our usual Annual Congress, and that is the social element, where we meet and discuss issues face to face and over a pint or two. However, this event is the minimum that is required of us as an organisation to allow for the continuance of good governance of our affairs. The TUI rule book requires that a properly constituted Executive Committee is in place to govern the running of the Union. The term of Office of the Executive relates to the annual Congress, which obviously could not be held at Easter. We sought and obtained legal advice which stated that we are required to hold a Congress at the earliest possible date. We are doing that here today, to the best of our ability and the technical capability available to us.

I want to take this opportunity to thank all the Officers of the Executive. They have managed to maintain vital and imperative contact with branches either through Zoom or telephone or email. Maintaining a service throughout a national crisis has been challenging. Still, I believe they have served the membership well, contributing on your

behalf, attending meetings incorporeally and updating us with your opinions. These are the messages we have relayed in our contributions with stakeholders throughout the pandemic; we are and remain to be your voice.

We do recognise that this forum is limited, and it is debatable whether the usual, healthy, robust debate can be facilitated. So in that regard, we are suggesting that that the vast majority of our debate and discussion on the motions take place in October in Killarney. It is, however, your choice to do that. At all times we are here to serve the membership, and your input as you know only too well, helps to formulate our policies and the direction of the Union, I know you will choose the option you feel as delegates serves your members best.

The lockdown of our schools, FE Centres, Institutes of Technology and Technological University made the continuance of education very difficult for students, tutors, teachers and lecturers. However, you have all risen to that challenge, and in doing so, you have shown to all the dedication that we know exists throughout our profession. I want to thank you for that, for answering the call in a time of crisis. I want to thank you for going above and beyond what was expected of you, and I want to thank you for the aptitude and innovation shown when it was required. What was achieved from front rooms, home offices and back kitchens was exciting and inspirational but let me assure you and anyone who cares to listen to delegates, we are twice as effective within the context of our workplaces. What we have delivered may be unprecedented, but it is not a precedent, nor should it be thought of as such. Continuance of lecturing, and ensuring the completion of course content delivery across the Further Education and third-level sectors was maintained. Second level teachers responded to the crisis by continuing to teach remotely and then to provide a substitute for the Junior Certificate and the calculated grades model for Leaving

certificate exams. You all deserve high praise for efforts across all the sectors. We have seen all the sectors in TUI negotiate this crisis as a collective, the issues that pertain to one, relate to us all, and that similarly can be said for the teachers' unions. We have worked closely with our sister union the ASTI on the state examinations issue, meeting with them on many occasions over the past months, and taking a joint position, together. We are currently working with the INTO, ASTI and ICTU to initiate a return to work that is safe for all of us. We have been and will continue to be guided by the latest health advice at all times in our negotiations and in issuing guidance to our members.

This crisis has, of course, highlighted and exaggerated the existing shortcomings in funding for education, particularly in the third level sector. We have sought without success to date to reach an agreement on the provision of courses online. We have in the past week issued a directive to all our third level colleagues in this regard, and this is particularly important in the context of their return to work and the move to deliver courses entirely online. The TUI will not tolerate unilateral decisions, we will not be dictated to, and where this happens, we will take action.

In February we took action on the issue of unequal pay. I want to thank you for your support for our strike action in February in the run-up to the election. The campaign for equal pay, although somewhat overshadowed by the COVID crisis, remains a core objective for TUI and the elimination of this discrimination and unfairness must form a crucial part to any new pay deal that is agreed for the public sector. This fight must, and will, continue. Approaching a decade of discrimination is abhorrent to any trade union, much less a trade union whose primary purpose is education. Nationally the future is uncertain - a possible new government, a likely new minister, a potential new approach but there should be no uncertainty as to our determination

and approach to pay equality, we will and must continue to assert the basic fundamental right of equal pay for equal work.

Our Principals and Deputy Principals Association under the Presidency of Adrian Power has been very supportive of this campaign and many others, working closely with the TUI to highlight issues such as the recruitment and retention crisis of teacher supply and I would like to thank them for their continuing work and support. I must acknowledge the enormous workload that has been foisted onto them in facilitating teaching and learning as well as the work to facilitate the Junior and Leaving Certificate. They must not be left to deal with the enormous efforts that will be required to open our schools, without the required assistance and resources and support of TUI.

This year saw our first cohort of TUI activists complete our training course in Industrial Relations. The course delivered mainly online was carried out in conjunction with the Trade Union education centre Glasgow College. This collaboration with Glasgow College has proved very successful, and TUI will seek to extend that relationship so we can continue to provide training for our Branch Officers. I want to thank Paul Little, Principal and Chief Executive of Glasgow College, for making their knowledge, facilities and their staff available to us. As a union of educators and educationalists, we must provide training to our members and help them in any way we can by assisting with CPD delivery throughout all the sectors. We are the professionals and can utilise our knowledge to support our members. Who is more skilled than us to deliver such courses, and I look forward to the further development of TUI as a professional development service provider.

The move to transition to technological university status continues with one Technological University in place, and four other consortia in progress, all at different stages, moving towards merger and achieving university status. Regrettably, the talks in some of these consortia have

proved to be difficult, with management bodies failing to reach the required agreements which are necessary to assure the employment terms and conditions of the staff in the merging institutes. The TUI organisation will not allow the mergers to take place without the agreements that we need, to underpin the future employment conditions and will resort to whatever industrial action is required. We will continue to engage with all our third level sectors and ensure that whatever is agreed carries the hallmark of TUI engagement, we will continue to participate throughout the process and once the process has completed. Our members and their working conditions will remain our central focus

Further Education has seen the completion of the BTEI conversion process, after a long and protracted period to complete it in some cases. We are currently focussed on breaking the impasse in achieving proper contracts and terms and conditions for those working in the area of Adult Literacy. We moved matters to the labour court to expedite the situation, and that body has directed the department to come back to us with an offer. We are awaiting that decision at the moment. We want to acknowledge the work done in FE to ensure that students completed examinations and are awaiting their QQI certification. Again, our members reacted swiftly and devised contingency arrangements to ensure that exams were possible.

We continue to monitor developments in Senior Cycle review and watch out in particular for initiatives that may increase bureaucracy and workload for teachers. Similarly, we are engaged proactively with the Junior Cycle implementation body. Yesterday we had the successful outcome in achieving the restoration of the management resource hours to schools.

Thanks to all our teachers who engage on your behalf with NCCA

Society has become addicted to the pursuit of CAO points as the only measure of success or value of outcome in our second-level education system. I have taught many many students in my time who could, or would not be judged fairly by the narrow, restrictive parameters; the CAO points system values. Thankfully, many went on to be very successful in their careers despite not being deemed successful by the CAO points system. I have in my role as President of TUI sought to promote the equal value of Vocational Education that our members support in a wide range of educational opportunities, for students, at second level, in our FE sector, in our Institutes of Technology and Technological University. I have worked with our Apprenticeship Working Party to forge alliances with Solas, the Construction Industry Federation, and Employers in Industry to promote the Apprenticeship blended training model.

Thankfully TUI continues to grow, with new entrant Teachers, Lecturers and Tutors continuing to join. We have seen staff members like Teresa Dodd and Bernie Ruane leave us in the past year they have given dedicated service to TUI and its members over a long period. Gerry Quin and Joanne Irwin joined TUI as Assistant General Secretaries. And while Gerry returns to his roots as Principal in his own school, we wish him and Joanne success in their future roles. This is the final Congress for John MacGabhann, as General Secretary of TUI. I have worked closely with John over the past two years, and I have attended many negotiations and fora on behalf of TUI with him. I can assure you that John has been a strong voice and advocate for TUI members and TUI policy. His meticulous attention to the detail of policy documents and his relentless pursuit of the best deal for our members has been remarkable. I want to thank him for that on behalf of the membership and to wish him well in the future

Michael Gillespie will be his successor. I have no doubt but that Michael will fill John's boots very well and will continue the strong representation that the job requires. We wish him well also as he takes up his position in August.

Thanks to all the Officials and Head Office staff, Thanks also to the Executive for their contribution over the last two years

Four members of our Executive come to the end of their term at this Congress. Liz Farrell from Area 1, Maura Carroll from Area 5, Les Begley from Area 7, Mike Lyons from Area 9. I want to thank them all for their service to TUI and wish them well for the future. At the same time, I want to welcome the incoming Executive members, Rebecca Jones, Shane Curtin, Noel Cronin and Tim Murphy. I hope they enjoy their term on the Executive and find it rewarding.

Liz Farrell, of course, is not leaving and will take up the Office of Vice President, and I also want to wish incoming President Martin Marjoram the very best. I have no doubt but that both will serve the TUI with distinction.

All the Branch Officers without whom the TUI could not function. Thanks for your excellent work. Finally thanks to Colm, Nadia and particularly the Standing Orders Committee for their work in preparation for today. Nadia will leave TUI shortly to pursue an exciting new career. We thank her for her contribution to TUI and wish her well in her new adventure.

So to sum up, I suppose what I can say? I have served you as President for two years now, the last few months have been a challenge for us all, and I think if we have learned anything, it is that in extraordinary times it is ordinary people who lead the way. Thank you for your exceptional service to the Union, to the members and for each other.