**President’s Response to the Minister**

**TUI Annual Congress 4th April 2018**

Minister, you are most welcome to TUI Annual Congress 2018. I would also like to welcome the officials from your department who are here with you today.

**Pay Discrimination**

Minister, the focus here today is on new entrant pay. There have been issues that have been raised by you and your department during the last few days that no doubt are important and about which we will engage with you, at an appropriate time. However, right now Minister, our attention is clearly focussed on, and we want your attention to be clearly focussed on, is bringing an end to the injustice of discriminatory pay.

Minister, you will be aware that this union, along with our sister unions, passed a resolution yesterday that sets out our clear determination to have the matter of new entrant pay fully, fairly and finally resolved. There is a crisis of confidence in the profession as well as an associated crisis in recruitment and retention.

Minister, this time last year, a TUI survey revealed that 29% of new and recent entrants did not see themselves in the profession in ten years’ time. Much has changed in twelve months. Apparently, we are enjoying an economic boom. Unemployment figures are down, we are told. House prices have spiralled to make ownership an increasingly unlikely pipedream for many. Rent costs in urban areas are extortionate. The corporation tax take that the country actually chooses to collect (as opposed to the billions which it turns a blind eye to) has increased drastically.

Something else has changed too. The same question, on where they saw (or didn’t see) their future, was also posed last month to those TUI members who entered post primary teaching since 2011. This time **46%** of new and recent entrants thought it unlikely that they would be in the profession in ten years’ time. 46%!. Ironically, you Minister have told us on numerous occasions that we will have the best education service in Europe by then. Yet, 95% of respondents to the survey within the last few weeks believe that the status of the profession has fallen in recent years.

While the findings in our survey relate to second level teaching, pay discrimination has inflicted similar damage to lecturers in Institutes of Technology and those working in Further and Adult Education. Unless things change in the very near future, the fancy parchment that contains the lofty aspiration of the best education service in Europe will be gathering dust on a Marlborough Street shelf.

With employment options in the private sector becoming more attractive with each passing month, that teachers are looking elsewhere is hardly surprising. Across an ever-increasing range of Junior and Senior cycle subjects, teachers cannot be found. The profession is creaking at the seams.

Those who have been recruited are often leaving for other jurisdictions or other professions where their role is respected and where they enjoy the same working conditions as their colleagues, irrespective of when they walked in the door.

Minister, sadly you have spent the last twelve months plugging the leaks in the dam. That dam Minister has been seriously breached. Half socked measures will not do. You need to address the fundamental problem, you need to treat the disease not the symptoms.

In recent months, the solutions you have proffered have been no more than a combination of blandishments and sticking plaster measures. A piece of twine here, some sellotape there. Short-term and short-sighted fixes. A tinkering around with the terms of the career break scheme, an increase in the number of places for teacher training positions.

Drip, drip, drip. All the time more leaks appear.

* A school in Cork can’t get a Physics teacher.
* A school in Wexford is left without a Chemistry teacher who leaves for a better option in the private sector.
* An institute of technology gets zero responses to an advertisement for an Assistant Lecturer position in a key area.
* In desperation, a school in Dublin offers free accommodation to any Home Economics teacher but still can’t source one.
* A tech giant – that, thanks to Government timidity, isn’t obliged to pay its taxes like those in this hall – recruits a teacher of modern languages in the car park of a school in west Dublin.
* A further education college can’t recruit suitably qualified teachers for modules such as social care, digital media or in the STEM area.

Another day, another leak in the dam.

Minister, you regularly defend yourself and the government by quoting the starting salary of second-level teachers, but neglect to clarify that despite some improvement, **78**% according to our survey of recent entrants – do not receive a contract of full hours in their first year. So, four out of every five new teachers earn just a fraction of the €36,000 figure that you spin like a freshly-oiled roundabout.

And even **if** they earned the full amount from the commencement of their employment, they would still be victims of pay discrimination, despite a six-year training period and an average age of 26 upon first employment. It would still be wrong.

The problems are varied and severe, but we are fortunate that there is a clear solution. I’m happy to offer you and your Department some advice that, if acted upon, will halt the corrosion of the education system. There is a crisis in recruitment and retention – dead parrot denials do **not** work. The crisis will worsen until such time as the pay discrimination is ended.

We acknowledge that it isn’t your decision alone, but we implore you to do everything you can within your Government to make this happen and happen now.

# Minister, last week you convened a Specialist Group to look at the whole area of Teacher Supply. Who’s on that Steering Group? Four officials from your Department, three representatives from the University sector, the HEA and the Teaching Council – where’s the voice of the teacher, Minister? Where’s the voice of the Institutes of Technology? We have been warning for years that teacher supply was going to hit crisis levels yet we, or any other teacher representative body, are not even invited to be on, or consult with, this steering group.

# Minister, our survey of new and recent entrants to the profession last month found that 94% of them would remain in the profession if pay equality was fully restored. Minister, you know now how to resolve the teacher supply issue – restore pay parity and restore it now.

# Minister when I speak about those who entered the profession since January 2011 (over 16,000 teachers) I am not speaking of numbers, I am speaking of people. People, who love to teach – 81% told us they enjoy their day-to-day teaching. People who do a lot more than just teach – 91% of our new and recent entrants are involved in unpaid, extra-curricular activities with their schools running on average to several hours per week. Minister, before you today are some of those affected:

# Conor Crowley, Co. Cork

# Crona Kerr, Co. Donegal

# Zara Blake, Dublin

# Rod Gillen, Galway

# Sarah Doyle, Kilkenny

# David Waters, Co. Dublin

# Paddy Travers, Laois

# Joe Farrelly, Louth

# Stephanie Hassett, Tipperary

# Minister, they are not just a number. These are real people, dedicated public servants, committed teachers and lecturers, citizens of this country who want to serve their community and our society. However, Minister these fine and committed public servants have been for a long time scunnered and now they are thran. Now only people from Donegal will know what those words means so for the rest of you what they mean is fed up, sick and tired but determined and resolute.

# They stand before you today asking you to fight for them to be treated equally, asking you to treat them the same as the person they are sitting beside, asking you to finally treat them as they deserve to be treated. Many of their colleagues, who are also suffering pay inequality, are not here as they are working their second or third jobs this week to make ends meet. Minister, this is discrimination and discrimination is both wrong and unacceptable *and we all stand in solidarity with our new and recent entrant*s.

# We need a process to achieve full pay equality and we need it now. By full equality I mean the removal of the two additional scale points for all our grades, the re-instatement of the HDip/PME allowance as professional recognition for the two-year training now required on top of a primary degree qualification in order to train as a teacher and restoration of the incremental recognition for pre-service training.

# Minister, can you please advise me why you feel it is necessary that a graduate should have to do a two-year training course to train as a teacher. I have travelled up and down this country and I have yet to meet a single person who has told me that the additional year has added anything of value. All it has added is more debt for them.

# Minister, it is sad to hear that 52% of those who have only entered the profession would not advise a younger relative to take the career path that they have just taken and morale is at an all-time low – 94% have identified pay inequality as the primary cause in the collapse of morale in their staff rooms. Minister, it is just sad.

**Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017**

In our day to day work Minister, we teach our students about the difference between right and wrong. We teach them that you reap what you sow. You have sown a division and you are reaping a crisis.

Minister the coercive measures contained in the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017 are undemocratic. They are simply despicable. This Act was meant to be about the unwinding of FEMPI and yet before the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills on 28th March you referred to the Pay and Pensions Act as the FEMPI act – a telling Freudian slip.

We understand that if we take strike action we will lose pay but what you and your Government have done is legislate to ensure that if we take action, not only will we lose pay but our members would suffer further and savage punishment, completely unrelated to the democratically mandated industrial action that they may have chosen to undertake. This is democracy in Ireland in 2018.

Minister we have taken the view that Government should be discouraged from forming bad habits. We cannot countenance coercion becoming the norm and about complacency within the **union** movement in that regard.

The American author Elizabeth Ann Bucchianeri once declared that "Errors do not cease to be errors simply because they're ratified into law". This government should take heed of that very simple statement. What Government has done is spiteful, vindictive and unjustifiable.

**PLC**

It’s hard to avoid the impression that Government, for all its high-minded talk and flattery, simply doesn’t listen or understand and really doesn’t care. A prime example of this is the PLC review. The ESRI independent evaluation of the Post Leaving Cert programme confirmed matters that we already knew, for example, the positive role of the programme in providing high quality standalone qualifications and the significant part it plays as a bridge to higher education. The report highlighted that graduates of PLC programmes are 27% more likely to progress to Higher Education compared to similar peers who entered the labour market directly on completion of their Leaving Certificate. Crucially, the PLC programme is a critical route back to education for the many women who, for economic or family reasons, had to cut short their first shot at education.

One of the recommendations of the report is the establishment of a SOLAS-led PLC Programme Improvement Advisory Committee, whose role it will be to implement the recommendations. TUI as a primary stakeholder has not been invited to participate in this. Given that TUI members will be key to the implementation of the recommendations Minister, I ask you to intervene in this regard and ensure we have a position on this group. SOLAS again appears to only consider the DES, ETBI and NAPD as key stakeholders. What about the representative body for teachers, including Principals and Deputy Principals, who deliver and manage Post-Leaving Certificate programmes?

Minster, be on notice, continued failure to invite TUI to nominate representatives to this Advisory Group will be viewed as contrary to the spirit of the DES/TUI Agreement, May 2016 – which was accepted in good faith by our members, and which clearly states that ‘appropriate arrangements will be made for engagement between SOLAS and TUI on strategic and policy issues of mutual interest’. Now if this isn’t a strategic and policy issue of mutual interest I don’t what is!

SOLAS’s continuing failure to engage with the TUI in relation to developments in FET is causing the perception to grow among frontline practitioners that they are being side-lined and that there is a deliberate policy to ignore their voice, as articulated through the Union. Clear evidence is now needed that this perception is mistaken. Minister, help us in this regard.

**Third level issues**

***Funding***

Just as the PLC sector has been neglected and indeed its funding cut, so also have other levels of our education service. The deepest and most devastating cuts have hit third level, where an already dire situation has been exacerbated by an absence of genuine political will to tackle what has been a crisis for many years now. Instead, procrastination and inertia continue to be passed off as deliberation and consultation by our policy-makers.

This is a public policy failure, and it is morally wrong that a generation of students suffer because they have had the sheer bad luck of entering during this benighted era. For over 50 years, the institutes of technology (previously regional technical colleges) have made an enormous contribution to Ireland’s social, economic and cultural development, providing a full range of qualifications from apprenticeships to doctoral level in places, where previously there was no access to higher education opportunities. But this success has been dangerously undermined by short-sighted austerity cuts.

This has had a severely detrimental effect on the educational experience of a generation of students. The most important resource academic staff can provide is their time, and this has come under severe pressure, with considerably less opportunity to interact with students on an individual/small group basis. This was always a key strength of the Institute of Technology sector and is vital to dealing with students from diverse social, cultural and educational backgrounds.

**Apprenticeship**

Minister, what we **do** welcome in the IoT sector is the promotion of quality apprenticeships that are the route into secure employment, excellent terms and conditions and quality education and training. I do, however, ask you again Minister, let us put an education expert on the National Apprenticeship Council.

Of course Minister there are no two ways about it. The facilities and staffing required to guarantee high quality apprenticeships and other courses in IoTs are considerable and require sustained investment by the State. This brings me once again to the funding crisis in respect of third level education and once again, **crisis** is not too strong a word for it.

TUI’s position has always been that third level education is an intrinsic part of the social contract, it is the first destination for a very large and increasing proportion of those who complete senior cycle and must be funded from the State’s resources. It should not and must not be privatised.

The imposition of a scheme of income contingent loans, as set out in last year’s Cassells report, does not represent investment. Instead, this is privatisation, plain and simple. Adding to personal debt or creating a newly indebted generation is neither financially nor socially appropriate. For guidance on the folly of this approach, we only need look across the water to the UK, where their disastrous loans system is set for yet another overhaul.

As you well know Minister, TUI is strongly of the view that a levy should be applied to corporation profits in order to generate a dedicated higher education fund. This would allow corporations to make an entirely appropriate and meaningful contribution to the public education system from which they derive huge benefit through graduate talent. Operating such a model within the taxation system would guard against any creeping privatisation of the sector. While the recalibration of the National Training Fund is useful, it simply will not generate the required level of resources. There will be a battle royal between competing sectors for the additional funds and there is a risk of employers and business exercising an excessive influence on public policy.

***Unsustainable workload at third level – ballot***

The absence of adequate funding, the increase in student numbers and the cut in staff numbers taken together, as well as other changes in the system, have resulted in greatly increased workload for academic staff. They have been stretched beyond any reasonable limit. A review of matters relevant to lecturing in Institutes of Technology committed to by the DES, has not yet been completed and indeed has hardly commenced. The review was due to be completed by March 2017 and was, to have regard to as a priority, to the usage of the full flex hours for duties other than teaching in accordance with institute needs.

As a result of this unacceptable delay in implementing a collective agreement, TUI is currently balloting for industrial action on re-designation of the second flex hour. Before the two flex hours were ever imposed, academic staff in Institutes of Technology were already required to deliver hours far in excess of domestic and international norms.

Their workload is disproportionate, unfair and unsustainable. This excessive workload is entirely counter-productive. It means, for example, that finding time to carry out the research that drives economic growth is an increasingly unrealistic aspiration. In addition, like their colleagues in other sectors, lecturers employed from 2011 onwards are paid at a lower rate than those in service before that date.

Third level members will vote ‘Yes’ in this ballot. When they do, the initial action will include delivery, at maximum, of the weekly norm of class contact hours for the relevant grade with effect from September. Enough is enough. Our members will make their voice heard and give an overwhelming mandate on this crucial issue. This sorry mess must end now.

**Technological Universities**

Any IoT Management that decides to be awkward in this matter should consider the aspirations they have for the sector. If we have to, we will re-consider our co-operation with the Technological Universities project.

In relation to TUs, I take this opportunity to remind you Minister that we have an Agreement, that agreement requires consultation.

Management should take note that they’re not out the gap. If, in relation to the TU project, they fail properly to consult and engage with the TUI, both locally and nationally, on all matters of relevance to our members, we will find ourselves at loggerheads again.

If this consultation is to be at all meaningful, the representatives of our members in these Institutes, need the basic resource of dedicated time. For those on the management side, consultation is part of their job. For our members, it is in addition to their job. Minister, we will not do what we are not consulted about.

**Posts of Responsibility**

You will notice Minister that a thread through much of what I have to say to you concerns opportunities, lost, spurned or under-resourced. That thread continues when I consider the matter of posts of responsibility.

It is clear for all to see that teaching as a profession has become unattractive for a variety of reasons. Pay inequality is obviously one such reason; the absence of career and promotional opportunities is emphatically another.

While this government keeps its head in the sand in relation to recruitment and retention, foreign jurisdictions, particularly in the Middle East, benefit enormously from the influx of droves of our brightest and best young teachers. *We are haemorrhaging plane loads of well-educated and articulate young teachers.*

Minister, I acknowledge that Budget 2017 provided for some limited resources in terms of a commencement of the restoration of posts. However Minister, let’s be very clear - we consider this to be the beginning only and a very modest one at that. Minister, in Budget 2017 you also **wasted** a golden opportunity when you bizarrely, in our view, prioritised the creation of 175 additional deputy principal positions over the role out of 1,700 Assistant Principal 1 positions or 3,900 Assistant Principal 2 positions that could have been provided for the same cost.

Can you even begin to understand the huge difference those posts would have made to teachers, to management, to schools and most importantly to students without costing the State a penny more than the provision that you chose instead? What a missed opportunity Minister.

Nevertheless Minister, a commitment was made by your department in a collective agreement with the TUI that there would be restoration of Posts. We are holding you and your government to that commitment and are marking your cards that we need money to be provided for this in Budget 2019. Don't let another great opportunity pass you by again.

**Island Schools**

Speaking of opportunities Minister, it is useful and salutary to consider the particular, often difficult, circumstances in which sections of our membership have to operate. I would invite you therefore to take a moment to recognise and acknowledge the unique challenges faced and contribution made by our members in island schools off the Galway and Donegal coasts. The word unique is apt in this context because no mainland school experiences the difficulties faced by our 138 members in these schools.

It is often suggested that education is the lifeblood of a country. It is most certainly the lifeblood of these island communities. A school on an island is not just a school. It is much more. It is a community centre, a meeting place, a hub of island activity, a locus of hope for the future. It is therefore vital that our island schools thrive because our island communities will thrive alongside them. If Island schools continue to be ignored, marginalised and under-resourced – as they have frequently been, the communities they serve will wither away, a hugely important part of our heritage will be lost and we will all be the poorer for that.

Therefore, TUI welcomes the recent publication of the report and recommendations of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills on Off-Shore Island Schools. We welcome the fact that the Committee recognised the difficulties encountered by these schools. The next move, once again, is up to you Minister and your Department. We would ask you to do the right thing. Every one of the eight recommendations of the Committee is achievable and, indeed, relatively inexpensive.

We cannot seriously aspire to have the best education service in Europe if some of our schools, children and teachers are significantly worse off than others just because of where they are located. This is true whether we are speaking of island communities or of disadvantaged communities in large urban areas.

**Junior Cycle – Oral Gaeilge**

Minister, as you know we are co-operating with Junior Cycle Reform, however, as I advised you last year, we have serious concerns over the absence of an externally assessed Oral examination in Gaeilge. Recent reports suggest that Irish, as a spoken language, is in sharp decline. We are still of the strong opinion that it was a backward step to dispense with an oral component in Gaeilge.

Spoken proficiency is surely the bedrock upon which language development thrives. As I advised you previously, Gaeilge needs to be promoted as a living language. Another year has passed Minister and this issue has not yet been addressed. Ask any of the Irish teachers in this Congress hall and they will confirm for you that an oral component is vital for the successful teaching of any language.

We appeal to you and your officials once again to reconsider this regrettable decision and reinstate oral Irish.

**Youthreach**

Minister, you will recall my response to you last year in relation to our members working in Youthreach centres throughout the country. Many of them are here again this year listening intently to you and me Minister. My message to them has not changed since then, I sincerely hope yours has. Last year I outlined to you TUI's strong assertion that the work undertaken by these TUI members **is** teaching.

The intervening year has not altered my opinion. TUI still assert strongly that the work undertaken by Resource Persons and Co-ordinators in Youthreach **is** teaching.

The work carried out by Resource Persons and Co-ordinators in Youthreach includes:

* Teaching classes
* Preparing and marking exams for classes taught
* Meeting with parents about students’ learning
* Developing lesson plans and schemes of work for their teaching

Minster, quite clearly, these are the duties of teachers!

We have brought a claim in this regard to the ETB IR Forum and I ask you Minster to look favourably on our claim.

We do not know what direction Youthreach will take following the review of the Programme commissioned by SOLAS but we will attend the consultation events and we will advise those present of the direction, we feel Youthreach should take. We have strong opinions based on extensive experience of Youthreach and its staff Minister.

Our members in Youthreach are concerned that the valuable work undertaken in Youthreach Centres, which serves its students so well, will be forgotten in the requirements by SOLAS to adopt a business style approach where success will be abandoned in favour of an approach driven by outputs that are measurable. Such an approach to education is the polar opposite of the holistic approach that underpins practice in Youthreach.

The young, often marginalised people that attend Youthreach centres, **do** value the chance they are receiving. They appreciate the effort and dedication of committed staff. They recognise the opportunity that they are being given.

**BTEI Conversion**

Minister, lengthy negotiations have finally concluded on a conversion process for our members working in the Back to Education Initiative.

However Minister, we have encountered an obstacle that **you** can remedy. We have an agreement with your Department Minister, of real importance to the people to whom it applies. Some ETBs are indicating that they cannot or will not implement it because they claim not to have the staff, to carry out the administration work that it entails. We cannot say with certainly whether or not they have but you cannot let this become our problem.

Our members deserve better than to be stuck in a limbo or to have their employment status and security bandied about at the whim of others. I am directly requesting Minister that your department would see to it that ETBs do not delay this process and that if there are genuine staffing issues they will be addressed immediately.

We are also offering fair warning to those ETBs who are dragging their heels or deliberately frustrating implementation of the Agreement,– the TUI will take direct action against them and soon. Please sort it, Minister.

**CL 13/2018 on Religious Instruction**

Minister, our members were somewhat taken aback, as it seems were the management bodies, at the publication, without any prior consultation, of Circular Letter 0013/2018 – the circular that sets out the arrangements for students who do not wish to participate in religious instruction. This circular only applies to ETB schools and Community schools.

Minister, this circular came out of nowhere and offered no additional resourcing for its implementation. You are expecting schools to offer ‘alternative tuition’ meaning subjects to students at the time that religion instruction takes place. How can this be done? Have you even considered the implication this will have for the provision of the 400 hours wellbeing as part of Junior Cycle Reform? Minister, we would have brought all these concerns to you if you or your Department consulted with us. Why Minister are you singling out some schools and not others?

Tomorrow Minister, we have an emergency motion on this issue – the outcome of which, I have no doubt, will be to direct our members not to comply with the Circular.

We have no intention of infringing the constitutional rights of students and their parents and will not do so but to ask us to draw water with a colander from a dry well is to ask for the miraculous Minister. We are good but even we can’t always do miracles.

**Droichead**

Minister, when we think something is a good idea we will say so. One example is Droichead. We want to look after new entrants and help induct them into the profession. Yet, when we met with the Department to discuss how this needs to be resourced in order to be done properly and professionally, all we got was slipping, sliding, ducking and diving. We have the same fear about lack of consultation and understanding when it comes to PLC, VTOS and Youthreach.

**Consultation**

Minister, we have been told, on more than one occasion, in recent times, that once something is policy, there is no need to consult with us. This is a worrying trend. Minister, we speak common sense. Public policy should echo common sense. I understand fully that you and your officials may not, at times, like to hear what we have to say but there is evidence that when we are involved, real progress can be made – just look at the Junior Cycle Reform or the agreement reached on technological universities.

It is better all-round if we can head trouble off at the pass. Minister we, the people before you in this room, who also represent thousands more back in their schools, colleges and centres, deliver the service that you speak about. You must know by now that when you run into trouble it is when you do not consult us.

**Conclusion**

Minister before I conclude, let me go back to the future to the key issue that can make the most difference. I once again ask you to ensure that this is the last time that we need to ask you to do what is right and just – you want the best education system in Europe and we are with you in that - Minister you will not get it if the discrimination against teachers is not resolved. I have said it already Minister – do the right thing, end pay discrimination, once and for all and end it now.