

'We are proud of the work we do and proud of the high standard of Irish education'

Some key points from President Seamus Lahart's response to Minister Joe McHugh's address at Annual Congress 2019

Who are we?

TUI is committed to sharing the lifelong educational journey of students of all ages, and we are active in protecting and promoting the terms and conditions of our members. We are central to the success of the Irish education system.

We are second level teachers who engage with teenagers with varying abilities, talents and needs.

We are lecturers who have developed the third level sector seamlessly from the days of small regional colleges to producing many thousands of highly trained professionals that sustain our economy in Institutes of Technology and more recently, in Technological Universities. We are further education trainers who provide an alternative pathway to a career, offering a second chance to some. Last but by no means least, we engage with adults who may be challenged in terms of literacy and numeracy, and we bring the joy of being able to read and write to these people.

We are proud of the work we do and proud of the high standards that Irish education is consistently recognised in international comparisons. We are the educators who prepare people for a lifelong journey; we are the ones who are there for the long haul. We support, we advise, we mentor, we teach, we instruct, we innovate.

Apprenticeship

The economy is crying out for many more trained skilled apprentices, and we still have the nonsense of TUI being excluded from the Board of SOLAS, the managing body of Further Education and Training, from where a solution to this problem must evolve. Minister, you have to rectify this stupidity as a matter of urgency. Allow TUI to have a voice on the Board of SOLAS, and

I guarantee you that we will effect the positive changes to address the skills shortages in our society.

Leaders in academic and vocational education

I want to draw your attention to our theme for Congress this year. The Teachers' Union of Ireland is leading academic and vocational education. Both are held in parity of esteem within TUI.

Vocational education programmes have made a real difference to society, to the economy and the lives of countless young people nationwide; they build self-confidence and leadership skills by allowing students to utilise their unique gifts and talents.

Minister, TUI draws no distinction between our learners. We value young and old, new entrants or prior learners, regardless of ability. Education is a lifelong activity, and all are welcomed to our schools and centres.

Senior Cycle review

The Senior Cycle review is underway while we do not yet have the evidence to inform us of the positive and negative consequences of the radical overhaul of the Junior Cert. This is a matter of concern to TUI members, and it is a matter that should be fully investigated as a priority. TUI insists that the long-promised linear study of the effectiveness and outcomes of the new Junior Cycle approach and programme content be carried out immediately. The success of the new programme has not been assessed, and without the proper evaluation, we may be in danger of repeating the bad and failing to recognise the good, and as we know, it is not inevitable that all change is good. To facilitate change for the sake of it will not happen with TUI members. As long-serving educationalists, we will not support a radical reform which has detrimental effects. Mark my words Minister, TUI is watching closely.

There are some red line issues which must underpin the revision process. Number one - State certified examinations must remain. Number two - teachers will not correct their own students' exams. Number three - additional workloads and bureaucracy will not be offloaded onto teachers

behind the smokescreen of reform which inevitably becomes a cost-saving exercise. Work with us, Minister. Please do not work against us.

Initiative overload

Also, Minister, our members are undergoing what I can only describe as initiative overload; you have used the words yourself - circular fatigue and administrative apathy. Minister, we've reached a saturation point, there is simply no more room for any more paperwork, we simply cannot sustain the job we are paid to do when every month it seems that a new avalanche of paperwork and more initiatives are coming our way. Minister, it's time to offload the overload.

Teacher Supply and pay discrimination

A supply of fully qualified, professional teachers is essential to the delivery of quality education. Differential pay is still a reality in our schools. Yes Minister, still. Teachers are asked to teach children about the immorality of discrimination in our society while at the same time those same teachers are being subjected to grossly unfair discrimination themselves.

TUI has campaigned on the issue of pay equality for quite some time now, and we have made some headway, but equality has not yet been achieved. Teac must be paid from the same scale. In addition, we need reinstatement of the PME/HDip allowance and placement on the 3rd point of a 25 point scale in recognition of the time spent unwaged during their six-year training period.

Discrimination will be an election issue in every constituency in Ireland during the upcoming local elections and the next general election. Again, Minister, we are here for the long haul. Ministers may come and go; educationalists will remain.

Pensions

Teachers retire having given decades of valued service to education. They pay for and have earned their pension and are entitled to have a small level of comfort in their retiring years. Pension is linked with current pay, and some greedy Government ministers have the mad notion of breaking this link. It is unfortunate that the same Government that attacked our new entrants since 2011 now wants to target the elderly.

General pay rise

Another reality is the matter of a general pay rise for those of us working in the public service. The negotiations for a new pay deal must begin, and they must reflect the reality of pay increases in other sectors and the spiralling cost of living in Ireland.

Third level issues

Our Institutes of Technology and Technological Universities are struggling with a huge funding deficit, yet the growth of the Irish economy is dependent on adequate funding being available to our third level colleges.

The workload review in the third level is not yet completed some three years later, and one wonders when - if ever - that will move to completion. We need that review to be completed as we move forward to embrace university membership

The Institutes of Technology have served the regions well and are to become Technological Universities under the terms set out in the Technological Universities Act 2018. TUI responded to the original draft of the Act by proposing some essential amendments. Regional access to courses has served the country well, and the continuation of that availability is now underpinned in the legislation, and TUI will continue to monitor that.

TUI has insisted that members will cooperate with these mergers only when local management bodies engage with us in respectful and detailed discussions leading to agreement. TUI members locally and nationally will work with change only when there is prior agreement on all issues that

effect terms and conditions of employment. Foolishly, some local management bodies thought that they could do a solo run without our members being consulted, but they found out the hard way that respectful negotiation and cooperation is the best and the only way forward

Posts of responsibility

Minister, in 2009, one out of every two teachers held a post of responsibility in our schools. These posts were, and are essential to managing the everyday demands of running a school. Yet failure to restore the posts as agreed is making school management impossible. Plans to rejuvenate the Senior Cycle programmes on top of a long list of new initiatives will be impossible to implement without the middle management structure being reinstated as agreed in May 2016.

Further and adult education

TUI has a very active and wide-ranging membership serving the further and adult education sectors. We have fought hard to secure proper contracts of employment for the many who work in these diverse sectors, and there has been much success. However, the ongoing campaign on behalf of those working wide in adult literacy must be brought to a successful conclusion shortly. The provision of the skills required by the Irish economy continues to be actively provided by our further education colleges. The ability to respond to the ever-changing needs depends on adequate funding being available to allow our practitioners to upskill and to develop new courses. The provision of courses by private providers is being facilitated by some ETBs to the detriment of standards. Cheap, short term ad hoc course provision is a bad practice that must be discontinued.

Follow Donogh O' Malley's example

Minister Donogh O' Malley identified a system of inequality in Ireland in the late 1960s. He announced the free access to second level education for all the children of the nation. Even today, over 50 years later, his vision is applauded across the political spectrum.

Minister McHugh, you can follow in the footsteps of great ministers of education by showing the same vision in addressing inequality. The solution for you is much easier than the mammoth task

faced by Minister O' Malley, but the rewards for Irish education will be great. Speak out and take action against unfair discrimination of our younger teachers, speak out and take action to harmonise two different and unequal pay scales and you will leave a lasting legacy in the annals of Irish education.