



NOVEMBER 2015

VOL.38 / NO.5

news **BALLOT SPECIAL**

TEACHERS' UNION OF IRELAND / AONTAS MÚINTEOIRÍ ÉIREANN

Ballot on the resolution of issues at third level

A Word from the President

Colleagues,

The Executive Committee is strongly urging you to vote 'YES' in the Third Level ballot for industrial action up to and including strike action. As I have written before, there is a window of opportunity in advance of the general election to exert the maximum pressure possible on the Government to address the unfair burden on lecturers and other educationalists in the Institutes of Technology (IoTs). The huge problems of chronic understaffing and lecturing hours far in excess of international norms cannot be put on the long finger. Since the recession began, funding for the IoT sector has been cut by 35% and lecturer numbers have fallen by 9.5% while student numbers have increased by 32%. Therefore, TUI needs a powerful mandate for industrial action in order to tell Government that, unless these problems are addressed seriously and urgently, there will be major disruption in the IoTs when they are canvassing for electoral support. Their message of stability will be countered by the reality of educational instability. It will be their choice.

A strong mandate for industrial action would bolster the other aspects of our campaign including lobbying of politicians, media coverage and other forms of protest. As outlined in the previous issue of TUI News, members are asked to lobby election candidates in their constituency with a view to winning support for our reasonable

demands. (Please see the November edition of TUI News for guidance regarding your obligations under the Lobbying Act). While our grievances are about unacceptable conditions in the sector, this cannot be divorced from the quality of the education service. IoTs have been an education success story. They provide regional access to third level for tens of thousands of students who are training and studying for courses which range from Level 6 to Level 10 on the National Framework of Qualifications. IoTs and their predecessors have made a vital contribution to achieving social, economic and cultural development. This success is being undermined by short sighted austerity cuts. This must become an election issue.

The workload pressures on lecturers are unacceptable, unfair and unsustainable both in terms of the impact on conditions in the sector and the impact on quality of the education service. The draconian FEMPI Bill 2015 is designed to silence us on the critical issues in third level, by threatening what amounts to a deep and permanent pay cut. No doubt other serious threats may emerge. While none of us is in any doubt about the gravity and difficulty of the task at hand, we also need to have hope. TUI has stated clearly that we will honour our commitments under the Haddington Road Agreement (HRA). For now we have an opportunity but by necessity our decisions are made on a contingency basis. The ballot

for industrial action does not breach the terms of the HRA. Rather, the ballot tackles the root causes of our grievances. We can have industrial action while simultaneously respecting our obligations under the HRA. That is the lesson of the Junior Cycle strategy at second level.

Colleagues, our challenges, although very difficult, are not insurmountable. Collectively we can make a difference. You need to know that your burden will be lifted, that you will have a fair workload and that those of you who have precarious employment will have secure and full time work. Such changes would also bring huge benefits to students and the local communities from which they come. There can be an educational solution to an educational problem. But such a solution can only emerge from meaningful negotiations. That is a lesson of history. So far the door has been firmly closed to negotiations on our grievances. The door will only open if we place sufficient pressure on it. That too is a lesson of history. By voting 'YES' for industrial action, and encouraging your colleagues to do the same, you can help bring the necessary level of pressure to bear. The stronger the mandate for industrial action then the stronger will be our collective ability to achieve our goals.

Gerry Quinn

Vote 'YES' to tackle crisis at third level

Background

TUI members recently voted not to accept the Public Services Stability Agreement (the Lansdowne Road Agreement – LRA) on the basis, not least, that it had no regard to issues of critical importance in the Institutes of Technology sector.

In particular, the LRA is oblivious to the crisis that has been caused in the sector by chronic underfunding, understaffing, casualisation and the imposition of excess and inappropriate workload.

What are you being asked?

As part of the campaign to have these issues addressed through appropriate discussions, the Executive Committee of the union has decided to ballot members in the following terms:

Having regard to

- the chronic underfunding of the Institutes of Technology
- the critically low staffing levels and the steep and ongoing increase in student numbers
- the consequential unacceptable workload imposition on academic staff
- the precarious employment status, income poverty and associated exploitation of many academic staff
- the resulting detrimental effect on the quality of service to students

do you agree to engage in a campaign - encompassing a range of industrial action, up to and including strike action, as directed by the Executive Committee - in order to secure a fair and sustainable resolution of these issues?

What is the TUI Executive Committee recommending?

The Executive Committee recommends that you vote 'YES'.

When will the ballot take place?

Ballot papers will be posted from TUI Head Office on Thursday, November 26th, 2015.

Completed ballot papers must be returned, in the envelopes provided, to the union's auditors, Deloitte, by 5pm on Thursday, December 10th, 2015. (To ensure that completed ballot papers reach Deloitte by the closing date, they should be posted by Tuesday, December 8th 2015 at the latest).

Key issues of concern in Institutes of Technology

The chronic underfunding of the Institutes of Technology

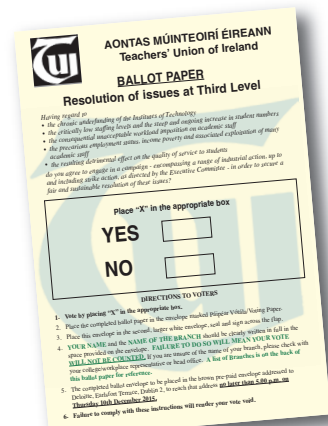
Funding for the sector has been cut by a massive 35% (€190m) between 2008 and 2015

Critically low staffing levels during a time of huge increase in student numbers

Lecturer numbers in the Institute of Technology sector fell by 9.5% - or 535 wholtime posts - between 2008 and 2015. Meanwhile, student numbers within the sector rose by a staggering 21,411 or 32% between 2008 and 2015.

While the increase in numbers participating in third level education is most welcome, the complete failure to provide appropriate funding and to maintain appropriate staffing levels is having a direct, negative impact on the student experience of higher education.

The reduction in academic staff numbers and the increase in student numbers has brought the student/teaching staff ratio in third level institutions above the OECD average of 16:1 to a high of 20:1 (OECD Education At A Glance, November 2015).



Unacceptable workload imposition on lecturers

As a result of the fall in lecturer numbers and the steep rise in student numbers, lecturer workload has increased significantly and intolerably. Findings of a survey carried out by TUI (released April 2015) show that lecturers are experiencing high levels of work related stress as a result of cutbacks and rationalisation measures in the sector. The current workload of lecturers is disproportionate, unfair and unsustainable.

Precarious employment status of many academic staff

In common with their colleagues at second level and in further and adult education, many academic staff suffer income poverty as a result of low hours and insecure employment. It is completely unacceptable that even such limited measures as may emerge from the Expert Group on Fixed Term and Part Time Employment for the third level sector – as provided for under the Haddington Road Agreement – have not yet been revealed or implemented.

Resulting detrimental effect on the quality of service to students

The crisis described above has a direct, detrimental effect on the quality of service to students (in terms of larger class sizes, less access to laboratories, libraries and sharp cuts to tutorials, student support etc)