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# news **BALLOT SPECIAL**

TEACHERS' UNION OF IRELAND / AONTAS MÚINTEOIRÍ ÉIREANN

## ***Ballot of members in Second Level, Further Education, Adult Education and Youthreach sectors***

### **A Word from the President**

Colleagues,

The Executive Committee is strongly urging you to vote 'YES' in the 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 crises in our education sectors. We may need to be firm with an incoming Government also.

There is a huge difference in the take home pay for teachers who entered the profession since 2012. Approximately 50% of our teachers, who are under the age of 35 years, are in precarious, temporary employment or have low hours, or both. The income issues for these teachers, and other educationalists on low pay, are extremely serious. We are demanding respect for the principle of equal pay for equal work. The teaching profession needs to be protected both for now and for the future. All teachers should have access to the same (pre 2011) level of income.

There are also significant problems with the ongoing bureaucratisation of our profession and other practices which distract from our core mission of teaching and learning. The highly managerialist manner in which the 33 'Croke Park' hours are arranged is a case in point. The continued imposition of austerity measures, such as the moratorium on posts of responsibility, is very damaging to our profession and the service to students. In the Further Education, Adult Education and Youthreach sectors, the lack of career structures for many of our members needs to be addressed as does the requirement on employers to meaningfully consult with employees.

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 schools, colleges and education centres when they are canvassing for electoral support. Their message of stability will be belied by the reality of educational instability. It will be their choice.

A strong mandate for industrial action would bolster the other ongoing aspects of our campaign, including lobbying of politicians, media coverage and other forms of protest. Our third-level colleagues recently had a very successful national lunchtime protest to highlight their grievances. Our members in the other sectors may need to do the same in January. 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, this cannot be divorced from the quality of the education service. The success of our Second Level, Further Education, Adult Education and Youthreach sectors is being undermined by short-sighted austerity cuts. This must become an election issue.

The draconian FEMPI Bill 2015 is designed to silence us on the critical issues, 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, of 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 addresses the root causes of our grievances and of the crises in education. 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 or are on low pay will have secure and full time work. 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, the stronger will be our collective ability to achieve our goals.

## ***Vote 'YES' to tackle the crisis in your sector***

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 education sector.

In particular, the LRA is oblivious to the crisis that has been caused to the education system by chronic underfunding, understaffing, casualisation and the imposition of excessive 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 precarious employment status, income poverty and associated exploitation of many education staff
- The steep and ongoing increase in student numbers and an urgent need for increased staffing levels
- The collapse of the student support, internal management and staff promotional systems
- The increased bureaucratisation of work and
- 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?

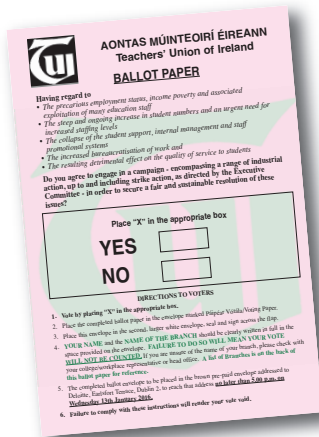
What is the TUI Executive Committee recommending?

The Executive Committee recommends that you vote 'YES'.

When will the ballot take place?

Ballot papers will be posted from TUI Head Office on Wednesday, December 9th, 2015.

Completed ballot papers must be returned, in the envelopes provided, to the union's auditors, Deloitte,



by 5pm on Wednesday, January 13th, 2016. (To ensure that completed ballot papers reach Deloitte by the closing date, they should be posted by Monday, January 11th 2016 at the latest).

Key issues of concern

These include:

**The precarious employment status, income poverty and associated exploitation of many education staff**

Those who entered the profession from February 2012 have been placed on a severely reduced pay rate which sees them generally earn 21.7% less than those appointed prior to 2011. (Based on contract of full hours).

To make matters worse, for several years now, second-level teachers have been forced to apply for fragments of jobs with no guarantee of being retained from year to year. Such teachers experience income poverty, often struggling (and sometimes failing) to pay the rent. Some 30% or more of our second-level teachers are employed on a temporary and/or part-time basis and this proportion grows to 50% for those under 35. These situations are completely unacceptable and are a threat to the profession and to the quality of our public education system.

**The collapse of the student support, internal management and staff promotional systems**

Budget 2016 allowed for some improvement in middle management and guidance counselling provision. However, these measures do not go at all far enough.

As a result of the moratorium on filling post of responsibility positions – in place since 2009 - and the removal of the ex-quota entitlement to guidance counselling provision, year head and other pastoral structures have become seriously curtailed and it has become increasingly difficult for schools to make timely interventions to support students

struggling with aspects of their education or even a personal crisis.

A major survey carried out by TUI last year showed that 91% of guidance counsellors spent less time than previously talking to students about subject choice. The survey also showed that large numbers were dissatisfied with restrictions on their capacity to respond to crisis situations. Practitioners felt that the role was becoming increasingly reactive rather than proactive.

In addition to greatly reducing the level of pastoral support available to students, the moratorium on the filling of posts has largely abolished any promotional opportunities within schools for teachers and has had a demoralising effect on the profession.

In the Further Education, Adult Education and Youthreach sectors, the role of the teaching profession must be protected and appropriate career structures must be established.

**Increased workload/increased bureaucratisation of work**

Teacher workload has increased significantly and administrative duties are deflecting teacher time from the core roles of classroom teaching and learning. An online survey of 545 teachers carried out by the union in March showed that 96% of teachers agreed that their workload had increased significantly in recent years, while 97% agreed that they have an increasing amount of work to take home, which impacts on personal time. Meanwhile, 88% of teachers listed administrative duties as having increased as a proportion of workload over the last five years.

The number of teaching hours per annum for Irish second level teachers is 735, which is far in excess of the OECD average of 669 (OECD lower secondary average: 694; OECD upper secondary average: 643).

In short, in addition to damaging the service to students, anti-educational cutbacks have increased teacher workload and have diminished schools' effectiveness. On top of this, the volume of legal and reporting demands imposed on teachers, including principal teachers, has grown exponentially.

**The resulting detrimental effect on the quality of service to students**

As a result of casualisation, students are often taught by a succession of teachers in a given subject area over the course of the Junior or Leaving Certificate cycles. The additional crisis situations described above have a direct, detrimental effect on the quality of service to students in terms of larger class sizes, less access to one-to-one attention and less pastoral support.