



ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT OF

P.D.A.

MR. BRIAN Ó MAOILCHIARÁIN

ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2015

Galway Bay Hotel

AREA 11

(Galway - Roscommon)

FÁILTIÚ

A chairde, mar Uachtarán ar Chumann na bPríomhoidí agus Príomhoidí Tánaisteacha cuirim fíor chaoin fháilte romhaibh chuig Cathair na dTreabh agus sibh ag freastail ar Chomhdháil Bhliantúil PDA.

Delegates, as President of PDA, it is my privilege to welcome you to my home town, Galway, and to the 46th PDA Annual Conference. This is an historic year for PDA Annual Conference as it is the first time for an amalgamated area (Galway City and County and Co. Roscommon) to host conference. The last time we convened in Galway was eleven years ago at this same venue. It was a significant year as it signalled the restructuring of our organisation to include Deputies and hence a name change from APVSCC to PDA.

Our then president, Martin Wallace, spoke of the uncertainty the rate of change and intensity was bringing to the lives of school leaders. He said that we should take **'time out'** to reflect on our roles as educational leaders. He was right then, and you are right today to have taken 'time out' from your busy schedules to participate at this educational and professional forum.

Colleagues, in the intervening years little must have changed for I find myself before you today pondering the same thoughts and wondering how best we can, eleven years later, manage an ever increasing rate of change, intensity and expectation.

Schools are complex organisations with multiple clients. The students our primary clients are those to whom we provide the service of education, their parents too are clients - as we serve their children, and the tax payer is also a client of ours, hence the quality assurance which is one aspect of the Inspectorate's brief.

Serving so many demanding clients as we endeavour to deliver a multitude of programmes while implementing increasingly numerous initiatives and all the while providing pastoral care to our students is indeed a significant challenge. We are meeting that challenge but at what price?

We are meeting the challenge because our profession goes well beyond the call of duty not to renege on our students. Despite being hugely under resourced, we continue to meet the challenge out of loyalty to those whom we serve, but Delegates, this position is evidently unsustainable - I need only reference the fact that the attrition rate in our profession was never

as high- 70% retirement at senior leadership level since 2010; Not because our retired colleagues had reached retirement age, not necessarily because they wanted to - rather because they could, and they recognised that their working conditions were not going to improve!

Delegates, now that our nation once again boasts one of the most buoyant economies in the EU we, serving principals and deputies, will not have recourse to the retirement incentives (somewhat cynical, Hobson's choice scenario) of our recently retired colleagues.

I call today, as I did when I first addressed you four years ago, that the various principal and deputy principal organisations, their respective managerial bodies and the two teacher unions present a joint case for a redefined role of school leaders!

It is customary at annual conference that this address comments on matters educational during the previous year. The Irish proverb - '**Ná déan nós is ná bris nós**' dictates that I should not deviate from custom but with your permission I would like to use this platform today to encourage you to strengthen PDA's presence in your areas and to exploit the benefits the association offers in terms of networking, collegiality and support. Nonetheless, I will not neglect to comment on some of the issues of most concern to PDA during the past year.

At last year's conference, in my address to you, I stressed the importance of seizing opportunities when, and as, they present. I spoke of the turning tide in the economy and how that might ease our burdens. I focused on the dismantled middle management structures and the logistical, administrative implications of the proposed Junior Cycle reforms.

Regretfully delegates, albeit that some alleviating measures have been recently announced in this year's budget, the substantial issues are unchanged! Yet again, I must stress that quality education along with the implementation of new programmes cannot be provided for, if not adequately resourced both in time and money.

Reform

On the issue of Junior cycle reform, as you are well aware, there is some degree of clarity among TUI members but our members in dual union centres are not to be envied, the sooner the matter is resolved the better for all. PDA welcomes the agreement negotiated between TUI and the minister allowing for a new approach to Junior cycle. PDA was always clear about the necessity for change and equally assertive that adequate

resourcing be provided for the smooth implementation of the reformed programme.

Acknowledging the fact that the agreement allows for approximately 800 wte's, when the 40 minute reduction in class contact time is comprehended at a system level, the additional numbers are to be welcomed. Nonetheless, this does not add an additional minute to offset the logistical and administrative tasks attaching to the new junior cycle. There is also the associated planning, for example the restructuring of the curriculum in all centres and the restructuring of school timetables, especially where a mixture of 35 minute and 40 minute class periods were employed to deliver 28 hours pupil class contact time. The joint TUI- ASTI approach succeeded in addressing many of the earlier concerns, I suggest a similar campaign may be needed to protect the work conditions of Principals and Deputies. Colleagues, the minister and the teacher unions need to deliver on the resourcing required to plan and to administer the new programme.

The plans to further develop our **apprenticeships** is exciting as it heralds a new departure in the education and training landscape. The establishment of the Apprenticeship Council and its subsequent

announcement to develop 25 new apprenticeships, the vast majority of which are expected to be ready in 2016, is good news indeed.

Hopefully, this development will have a direct positive effect on the choices school leavers make and initiate a renewed approach to second and further level education. It may assist in dispelling the national obsession of attending college straight after school and challenge the government and the DES to raise awareness among students, parents and the public in general about the needs of the Irish and global labour markets.

Many of us have seen presentations and read reports with telling statistics about future employment trends - figures that reveal that in a decade's time, if current trends prevail, that there will be a billion graduates globally but only 300 million jobs requiring graduate qualification! That even in high tech economies 50% of the workforce will require medium level skills! That currently in Ireland there are only 26 apprenticeships as compared to over 300 in Germany!

But, delegates, this narrative must be shared with society in general. As our recent past highlights, good ideas very often collide with cultural norms and consequently fail.

The fact that the new apprenticeships will be awarded up to and including level 8, and that there will be flexible educational pathways thereafter should be generally reassuring. Finally, this changing educational landscape presents as a great opportunity for our ETBs to revitalise the further education and training sector. PDA request that ETBs, recognise and acknowledge the pioneering, innovative and quality assured work carried out by our FE colleges and PLC providers. SOLAS and the ETB's have a wonderful opportunity to support and further develop our FE sector and should NOT be wooed by the lowest private bidder, value for money and quality assured education don't always match.

Somewhat related is the introduction of the revised **CAO points system**, another welcome reform which hopefully will benefit our students, in the first instance to select subjects in which they have an interest and aptitude, and at the end of the process whereby offers of places will, hopefully, be less reliant on random selection.

'An sob in áit na scuaibe'

You might recall that in September of last year DES officials had briefed the then newly appointed Minister Jan O'Sullivan that

‘some education cuts have pushed the system to the brink’ and that the “degree of loss of the posts in many second-level schools has had a significant impact on the leadership of those schools” rendering the current position as “unsustainable”.

We highlighted this dilemma to the minister at last year's conference. Arising from that PDA met, last June, with senior department officials. Delegates, we availed of the opportunity to highlight our concerns about our ever increasing workloads. When asked to prioritise the area most needing of immediate support, PDA unambiguously and categorically requested support for school leaders.

The minister evidently listened to her advisors and to PDA. The ex-quota deputy principal allowance announced in this year's budget is most welcome indeed as it gives a pro-rata alleviation to all 374 schools involved or 250 whole-time-equivalents in teacher numbers. PDA also takes the minister at her word that she will address schools in excess of 500 pupils by appointing 2nd and 3rd deputies.

PDA also welcomes the downward revision in the pupil teacher ratio to help meet the guidance needs of our pupils. I believe that we had gone beneath a reducing minimum which had our schools and centres at the

brink. Undoubtedly, the minister has taken the first small steps in attempting to bring our schools back from the edge, but many quick steps must follow to ensure a sound footing for the changes ahead.

One such change is the trainee teacher placement arising from the new PME programme. PDA has already raised concerns that the limits of schools' capacity to accommodate placements is being tested and that delivery of the curriculum could be compromised.

PDA welcomes the establishment of the **Centre for School Leadership (CSL)** as a support for current, newly appointed and aspiring principals and deputies, at this point I'd like to congratulate Mary Nihill on her appointment as director of the centre- undoubtedly Mary's experience as a school principal and as president of NAPD will have provided her with the necessary insights to develop the centre. In welcoming the establishment of CSL, PDA acknowledges the work already done in this area initially by LDS and subsequently by the PDST.

On the matter of leadership, it is well documented in the research literature that effective school leadership has a huge bearing on student outcomes. We often hear commentary on distributed leadership, there is a consensus that it has become the preferred leadership model in the 21st

century. I spoke previously on this topic and think it's worth reminding ourselves that the model of distributed leadership advocates that leadership may arise anywhere in the organisation and is not confined to formal leaders.

However, delegates, it is equally well argued that the motivation for **distribution** arises partly from the growing recognition that principals and other senior leaders are overloaded. Indeed, Hartley (2010: 27) argues, and I quote, that

'its popularity may be pragmatic: to ease the burden of overworked head teachers'

Perhaps, those other authors (Fitzgerald and Gunter, 2006), who adopt a more sceptical stance, arguing that distributed leadership is a way of encouraging schools to do more work -perhaps they are not too far off the mark! – by this I mean the unreasonable expectation that principals, deputies and teachers will embrace reform along with all the additional associated work, not to mention the endless, time consuming, unnecessary bureaucratic work, – and colleagues do all this without additional resourcing. Let's be frank and candid in our discussions, one cannot distribute in the absence of an adequate middle management structure nor indeed can one delegate in the absence of promoted personnel.

Notwithstanding the welcome additional resourcing, allowed for in this year's budget, the substantial issue of inadequate middle management structures still remains- our burden has not been lessened. The minister said, when she addressed us last year, that the workload issue and pressure on school leaders pre-existed the moratorium despite the fact that one in every two teachers at post-primary held a management allowance. She also indicated that it would be too simplistic to address our concerns by merely lifting the moratorium when funding became available.

As you are aware delegates, ETBI, ACCS and JMB have submitted proposals on changes in our middle management structures. TUI has made its negotiating position clear -a return to pre-moratorium levels of promotional posts. PDA has worked closely with both TUI and ETBI on the matter. Indeed, you will recall that PDA greatly facilitated Pat O'Mahony, ETBI Education Research Officer, in conducting a national survey on the issue, the results of which he presented to conference last year. Let me remind you of some of the survey findings, and I do so because they are equally as reflective of the current situation as they were a year ago and indeed for many, many years at this stage. More than 6 in 10 respondents believed that:-

*'... the inadequacy of the in-school-management system results in constant **distraction** from my core functions'. (ETBI Survey)*

A half of all respondents claimed that while the work of a principal / deputy principal is rewarding and important, the workload is so excessive that it impacts **negatively** on my work-life balance.

Additionally, 1 in 5 agreed with the statement that the workload and responsibilities are so onerous that I feel **constantly** stressed.

Furthermore, I doubt there is one among us today who would not subscribe or indeed be author to those viewpoints, indeed many of our friends cannot be with us today for those very reasons, and that colleagues, is a sad state of affairs. As I said earlier, this issue was exercising the minds of conference delegates in Galway in 2004 and has continued in an incrementally increasing fashion to do so ever since.

PDA, I can assure you, has brought this matter to every discussion forum and will maintain its efforts to effect change.

I reiterate my earlier call and ask that all parties concerned, as a matter of immediate urgency, expedite their respective efforts, reach a consensus and submit an agreed set of proposals to address this issue. In considering the impact on school leaders resulting from the absence of an

adequate middle management structure PDA is cognisant also of the implications for our teaching colleagues and the lack of a career development path.

Equally detrimental to the teaching profession is the scourge of casualisation. The Peter Ward recommendations have gone some way in addressing the matter but we still have obstacles to overcome. Second level teachers and IOT lecturers do not necessarily have full hours as do their primary school colleagues or a Garda. Much of this is as a direct result of subject qualification and curricular demand not matching a full-time equivalent. PDA will continue to press for an equalisation of teacher allocation cross-sectorally. Perhaps a root and branch approach is needed to change the allocation model so as to comprehend the varying profiles of individual schools.

Locally, here in Galway, we have 3 island schools and as many Gaeltacht schools serving marginalised communities in remote settings. Surely, common sense would dictate that a baseline allocation determined by each school's unique profile should be granted before the general allocation model is applied. Furthermore, assuming no significant change in profile, schools should not be required to go 'cap in hand', year in year out, for the same level of teacher allocation.

As you know delegates, school self-evaluation (SSE) which commenced in 2012 is scheduled to move into its second phase soon - the evaluation of 'leadership and management'. The Chief Inspector has previously indicated that the inspectorate are currently working on significantly revising the framework to be used in evaluating the leadership in schools and this might provide the opportunity to pause for thought.

In light of what I have just outlined I suggest that there may be some merit in proposing a stay on this second dimension, at least until such time as we once again have adequate structures in our schools and centres. Perhaps the time has come to cry halt, or are we so ill-fated to be so preoccupied mopping up that we can't find the wherewithal to stop the tap!!".

'Ní neart go cur le chéile'

One thing I can say for certain is, that our efforts and endeavours will bear better results if we approach the challenge, not alone, but together and in keeping with this year's conference theme - **'Leading Together'**. When the local organising committee suggested the theme I was immediately enthused as it encapsulates all that we are about - leadership and unity! Let me preface my concluding remarks by saying that we, ETB principals are unique in the Irish education context, like it or loathe it, our inclusion

as centres in an ETB scheme mean that we jointly share human and fiscal resources. As ETB principals, de facto, we are a readymade team of education leaders whose strength lies in our inherent ability to cooperate. Roosevelt is quoted to have said that,

Competition has been shown to be useful up to a certain point and no further, but cooperation, which is the thing we must strive for today, begins where competition leaves off.

Delegates and friends, we all know that neither individuals nor very small groups can be fully self-sufficient, this is precisely why cooperation at every level is necessary, both for survival and success. I repeat, we, as principals and deputies of ETB schools, are uniquely positioned to cooperate, to collaborate and to mutually support each other in our shared challenge of Leadership. If I were to pick up the phone to seek advice I, like you, would invariably call an ETB principal or deputy principal colleague. Where else would I turn? but to a colleague who understands our sector, who appreciates the ETB mechanisms, a colleague who shares the path of my professional journey!

PDA Restructuring

Delegates and friends, PDA represents ETB school leaders both locally and nationally. PDA was traditionally, and, I am convinced, will continue in the future to be the best placed association to highlight your concerns and to support you.

If my experience as principal since 1998 has informed me of anything, it is that there is little point in asking what other body, what department or what other association can do for us principals and deputies. Our strength and support lies with each other, we should look to each other for mutual support. PDA offers us a professional network and all the associated benefits of meeting with likeminded professionals.

Last year PDA realigned its area network to mirror the 16 ETBs. This restructuring was done in recognition of the fact that schools and FE centres may have a lesser presence in the ETB landscape than that which was previously enjoyed in VECs. Indeed, it could be argued that anecdotal evidence already exists of this change. Many of our colleagues are, as I said earlier, too overburdened to attend conference. Couple that with the fact that nearly 3/4 of current school leaders are 5 years or less in their positions and it makes for worrying contemplation.

Stephen Covey, author of many books on the principles of effectiveness uses the metaphor of a 'saw' to stress the importance of taking **'time out'**, he convincingly, but unsurprisingly outlines that for a 'saw' to carry out its function effectively, that is to cut, must maintain a certain degree of sharpness. Hence, one of our guiding principles should be 'to sharpen the saw'. However, to do so, the saw must stop cutting to allow the sharpening to occur. The message therein is obvious.

Delegates, I urge you to use the revised PDA area networks as an opportunity for you and your ETB colleagues to network locally, assured in the knowledge that your local PDA grouping has a national presence through which to advance your concerns.

CONCLUSION

Before I finish there are some people I wish to thank. Firstly, Area 11 conference organising committee which has been unerring in its preparations, it was a real team effort from the start and I think all would agree that Áine Bhreathnach and Peadar Ó Sé are deserving of a special mention for their tireless dedication to the task. Secondly, to all our TUI colleagues – President Gerry Quinn, General Secretary John Mac Gabhann, and all at TUI head office – for their continued support to PDA,

I thank you. Sincere thanks also to Michael Moriarty and his staff in the ETBI.

Finally, and this is finally for me as President of our association, to PDA National Executive, and its officers Gerry, Stephen, Kevin and Brian – for your continued encouragement and support I am very grateful, it has been my privilege to work with you and with such a diligent, committed executive. At yesterday's executive meeting, after formal proposal from the Areas, I am glad to announce that Gerry Connolly will be your president. I can say unreservedly that PDA will be safe hands and that you can assured that our association will prosper under his stewardship.

Mar fhocal scoirr, in my concluding remarks last year I expressed a hope, that on meeting each other again we would be in a better place. I believe we are, many small steps have been taken from which we can draw a renewed optimism. I further believe it will be better again when we next meet in Ballinasloe on November 16th, 17th and 18th, 2016, as guests of Areas 13 (Laois, Offaly) and 15 (Longford, Westmeath).

Slán agus go raibh maith agaibh.