

Address of the President of P.D.A.

Mr. Kevin Whyte

Annual Conference 2009

Area 2

Sheraton Athlone Hotel,

Co. Westmeath

Introduction

Is mór an onóir dom mar Uachtaraín Cumann Priomhóidí and Priomhóidí Tanaisteacha fáilte a chur róimh go léir go dtí an criunniú bliantiúil seo.

It is a great honour for me to address you as President of the Association of Principals and Deputy Principals and to welcome you to this year's conference in the heart of Ireland. Our theme for this year is

'Education in Challenging Times – Hope for the Future'

Last year Kevin O'Meara, our then president, referred to the dramatic turnabout in the country's finances and the impending era of cutbacks and financial constraints. Since then things have gone from bade to worse. To quote the poet William Butler Yeats

**“All changed, changed utterly
A terrible beauty is born”**

Our terrible beauty consists of larger class sizes, reduced staffing levels, reduced funding for programmes such as L.C.A. and T.Y.O., dismantling the middle management structure in our schools arising from the moratorium on filling vacant posts of responsibility, dismantling our Adult Education provision due to the non-replacement of Directors of Adult Education, refusal to accommodate suitably qualified applicants for F.E., P.L.C. and V.T.O.S. Programmes due to a very restrictive capping process.

The Future Skills Needs Report highlighted the need to up skill significant numbers of the working population, particularly to Fetac Levels 5 and 6. Recent rises in unemployment have greatly increased the level of demand for such up-skilling and

re-training. A national debate is required to determine how these objectives are best met. It is the strong contention of P.D.A. that schools and colleges in the V.E.C. sector have the staff, the expertise, the experience, the tradition and most importantly the quality assured processes to deliver the required programmes most efficiently and cost effectively. It is high time in the current challenging economic climate to stop the duplication of provision and use scarce resources more prudently and prevent the wilful waste of taxpayers' money by other training agencies.

Education Cutbacks

We returned to our schools and colleges this autumn with considerably less teachers which created major difficulties in maintaining the curricular provision for the students entrusted to our care. The major difficulties which emerged and which continue to exist area:-

- Not enough teacher allocation (W.T.E.'s) to cover all subjects offered to students – this resulted in shorter class periods in some cases and a shorter tuition week
- Loss of some subjects from the school/college curriculum e.g. Physics, Chemistry, Art and Music which have been actively promoted in our schools/colleges in recent years
- Time-tabling mixed ability classes and combining 5th year and Leaving Certificate classes
- Loss of teaching and management expertise due to the high numbers of senior teachers retiring

- A dismantling of the middle management structure in our schools/colleges due to the moratorium on filling these posts when vacated
- Loss of very educationally valuable programmes e.g. T.Y.O. and L.C.A.

This prompts me to ask the question – Is this a Government that knows the price of everything and the value of nothing?

The recently published Report of the Special Group on Public Service numbers and Expenditure Programmes otherwise known as the McCarthy Report or the Report of An Bord Snip Nua recommends public expenditure cuts of some €5.3 billion to be made principally in the coming year. In addition it goes outside of its terms of reference and states that there must be public service pay cuts as well as pension reductions for public servants. As part of its recommendations the Bord has recommended a reduction in expenditure in Education & Science of some €746 million as being a full year saving with staffing reductions of 6,930.

It is ironic that €5 billion is only a fraction of the money that this government is using to bail out the banks following unregulated, irregular and very questionable practices. Our members, their children and grandchildren are now being held to ransom to pay for these practices. Our members and all public servants have always been compliant tax payers and are now reacting with disappointment, disillusionment and dismay after years of study and dedicated service.

It is said that wilful waste makes woeful want

We are fully conscious of the current, unprecedented economic crisis and recognise that the gap between income and expenditure can only be addressed by an increase in income by taxation or by reduction in expenditure or a combination of both.

Our members have already been subjected to the so-called ‘Pension Levy’ which it is not. It is a levy on all Public Service pay, whether the pay is pensionable or not. Where is this money going to? What is the duration of this levy? Our members contribute to their pensions over a 40 year period, the question is ‘what does the government do with this money?’ Any further salary cuts will not be tolerated by our members and our parent union T.U.I has got a mandate for strike action. Strike action is a last resort which will impact yet again on the students entrusted to our care.

Is there a better fairer way of solving the problem? In January the I.C.T.U, the Government and employers suggested a National Recovery Plan in which “all sectors of society contribute in accordance with their ability to do so, and the most vulnerable, low paid unemployed and social welfare recipients are insulated against the worst effects of recession”. It seems that this plan no longer exists and that the compliant public servant will be taxed, levied and have his/her salary cut until it is no longer attractive to work.

Capitation Grants

Another proposal in the McCarthy report causing serious concern is the proposed reduction in the capitation grant. Schools/Colleges are currently struggling to meet heating, lighting, I.T. and the cost of class materials within existing Budgets. Any further reduction would seriously impact on curricular provision and college facilities.

Impact of Budget Cuts and Embargoes

- The effects of the Education cuts have had a serious impact on the capacity of our schools/colleges to deliver a quality service to our students
- The increase on the P.T.R. from 18:1 to 19:1 has

- reduced subject option/choices for students at Junior Cycle/Senior Cycle
- restricted student access to L.C.A., L.C.V.P. and T.Y.O.
- increased class sizes with negative impact on student learning
- reduced the capacity of schools and colleges to cater to the needs of students with special needs e.g. learning, social, emotional
- reduced the capacity of schools and colleges to provide a full 28 hours of tuition to students

The effects of the embargo on the replacement of Post Holders (Special Duties and Assistant Principals) has impacted on the efficient and effective management of schools and colleges and consequently on the care and attention that the school/college is able to give students. The most apparent difficulties currently are:-

- It is not possible to replace departing heads of subject departments with the result that subject planning and the leading of teaching and learning in some subjects has had to be abandoned
- It is not possible to replace Year Heads so that some year groups are left without a post holder to take specific responsibility for their pastoral care and/or academic progress
- It is not possible to replace post holders with responsibility for critical functions within the school/college e.g.
 - Examination co-ordinator
 - School timetabler
 - New student co-ordinator

- Special needs (reasonable accommodations) co-ordinator
- Sports co-ordinator
- Director of Adult Education
- Book Scheme Co-ordinator
- Fetac Co-ordinator

This list is only an indication of some of the various and critical tasks affected. Our parent Union T.U.I. has directed that reviews of posts may be conducted in accordance with Circular Letter 20/98 in the V.E.C.'s and Circular Letter 23/98 in C & C schools. Principal Teachers in our sector have always complied with directives. In the current situation it is not possible to maintain these services and we cannot perform **“The Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes”**.

These major difficulties must be addressed as a matter of urgency by T.U.I. to ensure those teachers who are employed have a career structure. Currently with the embargo, as directed, a teacher has no prospect of promotion and students, schools and colleges are denied vital support services.

The effects of the embargo on the replacement of school support staff e.g. clerical, caretaking, cleaning etc. has also impacted on the effective operation of our schools and colleges

- Some schools try to function with a part-time secretary
- Some schools have reduced numbers of cleaning and maintenance staff

In the current climate of the “Swine Flu” pandemic H1N1 we must seriously challenge these cutbacks.

Other cuts which challenge us in our daily life and have a negative impact on the schools/colleges capacity to meet the educational needs of its students include:-

- Reduced ingredients grants for Home Economics
- Withdrawal of the school book grant for non-D.E.I.S. schools.
- Withdrawal of grants held by non-D.E.I.S. schools under measures to address educational disadvantage.

Of all the above cuts the removal of the School Book Aid is the cruellest cut of all. Even before this latest cutback Ireland had the unwelcome distinction of being one of the few European countries where schoolbooks are not provided free to all students in the educational system. Students across the border or across the Irish Sea continue to have an automatic entitlement to free school books. The current situation is putting undue stress on families who once benefited from the Book Aid and are already in dire financial straits due to unemployment, reduced working week and a range of pressures. We request a reversal of this situation and no change in syllabi while the current cuts prevail.

Post Leaving Certificate Courses

Our schools and colleges have an established track record of providing quality-assured internationally recognised P.L.C. and F.E. Courses over many years. Our executive members have reported to me that the number of applications for places in P.L.C. courses in Colleges of Further Education has risen sharply with the economic downturn. It is estimated that 30,000 applicants have been unsuccessful in obtaining a place on a

P.L.C. course. The following extract is taken from a T.U.I. publication of September/October 2009.

Sample of applications to colleges around the country

Name of College	No. of Applications 2009	Number of PLC Places 2009	Disappointed applicants
Inchicore College of FE	2,500	800	1,700
Rathmines College of FE	1,100	550	550
Colaiste Dhulaigh, Coolock	3,000	1,073	1,927
Ballyfermot College of FE	5,800	1,200	4,600
Cavan Institute	3,000	1,600	1,400
Limerick Senior College	2,600	1,200	1,400
Sligo College of FE Ballinode, Sligo	1,100	600	500
College of Commerce Cork	3,600	1,845	1,735
Colaiste Stiofan Naofa, Cork	2,070	825	1,245
St. John's Central College, Cork	3,400	1,150	2,250
Galway Technical Institute	3,500	950	2,550
Drogheda College of FE	2,500	800	1,700
Waterford College of FE	2,000	850	1,150

Even looking at the situation on purely economic terms, the cost of the extra resources necessary to take on new students would be greatly offset by savings of money otherwise payable in the form of Jobseeker's Allowance. P.L.C. Courses are a very cost

effective way of up-skilling the population and restrictions on places make no economic, social or educational sense.

We request a removal of the cap on P.L.C. and V.T.O.S. places on humanitarian, social, educational and economic grounds.

All economic commentators agree that the Nation requires a highly skilled and well educated work-force to take on the challenges of new opportunities as soon as the green shoots of economic recovery appear. P.L.C. Courses can evolve quickly to suit the needs of the local community and as such are of critical importance going forward.

We also request an expansion in Adult and Continuing Education Programmes to serve all community needs and the immediate replacement of Directors of Adult Education when these posts arise.

In-Service

Continuing development on education is vital in today's knowledge society and is an essential component of all our careers. The development of the curriculum at both Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle has created a need for a significant amount of teacher in-service training, the majority of which seems to be timed in an ad hoc nature. Once again we request that the integrity of the school year must be maintained and that revised syllabi can only be introduced after a reinstatement of School Book Aid.

You will be aware of the intention to introduce a second component of assessment with a practical dimension in the Leaving Certificate Examinations in Biology, Chemistry and Physics in the future. As with Project Maths, now in its second phase, these syllabi represent new approaches to teaching and

we hope will also be examined in more innovative ways with due recognition in terms of time and remuneration for the work involved when agreed by all parties

Conclusion

It has been an honour and a privilege for me to serve as President to this association over the past year. I have felt very well supported at all times by a very hard working National Executive and I would like to thank them for the very dedicated manner in which they have represented your concerns at national level. I would like to pay particular tribute to the Officer Board, Past President Kevin O'Meara, Vice-President Mick Daly, Secretary John Kearney and Treasurer Brian O Maoilchiaráin for their availability, insight, hard work and support at all times. We are very fortunate to have the expertise of a number of past presidents on the Executive – Martin Wallace, Tom Hughes and Mattie Kilroy, who continue to give excellent service to this organisation. Regrettably we are losing vital talented executive members this year due to retirements namely the Chair of this year's Organising Committee – Nora Kennedy, our adviser for many years and Past President Mattie Kilroy, our esteemed colleagues Rosaleen Oldfield, Niall Lynch and Michael Parsons. I would sincerely like to thank them for their commitment and contribution to P.D.A. and A.P.V.S.C.C. over many years. Their contribution will be recognised by a presentation at the Conference Banquet later tonight.

Throughout the year the Officers of P.D.A. have had numerous meetings with T.U.I. and the I.V.E.A. to discuss and advance the issues of concern to us as an Association. I would like to thank all T.U.I. Head Office staff for their generous help and support and availability for meetings especially the President – Don Ryan, General Secretary – Peter McMenamin, Annette, Declan and John and our Liaison Officer Paul Whelan.

I would like to thank Michael Moriarty, General Secretary I.V.E.A., Pat O'Mahony, Education Research Officer and their staff for facilitating meetings and wish them well for the future and the challenges ahead. I would also like to thank Séan Ashe C.E.O. and Joan Russell E.O. – President and Secretary respectively of the C.E.O./E.O.'s Association. We look forward to continuing these co-operative arrangements with the new officer board on a regular and scheduled basis.

I would like to thank the Conference Organising Committee for their choice of venue, choice of guest speakers, making all the necessary arrangements in addition to a full work schedule in their schools and colleges. I would like to thank our guest speakers Micheál Ó Muircheartaigh, Declan O'Connor and Professor Ciarán Ó Catháin President A.I.T. for their entertaining and thought-provoking presentations – **Míle Buíochas**

In conclusion I would refer back to our theme “Education in Challenging Times, Hope for the Future”. I have made many references to the challenges but it is extremely important to be optimistic and have hope for the future. Our children are the future **“Mol an Oige agus tiocfaidh sí”**.

I will finish with a quotation from Joseph Addison an English essayist, poet and politician:-

“Education is a companion which no misfortune can depress, no crime can destroy, no enemy can alienate, no despotism can enslave. At home a friend, abroad an introduction, in solitude a solace, and in society an ornament. It chastens vice, it guides virtue, it gives, at once, grace and government to genius. Without it, what is man? A splendid slave, a reasoning savage.”