

ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT OF

P.D.A.

MR. KEVIN WHYTE

ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2010

MOUNT WOLSELEY

TULLOW, CO. CARLOW

AREA 1

(CARLOW, LAOIS, KILDARE, WICKLOW)

Is mór an onóir dom mar Uachtaráin Cumann Príomhoidí agus Príomhoidí Tánaisteacha fáilte a chur romhaibh go léir go dtí an cruinniú bliantúil seo i gCeatharlach.

The theme of this year's conference is **'Leading Learning in the V.E.C. Sector'** and the past year has been eventful both in terms of School Leadership and the Restructuring of the V.E.C.'s.

It is a great honour and privilege 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 splendid surroundings of Mount Wolseley, Tullow, Co. Carlow in P.D.A. Area 1 representing Carlow, Kildare, Laois and Wicklow.

At our conference last year in Athlone during the monsoon season, I 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 bad to worse and we have been caught in the eye of the economic storm. I referred to W.B. Yeats.

**'All changed, changed utterly
A terrible beauty is born'**

This year has been dominated by bank bailouts ranging from a total of 50 billion to 60 to 70 to 80 to 90 billion depending on which economic commentator you care to listen to. The bottom line is that Ireland is in a very difficult economic situation.

It must be remembered that this State has faced many challenges in the past years and succeeded in turning the economy around to create almost full-employment.

PDA strongly believe that Education, yet again, will prove to be the solution to our current difficulties. Education budgets must be protected in order to deliver high quality education and employment opportunities for future generations.

What chance now of a quality Education system and a steady job in Ireland for our graduates and all students entrusted to our care?

What chance now for the Principal and Deputy Principal of running a school/college with the minimum threshold of Assistant Principal Posts?

In July of this year Tánaiste Mary Coughlan got Department of Finance approval to allow schools worst affected by the moratorium in place since March 2009 to make some appointments.

The loss of almost 1,500 middle management posts through retirements at the country's 730 second-level schools in the past 20 months in addition to almost 300 holders of those jobs being promoted to Principal or Deputy Principal has left schools struggling to cover important areas of responsibility.

However, only 39 assistant principal posts have so far been filled at 28 second-level schools including three schools where three such posts were sanctioned and five schools cleared to fill two posts. Another 25 posts have been filled to date as a result of 75 applications.

For every one of the 39 Assistant Principal posts filled the likelihood is that another lower management role (Special Duties Teacher) is being left vacant by the person promoted.

Under the terms of C.L. 0042/2010 – ‘Limited alleviation of moratorium on filling of Posts of Responsibility for 2010/11 school year’ a School/College of 499 pupils will have 4 Assistant Principals. A School/College of 1099 pupils will have 7 Assistant Principals.

The Moratorium on Promotional Posts has removed the career path for Teachers and significantly increased the workload of Principals and Deputy Principals to a point where the burden is intolerable – this is now a major factor in the increased numbers of Principal and Deputy Principals retiring earlier and equally significantly a reduced number of applicants for Principal and Deputy Principal Posts when advertised.

The moratorium on promotional posts has unilaterally dismantled the middle management structure in our schools that we have built up over the years to support the educational, pastoral and co-curricular needs of students and is vital to the health, safety and well being of all students.

The schedule in the table hereunder is based on recognised pupil enrolment on approved courses and not on teacher allocation as was the case previously. This, therefore, does not take into account the increased needs in schools and colleges which carry a disproportionate number of special needs and ‘new-comer’ students.

Pupil Enrolment (30/09/09)	Minimum threshold of Assistant Principal posts in individual post-primary schools
< 100	0
100 – 199	1
200 – 299	2
300 – 399	3
400 – 499	4
500 – 699	5
700 – 899	6
900 – 1099	7
> 1100	8

At this conference I request T.U.I., the I.V.E.A. and the D.E.S. to address the increased workload of Principals and Deputy Principals as a matter of urgency at a time when schools have lost teaching staff, posts of responsibility, administration and other support staff.

At last years conference, I predicted that the embargo would paralyse our schools and make them unworkable. Regrettably this is coming to pass with a major impact on effective management.

At this time schools and colleges represented here today have lost 3, 4 and 5 Assistant Principal Posts which are not filled. Who is trying to plug the holes in the dyke?

- The Principal?
- The Deputy Principal?
- How long?
- December 2010? June, 2011? December 2011? Early Retirement?

Further Education

Our schools and Colleges have a long established track record of providing quality assured internationally recognised Further Education and P.L.C. courses. One of the continuing scandals, in the current times of increased unemployment, is the cap on F.E. places. Our executive members have reported to me yet again that the number of applications for places on F.E. courses has far exceeded the number of places available in schools and colleges.

These schools and colleges have accommodated students in excess of their allocated places and get no credit in terms of staffing and capitation grants.

Further Education Courses in our sector have proved to be a very cost effective way of up-skilling and these restrictions make no economic, social or educational sense. A cost benefit analysis of the V.E.C. sector compared to Fás makes interesting reading for anyone with basic mathematics.

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

Curriculum Reform

P.D.A. is open to reforms which improve the quality of education for the students entrusted to our care. We have done so very effectively and flexibly over the past 15 years. In that time new syllabi have been introduced in almost every subject. We have introduced such innovative programmes as LCA, LCVP and TYO. We are open to change but it must be change we believe in and realistic for the Ireland of today.

In February of this year the N.C.C.A. published '**Innovation and Identity – Ideas for a new Junior Certificate**' and since then a process has been underway to consider what might be the future shape of Junior Certificate education. NCCA.ie provides an opportunity to view or download innovation and identity or to express your views by email, blog or through an online questionnaire.

People who propose grand reforms may forget that we have 30 lively, vibrant and sometimes recalcitrant adolescents in our classrooms – some of whom don't want to be there – whatever the curriculum. Adolescents need the motivation, the structure and the coherence of a National examination at age fifteen but the curriculum must take cognisance of the behaviour, interests and attitudes of its target group. As with Project Maths the mode of Assessment must also be seriously considered.

At Leaving Certificate level there is a very reasonable argument in subjects with two components/papers that one would be taken at the end of fifth year at the same time as the actual Leaving Certificate examination. This would not involve major expense as the same examination centres and examiners could be used. Yes, there would be an increased number of students for one year and the results could be aggregated the following year.

The State Examinations Commission

In May, 2010 the State Examinations Commission released '**Revised arrangements for the validation of Examination Paper Packets**' without any prior consultation with the representatives of Principals and Deputy Principals. The co-operation and assistance of

Principals and Deputy Principals has always been forthcoming but in light of the lack of recognition of assistance in 2009 the increased role of the School Representative was not appreciated. These revised arrangements asked school authorities to adopt a watching brief in relation to the day to day operation of the arrangements in their schools and to ensure that the revised procedures were being implemented correctly by the Superintendents assigned to the school.

Thankfully when this matter was referred to Mr. Peter McMEnamin, General Secretary, T.U.I., we were assured in writing that no additional duties should be undertaken. This is a typical example of the benefits to be gained from the working relationship between PDA and TUI.

Whole School Evaluation

Since our last conference W.S.E. has created problems for our members for two main reasons, namely, Union Directive and Model of W.S.E. and Reporting

1. Union Directive

Since its inception schools and colleges have co-operated fully with W.S.E. and the D.E.S. Inspectorate. History has shown that inspections were carried out in a professional manner bearing in mind the various inputs into the school/college community. The Union directive, now thankfully lifted, isolated the Principal & Deputy Principal to deal with the process and prevented pre and post evaluation meetings. This put undue pressure and stress on the Principal and Deputy Principal to carry the bureaucratic load. I strongly feel that this situation was unjust and should not have prevailed – a union directive should not militate against or isolate one section.

2. Model of W.S.E.

In recent months the M.L.L. model – Management, Leadership and Learning – seems to be more common although we have not yet received the evaluation of this model. We understand that this model is more likely to be used where schools are having a second inspection after 5 years and/or where 4-5 subject inspections have already taken place. One third of schools in the state have already had the W.S.E. model of inspection.

While the M.L.L. model has the advantage of whole school inspection of all teachers, P.D.A. expresses the view that it may benefit from a change of emphasis in its acronym and the concept of teaching should be reflected more, possibly, with a title change from M.L.L. to M.T.L. – Management, Teaching and Learning.

President Barack Obama stated, addressing the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce in 2009 – **‘From the moment students enter a school, the most important factor in their success is not the colour of their skin or the income of their parents, it is the person standing in front of the classroom’**

P.D.A. expresses the following concerns regarding W.S.E.

- Lack of notice afforded to subject teachers under M.L.L.
- The identification of Principals in online published W.S.E. reports, which were far from positive,

- The lack of appropriate experience held by some inspectors and the failure of the Reporting Inspector to sign reports
- The lack of an instrument whereby a web report could be edited/updated to reflect recommendations subsequently undertaken by a school
- Need for clearer explanations regarding the status of M.L.L. (pilot/mainstream)
- Need for adequate substitution to cater for the meetings required
- Need for Special Education expertise on the inspection team

P.D.A. is of the opinion that part of the inspectorate's role is advisory and supportive and that this dimension would benefit from greater emphasis which may lead to constructive 'reflective practice'. P.D.A. wishes to stress the need for inspection teams to have realistic expectations of schools particularly in view of the frequent and severe incidence of Posts of Responsibility losses.

Technology in Schools

The action report '**Smart Schools = Smart Economy**' was launched in November 2009 to kick-start investment in I.C.T. in schools after a gap of several years. The report was accompanied with a Government Commitment to invest €150 million to create 'smart schools'. The report written by representatives from IBEC and D.E.Sk is largely based on the Department's 2008 document '**Investing effectively in I.C.T. in Schools**'.

This document was originally commissioned by Minister Mary Hanafin to advise her department on how to spend €252 million on I.C.T. in schools as part of the National Development Plan. This commitment could not be met due to the economic downturn and the €150million has replaced it.

Earlier this year post-primary schools were asked to complete an N.C.T.E. questionnaire seeking to establish the extent of I.C.T. infrastructure in schools in advance of the allocation of a promised I.C.T. grant. Principals had been advised by the then Minister Batt O'Keeffe that priority should be given to the needs of the new Project Maths area when funding was being utilised at school level.

It is the view of P.D.A. that a quality I.C.T. infrastructure is an essential pre-requisite for our schools as they seek to play their part in establishing Ireland's credentials as a smart economy.

At a time of austerity measures, PDA welcomes the allocation of monies recently received in our schools and colleges.

T.U.I.

P.D.A. have a positive working relationship with T.U.I. The officers of P.D.A. meet with the General Secretary, Assistant General Secretary and the President on a regular basis to discuss and advance our issues and concerns. We welcome the 84.2% vote to temporarily suspend the industrial action imposed as a result of the imposition of the pension levy and the pay cut in order to allow the Union to engage in discussions related to the Public Service Agreement.

In the current economic climate it is difficult to predict positive outcomes but I would appeal for unity of purpose within all teacher unions to protect our education system and to ring-

fence the education budget. We need strong leadership in our union to support the leaders in our schools and colleges who are frequently caught between Management functions, the D.E.S. and Union Membership.

I use this conference to explicitly request the following:

T.U.I. to protect the working conditions of Principals and Deputy Principals

Conclusion

It has been an honour and a privilege for me to serve as President to this Association over the past two years. 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 – Vice-President Mick Daly, Secretaries John Kearney and Joan McGarry-Moore and Treasurer Brian Ó Maoilchiaráin. 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 and were instrumental in the publication of our first newsletter. I particularly wish to mention Mattie Kilroy for his assistance to the Organising Committee – Bill Cullen step aside!!!

I would like to thank the Conference Organising Committee and in particular our Executive member Caitlín Ní Chárthaigh for their choice of venue, choice of guest speakers and 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 – Mr. Michael Moriarty, General Secretary of the I.V.E.A., Mr. Gary Ó Donnchadha, Assistant Chief Inspector and Ms. Ann Looney, Chief Executive Officer, N.C.C.A. for their comprehensive and thought provoking presentations.

Throughout the year the officers of P.D.A. have had numerous meetings with the I.V.E.A. to discuss and advance issues of mutual concern. I would like to thank Michael Moriarty and Pat O'Mahony, Education Research Officer and their staff for facilitating meetings and wish them well for the challenges ahead. I would like to extend best wishes to their Past President Mary Bohan and to welcome their new President Mr. Noel O'Connor.

I would also like to thank the officers of the C.E.O.A.'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 all T.U.I. Head Office staff for their generous help and support especially past President Don Ryan, current President Bernie Ruane, General Secretary, Peter McMenamin and fellow officers and our Liaison Officer Paul Whelan.

In conclusion I feel that it is extremely important to be positive and to see the glass as half full rather than half empty. As leaders we must be optimistic and have hope for the future. Our children are the future.

“Mol an Óige and tiocfaidh sí”

