

**ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT OF**

**P.D.A.**

**MR. BRIAN Ó MAOILCHIARÁIN**

**ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2012**

**CLARION HOTEL**

**SLIGO**

**AREA 8**

**(Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim)**

A chairde, is mór an chúis áthais agus bróid dom é Fáilte Uí Cheallaigh a chur romhaibh go léir chuig comhdháil bhliantúil PDA anseo i Sligeach

agus tá súil agam go mbainfidh sibh idir tairbhe agus taitneamh as bhur gcuairt.

As PDA President it's my pleasant duty to bid you all a genial welcome to our 43rd Annual Conference. Each year it is pleasing to look around and see so many familiar faces - peers, past and present colleagues, friends, many of you have made a huge effort to join us for our national conference. On behalf of us all, we are deeply appreciative and offer you our most grateful welcome.

The conference ***theme 'Change in Education- Meeting the Challenge'*** was also aptly chosen and reflects the current educational landscape which is being sculpted by the prevailing economic uncertainties as well as the numerous reforms to teaching and learning in our schools. In recent years the Irish educational context has changed radically as a result of successive budgetary cutbacks. Today, I wish to comment on some of the major changes taking place and also to highlight the detrimental effect of recent budgetary cutbacks and pay cuts.

Minister Quinn emphasises the need to continue with the reform agenda because, he says, it is necessary to modernise our educational system at all levels.

PDA, I must emphasise, accepts, that in a world of constant change it is necessary to keep apace, to embrace necessary change and to adapt new methodologies and approaches. Notwithstanding that, PDA also recognises that a prerequisite to any reform is the system capacity to manage change and at the moment the system is creaking at the seams. Delivering last year's budget the Minister said, and I quote: -

*“A modern, progressive education system is the foundation of our economic recovery”*

Most, if not all of you, will concur with his assertion but I ask how the modern system is going to be resourced? The Minister's answer seems to be (and I quote)

*“Funding is being provided over the coming years to support the implementation of the national literacy and numeracy strategy, overhaul the Junior Cert and rollout of high speed broadband to all second level schools. This will allow us to continue to improve the quality of the education system in Ireland.”*

Regrettably, such funding will not necessarily improve the quality of our education system because money is of little benefit without the personnel to implement the reform.

Delegates, I remind you that last year's education budget set out to save money primarily by cutting teacher numbers and to a lesser extent by reducing general funding. The target savings from budgetary measures was 700 teachers at second level, when that figure was adjusted to allow for an estimated 250 additional posts for demographic reasons, the net loss to our system was 400 teachers last year. Add to that a somewhat greater 'harvesting' of numbers from the previous year and one arrives at the approximately 1000 teachers less in second level schools!

If it is a sound bite you want – that is equivalent to shutting down 30 schools of 550 pupils, or if you prefer – closing a 550 pupil school in every county in Ireland! Does the public, I wonder, does the public realise the extent of the cuts and the inevitable reduction in educational service??

I don't mean to be pessimistic or alarmist but the frightening reality facing us now is that when account is taken of savings measures outlined by the Department of Education and Skills, further savings of approximately €68 million will have to be identified in 2013 and a further €138 million in 2014 in order to live within the expenditure ceilings set for those years.

The Department of Finance sees only the bottom line and the harsh reality is that cuts in 'pay or numbers' are the best options to reduce expenditure!

Where? Delegates, where, I ask, will the savings be made in education? What is there left to cut in a system devoid of ample middle management, and where 30% pay cuts have already been imposed??

Colleagues, we must all resist, by any means possible, any further cuts. PDA met with DES officials last spring, an historic first meeting, we met to highlight the genuine concern - that little heed is been given to the cumulative effect of the changes which are being rolled out and to their effects on schools, on staffs and on students. PDA stressed that in the new education landscape it was critical to :-

- Ensure the welfare of Principals, Deputy Principals and school staffs
- Ensure the quality of teaching and learning and student welfare
- Ensure the sustainability of current provision and quality in the system

In that context, PDA identified current pressures which are having a negative adverse impact on the school system. Among the main points discussed were:-

Dismantled Middle Management Structure and the consequential increased workload for Principals and Deputy Principals; ( I will come back to this topic shortly)

Reduced time for leadership;

Revised PTR; Guidance Provision (effectively a cut in PTR);

School-Budget Cuts (capitation, resource hours etc.);

Reduction in VEC administration staff and the imminent establishment of local education and training boards (ETBs);

Public Service Agreement- transfers and redeployment issues;

DES Inspections - MLL, Programme Inspection etc.

Moreover, additional challenges will arise under the following areas:-

Induction Probation; Teaching Council Revisions and Career Entry Professional Programme; Further 6% cut in capitation over next 4 years; Junior Certificate Reform; Literacy and Numeracy Strategy; Incidental Inspections, Legislative demands; SOLAS and the changes facing the Further Education sector; Any cuts to allowances (including SnS scheme).

Our clear message was then, and continues to be now- that the recent dismantling of school middle management structures coupled with the

revised PTR has left schools under resourced to meet current demands and consequently ill-equipped to satisfactorily implement new initiatives.

PDA continues to highlight that additional challenges are looming and that consideration must be given to the difficulties posed by the implementation of these new programmes at a time of unprecedented change.

While the DES officials, Pat Burke and Philip Crosby, took on board our concerns, acknowledging that schools were doing great work under very challenging conditions, but unfortunately, due to the continuing economic situation little hope was given of matters improving in the short term.

Concluding the discussions and having indicated an increased level of awareness, the DES accepted that schools couldn't meet all the demands and would need to prioritise areas. This colleagues, as we all well know is easier said than done (if, indeed, it can be done at all), nonetheless, it must be said that we have arrived at that point – schools have already be placed in the invidious position of choosing between guidance and subject provision.

## **GUIDANCE**

Last year the Minister announced that the pupil teacher ratio (PTR) at post-primary level would remain at 19:1. However, in the next breath and with effect from the beginning of this school year, Minister Quinn directed that the guidance provision be managed by schools from within their standard teacher allocation.

This measure, colleagues, we were told, was an alternative to making a change to the overall staffing schedule or PTR. Moreover, it was presented as a measure which would give schools greater autonomy and the flexibility to decide the precise resources they wish to allocate for guidance balanced against the other demands on available staff resources.

Delegates, as you are well aware, it was misleading to suggest that such a measure would not change the overall staffing schedule, it was disingenuous to espouse that schools would have greater autonomy, this cut, by stealth, as we well know, certainly did not give schools flexibility!

On the contrary, as schools reopened for the current year the abolition of ex-quota Guidance Counsellors combined with previous budgetary increases in PTR proved most problematic as schools attempted to timetable subjects and to maintain an appropriate level of guidance.

Since term began, less than 3 months ago, we have seen the restoration of guidance hours to a school in the South, and more recently the tragic events in Leitrim and Donegal highlight the need for on-going guidance and counselling service in our schools. The Education Act cites an 'appropriate level of guidance', Delegates, PDA will press for a definition of 'an appropriate level of guidance' and will continue to demand the full restoration of an ex-quota guidance provision.

I note that this morning several areas had submitted motions to this effect and I encourage you to attend the TUI scheduled session later on today and avail of the opportunity to engage with TUI president, Gerry Craughwell, and general secretary, John MacGabhann on current issues - non less of which are those motions relating to the planned Junior Certificate reforms.

## **Junior Cycle Developments**

In his announcement in October 2011 the Minister stated:

*The Junior Certificate Examination will be replaced with a school based model of assessment. This will include formative and summative assessment and involve schools and teachers in ongoing assessment and reporting of students' progress and achievement*

Controversy remains around the proposed reforms but the Minister is pressing ahead. PDA welcomes many of the new developments but as I have already mentioned, resources, support, leadership time and professional development will be key pre-requisites for this to be a success.

The first big step in the process will be the introduction from September 2014 of the new English programme; September 2014 will also mark the commencement on an optional basis of NCCA designed short courses (Anne Looney will bring us up to speed on these matters tomorrow). September 2015 will mark the introduction of phase 2 courses in Irish, Science and Business studies and also the introduction by schools of school designed short courses.

Students commencing their post primary experience in September 2017 will under the current plans be taking the fully implemented new Programme.

And, colleagues, as if all of this was not enough Post-Primary schools will be required from September 2014 to participate in the testing of students in second year. The tests will be in English reading and Mathematics in all schools and, additionally, in Irish medium schools – Gaelscoileanna and scoileanna Gaetachta there will be a test in Irish reading.

Again, Delegates, and not to labour the point, PDA has no objection in principle nor in general to the most of the proposed reforms (I point you to our newsletter article on this matter where Vice-President Mary Friel articulates some of PDA views on this reform not least of which is the evident need to reform the Leaving Certificate examination), but as I stated earlier, whereas, PDA agrees with the WHY for reform, what of the HOW and what of the WHO?

Importantly, it must be noted that the current system is working quite well and that any change is discretionary. We, PDA, will be advocating a stay on these reforms pending the provision of adequate resources to implement them, including the restoration of an ample middle management structure.

Delegates, it is both timely and most topical that we have the opportunity to discuss imminent reforms which will undoubtedly impact on our working conditions, as mentioned earlier, Anne Looney's presentation tomorrow promises to be most insightful and informative especially as the proposed reforms include school based assessment and evaluation.

### **School Self Evaluation**

The Programme for Government, 2011-2016 sets out specific targets in relation to self-evaluation and school improvement. Similarly, the National Strategy to improve Literacy and Numeracy, Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life requires

“....all schools to engage in robust self-evaluation and put in place a three-year school improvement plan which includes specific targets for the promotion and improvement of literacy and numeracy”.

The DES issued draft proposals in respect of School Self Evaluation in January 2012. If these proposals were to be implemented fully they would have had serious implications for the working conditions of Principals, Deputies and Teachers at a time when schools and colleges are already at near breaking point. PDA has represented this view at every opportunity with TUI, IVEA and DES. Indeed, such is the current

rate of change that IVEA warned that there is now a risk of “innovation fatigue”. (In your Conference Booklet, and worth noting, PDA secretary, Joe Carolan gives a detailed account of the various meetings PDA attended during the year)

During the past year quite a number of briefing sessions on SSE for school leaders were facilitated by PDST personnel around the country. Certain expectations were set out and indeed the feedback we in PDA received was that the expectations appeared to be onerous in the extreme.

It is a positive then that the inspectorate, working in conjunction with the pilot schools and taking on board representations from PDA/TUI saw the need to revise the guidelines, particularly with a view towards making SSE a manageable process for schools.

This revision, delegates, is I believe of paramount significance given the current climate of depleted middle management structures in many schools and the already comprehensive range of initiatives ongoing or about to launch in schools nationwide.

As we meet I can tell you, reiterating what Deirdre Mathews said this morning, that the new guidelines, are about to make their way to schools

if they have not already arrived and all schools must have their first school improvement plan in place by June 2013.

Delegates, our schools have varying contexts, a one-size fits-all approach is neither practical,manageable or implementable. Therefore, I believe it critically important that the guidelines take account of the diverse school realities which exist in our sector. Again, Deirdre Mathews, earlier today, offered some reassurance in this regard but it is vital that such an approach is taken in reality as inspectors visit and interact with schools.

Over the coming academic year Inspectors will be visiting all post-primary schools in the context of supporting schools around SSE. This is a welcome departure whereby inspectors will be operating in an advisory capacity as opposed to an evaluative one.

You may already have received communication regarding briefing sessions for School Leaders by PDST to further flesh out the new guidelines. I am aware that in some regions these sessions are taking place today which was an unfortunate clash but steps were taken earlier this week to facilitate delegates attending alternative centres.

## **Further Education – SOLAS-Education Training Boards (ETB)**

I will move on now to the Further education area. In his book on *‘Irish Education – history and structure’*, Professor John Coolahan refers to 2 landmark dates, namely the establishment of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction in 1899, and the Vocational Education Act 1930. The year 2012, I believe, with the enactment of the ETB legislation will add a third and most significant landmark for the VEC sector.

Originally 38 VECs were established by the Vocational Education Act 1930. Following a process of rationalisation in the 1990s, which merged a number of county VECs with their town counterparts, this number was reduced to 33.

*“The Education and Training Boards Bill”* provides for the aggregation of these 33 VECs into 16 ETBs.

The impending SOLAS (Séirbhísí Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna), legislation will provide for the dissolution of FÁS and the establishment of SOLAS as a new statutory authority to oversee the Further Education and Training sector.

As legislation is enacted, phasing arrangement will emerge around the incorporation of the 16 FÁS training centres along with the 800, or so, FÁS staff into the 16 ETBs.

Add, delegates, to this merger of two distinct cultures the further changes which will see existing awarding bodies ,FETAC, HETAC, NQAI, and IUQB amalgamate into a single Qualifications and Quality Assurance Agency Ireland or the QQAAI – taking all that in to consideration it will not surprise us tomorrow, when Prof. Coolahan addresses conference, if he refers to this latest transformation of the sector as possibly the greatest, most far-reaching change of all.

Certainly, PDA recognises the implications and ramifications of such a transformative change for our FE sector and will continue to articulate the concerns of members in these matters.

There are currently some major challenges facing the FE sector for example the €200 PLC levy is causing major headaches because many students cannot afford to pay it. This in turn creates difficulties for colleges in collecting it and increases the burden of administration. Not only that, but if a student enrolls and he/she does not pay the levy, the amount owing is still deducted from the school's capitation.

Furthermore, many students having accepted places on courses are deferring or opting out as they cannot afford to remain in education.

The primary reason for this is the revised eligibility criteria for grant assistance – to avail of the full grant a student must live 30+ miles from the college, it used to be 15 miles.

It is also increasingly more difficult to get additional supports e.g. Back to Education Allowances. And while benefits are reducing part time jobs are not as readily available.

Albeit, for the reasons stated, that student numbers have reduced, some colleges are still carrying a significant amount of students above their cap. PDA has advised the DES, TUI and IVEA that any further upward adjustment of the PTR will have even more serious implications for FE colleges as more applicants will be denied access to education.

Again, colleagues, it strikes me as bizarre that at a time of economic crisis the government of the day persists with policies which to my mind are counterproductive – should not every effort be made to incentivise a return to education rather than adding to the live register?

Another concern for our FE sector is the uncertainty surrounding the future and how the training culture of FAS will sit with the broader education culture of the FE Colleges. Much remains to be seen and PDA will endeavour at every opportunity to represent our members' concerns.

## **Teacher Education – Newly Qualified Teachers (NQT's)**

Indeed, delegates, the economics of the situation is of grave concern to PDA - in particular the issue of pay, and especially so for newly qualified teachers (NQT's). The perception out there that teachers have a comfortable, secure job is misguided and misinformed, teachers are no longer well paid!

According to CSO figures the average industrial wage is now €41,806. Across all sectors the average wage is €35,767. A teacher recruited this year and on full hours is on a starting salary of €27,814 which is considerably lower than the national average and is €11,000 less than a teacher recruited in 2010, representing a cut of @30%. The significant reduction is the result, in part, of the suspension of allowances. Allowances are an integral part of salaries reflecting additional skills and further qualifications. The cut in allowances coupled with the 10% government cut last year demeans new teachers and erodes goodwill.

The latest figures from TUI indicate that 25% of its memberships are on part-time contracts. This current lack of opportunity whereby new entrants are working on temporary contracts or dependant on substitution work has the effect of pushing teachers towards alternative careers or emigration to classrooms in other jurisdictions.

Reduced salaries for teachers, reduced hours, reduced pensions combine to make teaching less attractive for new entrants. A direct consequence of the recruitment moratorium in the public service and of great concern to PDA is the casualisation of the teaching profession. In this regard teaching differs from most other public service appointments, a teacher may only be awarded a contract for a few hours, whereas, for example, a Garda is on full pay when he/she graduates.

This, colleagues, is the reality of the situation, the maximum salary is €28,700 with no allowances for new beneficiaries, the vast majority of NQT's are on part-time contracts, many on 14-15 hour class contact, and on gross earnings of about €20,000 with no certainty of tenure- it is time to dispel the myth of a permanent, pensionable job and call it as it is – it is disheartening, it is discouraging and it is distressing to think that new entrants to the profession are so poorly remunerated. Add to that the new requirement of an additional year's training. International research shows that attracting high calibre graduates to the teaching profession is critical to the quality of the education system, I often wonder if the Departments of Education and Finance pay any heed at all to documented best practices!

PDA is extremely concerned that the current two tier pay scale will act as a disincentive for prospective graduates to the profession. We will

continue to highlight this inequity at a time when the government persistently defends its position to honour the exceedingly high salaries and pensions of those who allegedly precipitated the crisis while our young teachers struggle to pay the rent!

### **Dismantlement of Middle Management**

Schools too are suffering needlessly. The dismantling of middle management and the lack of promotional opportunities in the profession is of major concern to PDA.

The limited alleviation and the suspension of allowances pending the completion of the review of public services allowances continues to cripple schools. According to circular 03/2012 and the DES letter of 29th August – schools can apply for limited alleviation when the number of Assistant Principals is at least 2 below the alleviation threshold !! –

Delegates, this is clearly unsustainable in the short term! The revised schedule of posts leaves schools with only a fraction of the support they previously had, and now, even if a school is short one Assistant Principal, the school cannot even seek the alleviation, teachers have been appointed to posts but are denied pay, Principals and Deputies are fire fighting. Time for leadership, time for the promotion of learning, time for networking, time! there is no time in the present climate. PDA,

through TUI, will be seeking an immediate meeting with the DES to address this situation. We continue to press for a review of the revised structures for Posts of Responsibility and the restoration of middle management structures in our schools.

## **Conclusion**

Before I finish there are some people I wish to thank. Firstly, Area 8 conference organising committee which has been meticulous in its preparations during the last year.

I'm sure you'll concur that the conference venue, here at the foot of Ben Bulbin, with its spectacular scenery, was an excellent choice of location. It was here, in Sligo, as you know, that the landscape of mystery and beauty stirred Yeats' imagination. I hope that, we too, will be inspired by the conference speakers, all three of whom are esteemed specialists in education, and who, I am confident, will touch a cord with our most recent lived experiences. Deirdre Mathews' insightful presentation on the topic of school self-evaluation earlier today has set the tone for informative thought-provoking presentations and practical hands-on workshops.

Secondly, to all our TUI colleagues – newly elected President Gerry Craughwell and his predecessor Bernie Ruane; General Secretary John Mac Gabhann and former General Secretary, Peter McMenamin and all at TUI head office – for their continued support, advice and assistance to PDA, I thank you. Sincere thanks also to Michael Moriarty and his colleagues in the IVEA.

I also want to express my gratitude to recently retired members of PDA national executive - Matt Power, Deirdre Hanamy, Tomás MacPhaidín and of course Michael Daly former PDA President who retired on 29<sup>th</sup> February last.

Finally, to PDA National Executive, and its officers Gerry, Joe, Kevin, and Mary – for your encouragement and support I am very grateful, it is indeed a privilege to work with you and with such a diligent, committed executive.

Mar fhocal scoirr, undoubtedly, we are operating in times of unprecedented change. However, despite the enormity of the challenge facing us I can say to you today that we are resilient, innovative, we know how to improvise and manage, and we will not shy away from adversity!

As it is so aptly expressed in Irish – *‘Is ar scáth a chéile a mhaireann na daoine’*, colleagues, friends, we will, with each other’s support, we will work through these harsh times to find ourselves in a better place.

Go mbéarfaimid beo ag an am seo arís. Go raibh míle maith agaibh.