



ADDRESS OF THE ACTING PRESIDENT OF P.D.A.
MR. ADRIAN POWER
ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2016
CARLTON SHEARWATER, BALLINASLOE
AREAS (LAOIS/OFFALY, WESTMEATH/LONGFORD)

Presidents Address 2016

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 gContae na Gaillimhe.

It is my great honour to welcome you all to the 47th annual conference of the Principals and Deputy Principal's Association here in the Carlton Shearwater hotel in Ballinasloe. This year's conference was organised by Laois Offaly and Longford Westmeath areas and before I go any further I would like to thank the organising committee for the excellent job they have done and the many months of hard work that they have put in behind the scenes, without which conference could not happen. I would like to thank the executive for their hard work and support, and the TUI for their advice and support over the past year.

I would also like to take this opportunity to, mention the sad passing of Martin Wallace, PDA President from 2003 -2006. Martin was a retired Principal of Castletroy College, Limerick, who made a great contribution to this organisation.

When I was trying to write this address, I decided on an obvious course of action. Plagiarism. I figured that what needs to be said in a forum like this, has probably been said before by people who perhaps know a lot more than I do.

During my attempts to cheat by reading over previous Presidents' addresses, I realised that the problems we are facing now, as principals and deputy principals, are much the same as they have been for many years. What has changed, however, is the time available to us to adequately deal with these problems - the resources we have at our disposal to help run our schools and the personnel we have to support us in our work in the form of post holders.

What has also changed is the level of expectation of what we can do. Expectations from parents, students, DES, inspectorate, and the list goes on. There is not one person in this room who has not had to take on many extra duties because of the non-filling of posts of responsibility as they became vacant. For all of

these things, we are at the mercy of the Department of Education and Skills, Department of Expenditure and Public Reform and the government.

Through this forum, the PDA, we have a voice in the department and have the opportunity to meet with department officials to put across our point of view. It is easy to say that the Department is not listening and that we are wasting our time. I do not believe that this is true.

I believe the DES wants schools to be properly resourced and I know that they have been made aware of many of the problems and issues we face. It is our role to make sure, when they do have more resources to spread around, that we have a seat at the table and can have a say in how those resources are allocated. The PDA is a wonderful forum to have available to represent us. Due to the efforts of the executive officers over the last number of years, we are now invited to consultation meetings on current educational issues by various educational partners.

It is also important to point out that, as a sub-committee of the TUI, we have direct access to TUI General Secretaries and we avail of this opportunity to highlight issues of concern to principals and deputy principals. The TUI holds a strong consultative position with the DES in most initiatives and developments that affect our schools and our teachers.

As principals and deputy principals, we have specific needs that may not always tally with the needs of the majority of TUI members and we could sometimes be forgotten in the grand scheme of things. However, our status as a subcommittee of the TUI executive, means that we have a direct line of contact with its officers, and over the last number of years they have, on many occasions, sought our input on various issues.

Meetings with the TUI occur on an ongoing basis where concerns brought up by PDA members, through area reps, are addressed. Some of these happen at our executive meetings where we have representation from a TUI Liaison Officer and a

TUI Assistant General Secretary. At other times, we have formal meetings with TUI officials where specific items are discussed and motions that are passed at our congress are formally handed on to the TUI, which in turn informs their discussions with the DES. On that note I'd like to thank Colm Kelly for his attendance and contributions at our meetings. I would also like to extend a special thanks to Denis Magner, who has retired from his role as TUI Liaison Officer, for his many years of service and support of the PDA. I would like to wish him well in his new role on the teaching council. Furthermore, may I welcome Leonard O'Donnell as our new TUI Liaison Officer and look forward to working with him in the future.

PDA meetings with the DES have taken place regularly in recent years. These provide us, as PDA members, with a direct voice to the Department. The substantive issue at our last meeting was the need to review the ex-quota deputy principal structures. The DES engaged very positively with the PDA, seeking our opinion on the proposed revisions, which in the subsequent two budgets

gave some much needed relief to principals and deputies in many schools.

Last month, we took part in the NCSE Consultation forum. While it was called a review of the current SNA system in schools, I am sure that it will inform part of the review process for the provision of special needs support. Our agenda is, of course, to make sure that current provision is not reduced and that further provision will be given to the area of mental health. These views were put forward strongly.

Recent developments suggest that we are moving into an era where we are going to see some change for the better. It seems certain that the embargo on posts of responsibility is going to be lifted in September 2018. The posts are to be called Assistant Principal 1 and Assistant Principal 2. The seniority element will be eliminated and the selection interviews will be competence based. While we might have preferred a completely revised promotional structure, the filling of vacant posts will go a long

way towards alleviating some of the pressures on principals and deputy principals.

At last year's conference, and indeed at meetings throughout the last year, the deepening problem of schools being able to provide places for PME students was much to the fore of our concerns. Now, there is a mechanism by which PME students can do substitution work, gain valuable experience and help to alleviate staffing and substitution problems in our schools. Common sense has prevailed, and this is to be welcomed.

Another issue that caused major concerns in all schools since September has been Garda vetting. Since the guidelines have changed, schools have struggled to fill positions in a timely manner. Many teachers and SNAs have lost out on potential earnings because of it. A new year is busy enough without interviewing and hiring staff, that you then need to provide cover

for, because they are unable to start due to vetting delays. We need to ensure that this issue is resolved as a matter of urgency.

As touched upon earlier, the NCSE is bringing in a new model for profiling schools for special needs. It has been suggested that schools will be given an overall allocation based on school profiling and social context. The suggestion then is that the principal would be able to decide on the allocation given to each student.

This could add to our workload and there is a danger that many schools could lose out. The implementation date for this new system looks like it will be September 2017. It is very important once again that we do not end up with a greater workload as a result of the DES changing procedures. While we have all taken on extra duties for the good of our schools, our students and our teachers, every time we accept even a small new responsibility, it is just adding to a multitude of other small duties. We have reached a tipping point. We must be resolute and have TUI

backing in resisting additional duties and responsibilities. We must say no to any extra workload.

The revised Junior Cycle is here with most of our students having already taken part in the Classroom Based Assessment in English. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that the majority of students really benefitted from and enjoyed the experience and as such meaningful change is to be applauded, supported and embraced.

Forty minutes less class contact time, professional time has been secured for all teachers to allow for the extra administration and planning associated with the Junior Cycle. There is also a weekly allowance of management hours for a staff member to do the extra administration work associated with the continuous assessment aspect of the Junior Cycle. This is something that the PDA lobbied hard for.

It is now up to us to ensure that we do not take up any extra duties arising from the revised Junior Cycle. At present we are talking about a few subjects, but what might these duties look like in 2022, when all subjects have come on stream? We must ensure that whatever changes arise due to revised programmes or new educational initiatives, they must be adequately resourced, and we must ensure that no extra work lands on our desks.

Many PDA principals are deeply concerned about the inadequate resourcing of the Further Education and Training sector. The role of the Department of social protection in terms of direct referral of learners to private or contracted providers is a huge concern. The number of direct referrals to FE colleges is falling despite local protocol meetings in each ETB. Inflexibility around back to education allowances and other payments means learners must leave courses after registering. Each ETB needs to have greater autonomy in terms of programme choice.

Also, a greater degree and availability of CPD for FE staff needs to be organised in local centres of education.

Another area of concern is the administrative burden of the FARR reporting system. This system has an excessive focus on the degree of outcomes and employability without factoring in a learner's educational progression and personal development. Restrictions in terms of post of responsibilities over the past 5 to 7 years, along with these new requirements has led to an unsustainable workload for FE principals and those in mixed settings.

Dual reporting was brought in this year for October returns. October returns must now be sent for schools with mixed settings to both the DES & SOLAS. Inadequate training was provided for this and it needed to be implemented over a very short period. Not only that, we were also told at the training that the system used this year will not be used again. There will be a

different system to use next year. The PDA will be watching this sector very closely and will do the best they can to protect it and to protect the working conditions of its principals and deputy principals.

Another new development over the last year is the PDA website. Past President, Brian O'Maoilchiaráin, deserves great credit as he has put a huge effort into setting up this website. We now have a website that has not only the basic information about the PDA as an association, but also has links to useful sites and up to date information relevant to our sector. We would very much hope that it will become a quick reference resource for all Principals and deputy principals. This website is regularly updated and we would very much welcome any suggestions you may have to ensure it is meeting your needs. WWW.PDA.ie will get you there.

For those of you on Facebook, we have a Facebook page that will be updated with notifications as appropriate. We also have a

twitter feed. Details of these resources and how to connect to them will be E-mailed to members after the conference.

We are at present, updating our database of members. Over the last 10 years, there has been a massive turnover of principals and deputy principals. Our database, when fully up to date, will allow us to personalise correspondence and target our membership more effectively. It will allow us to disseminate information and survey members to give us more reliable data and statistics that we can further use to support you, PDA members.

Due to the nature of our job, where we are often firefighting, and the urgent overtakes the important, we may neglect to find the time to use technology to its full capacity. Let's use our website to quickly reference information that is useful to us. I urge everyone here to contact the officers with suggestions about what you would like to see on the website. If you are looking for something and it is not there, please tell us and we can make it

available for everyone. To be a member of an organisation is to have your voice heard.

Being principal or deputy principal can, at times, be a lonely position. The PDA, at both local and national level, offers a platform to discuss issues, air problems and discover solutions.

In conclusion, I would like to make reference to the theme of our conference, “Reflection and Renewal”. We are coming out of a long number of very difficult years with scant resources, both monetary and staffing. At the same time, we have been expected to take on new administrative and educational challenges. We need to take time to reflect on all that has passed. We need to decide what we feel is really important to our schools and our students. At a time when “wellbeing” is coming to centre stage for our students, it is vitally important that the “wellbeing” of principals and deputy principals is addressed. We also need to look at who we are as an organisation, and what we want to get from it. Sometimes we need to take a step back

from the urgent to take stock of where we are, what we stand for and what is really important. It is only through this kind of reflection does renewal come.

Thank you.