

Northern Committee Report

154th Annual Conference Enniskillen, 4-5 March 2022

Northern Office

Vere Foster House
23-24 College Gardens
Belfast
BT9 6BS

Oifig an Tuaiscirt

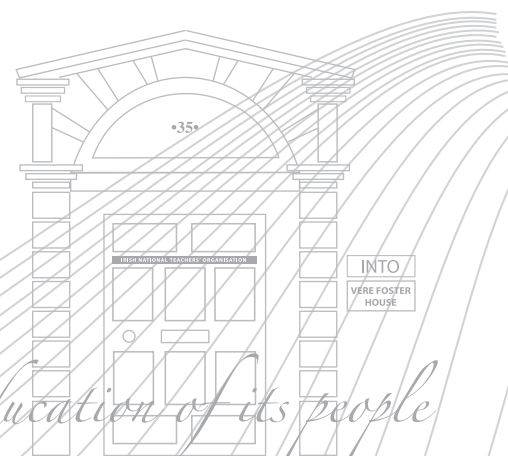
Arás Vere Foster
23-24 Gairdíní an Choláiste
Béal Feirste
BT9 6BS

Phone/Fón: (028) 90381455

Fax: (028) 90662803

Email: infoni@into.ie

Web: www.into.ie/ni



A nation's greatness depends upon the education of its people



154th Annual Congress

Contents

Section 1	Salaries and Conditions of Service	5
Section 2	Pensions	15
Section 3	Education	27
Section 4	General Teaching Council NI (GTCNI) Report	39
Section 5	Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) Report	41
Section 6	Internal	47
Section 7	Northern Conference Resolutions 2021	59

s **Enniskillen 4 – 5 March 2022**

Table of attendance at Northern Committee meetings

The total number of meetings held was 13.

Name	Meetings attended
Seamus Hanna	11
Dorothy McGinley	10
Patrick McAllister	13
Michelle McCrystal	12
Siobhán McElhinney	13
John Kelly	9
Caroline McCarthy	13
Geraldine McGowan	13
Caoimhín MacColaim	12
Marty Lavery	13
Noreen Kelly	11
Kevin Daly	7
Marie O'Shea	13
Moira O'Kane	13
Annmarie Conway	13
Gerry Murphy	13
Mark McTaggart	12
Nuala O'Donnell	11
Tommy McGlone	12
Paul Groogan	6
Caroline McCarthy	13
Rachel Poland	12

Salaries and Conditions of Service

1.1 Teachers' salaries and conditions of service

Teachers' salaries and conditions of service in Northern Ireland are determined by the Teachers' Negotiating Committee (TNC) between two parties – management side and teachers' side. Up until February 2022, management side consisted of the Education Authority, CCMS, NICIE, Governing Bodies Association (GBA), Comhairle Na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG) and the Department of Education (DE).

The Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC) is the teachers' side of the TNC. NITC consists of the five recognised teachers' unions, INTO, NEU, NAHT, NASUWT and the UTU.

Discussions continued, mainly via Zoom, in relation to the reconstitution of the TNC for 2021/22. After the pay agreement of 2020, much of the previous TNC was simply re-established, however, one new aspect of a Joint Secretaries' Forum was agreed. This new group is effectively replacing the Joint Working Party (JWP). Each side of the new committee has appointed joint secretaries. The initial hope that the joint secretaries will meet on a monthly basis to progress the strategic agenda and programme of work of the TNC and to establish sub-groups and working parties, where necessary, to both update and establish new policies and procedures has, by and large, been realised. The joint secretaries, Gerry Murphy, INTO and Justin McCamphill, NAS/UWT, have a shared responsibility to effectively support the work of the TNC and its sub-committees. It has already established joint working groups and commissioned research and investigations in relation to updating TNC papers.

The 'ICTU 2009' mediated agreement for the NITC continues to provide a basis for the operation of the negotiating arrangements. This agreement between the five constituent unions provided for a revised NITC Constitution with decision making for the two-year period from April 2009 to April 2011 being on a consensual basis of the five NITC Interests. It was agreed that after April 2011, decision making within the NITC will be on the basis of agreement of four out of five of the teacher unions. In 2022 this agreement remains in place.

ICTU agreement (extract)

"Having reflected on the discussions held during the above meeting I propose that the following clauses are adopted by all constituent members of the NITC in a spirit of solidarity and unity so necessary for meeting the challenges ahead in the current economic environment and in conformity with the NITC Constitution:

1. All NITC constituents accept fully that the TNC is the sole negotiating forum for teachers in Northern Ireland.
2. Section 10 of the NITC Constitution sets out the procedure for constituents wishing to submit claims and as this Constitution has been accepted by all concerned then the agreed procedure MUST be adhered to.
3. Accepting the above any current industrial action should be suspended. The issue at the centre of this industrial action shall be pursued through the agreed procedures.
4. On the matter of issues other than terms and conditions of employment for teachers such as policy implications it is recommended that all constituents participate in the Strategic Forum initiative on the basis of the preamble to these clauses.

5. The inter-trade union transfer of members is being processed by apparently all constituents in contravention of paragraph 46 of the ICTU Constitution. As this article is designed to promote harmonious relations between unions, I recommend all constituents implement forthwith.
6. Nothing in the above negates the autonomy of any constituent union to carry out its activities as endorsed by its membership. However, such action should only be engaged in following exhaustion of the procedures as contained in the NITC.

1.2 **Negotiating arrangements 2020/21**

The INTO is represented at the meetings of the TNC by Gerry Murphy, Northern Secretary and Tommy McGlone, Senior Official. Work undertaken through joint working party subgroups is also carried out during the year and INTO was represented by the relevant official or Northern Committee representatives.

During the past year, monthly meetings of the Joint Working Party (JWP) has been superseded by the joint secretaries forum which have happened both face-to-face and via online platforms. While normally these meetings are primarily focused on the management and progression of agreed agenda items and claims, much of the business since the last Northern Committee report has been taken up with Covid-19 regulations and pay negotiations. Substantive work on a number of issues was carried out by NITC but has not been fully progressed to a conclusion through the joint secretaries.

The primary focus, outside of pay negotiations, was based on a number of issues including:

- NISTR – employment of substitute teachers.
- Covid-19 related issues.
- EA contracts.
- TNC reconstitution/normalisation of negotiating machinery through new joint secretaries group.
- Upfront asks/workload, Joint Consultative committees Pilot (JCCs) and new initiatives.
- Transition group: nine review areas.
- Family-friendly contract variations and attendance procedures.
- Teacher redeployment.

Progress was made in some areas most notably the TNC reconstitution through a new Joint Secretaries Forum which has, since its first meeting in November 2020, now met face-to-face on many occasions. A programme of work has been firmly established which has resulted in the ongoing reviews of four family-friendly TNCs and the Teacher Attendance procedure. The Secretaries' Forum is attended on behalf of the INTO by Gerry Murphy and the initial review groups by Caroline McCarthy and Tommy McGlone. This work is ongoing.

The group tasked with the Upfront Asks, which as part of the pay negotiations, is known as the Transition Group and managed the transition from industrial action short of strike. This group primarily looked at the upfront asks which focused on three areas: workload (directed time budgets), Joint Consultative Committees (JCCs) and new initiatives. The latter two have their terms of reference agreed and are at the first stage of roll-out. Directed time budgets have returned to the agenda of the transition group after management side information was challenged by the INTO. A draft pilot scheme of 12 schools has been established to assess the feasibility of JCCs in supporting positive industrial relations.

Other issues, inter alia, NISTR, Cycle to Work, Teacher Health and Wellbeing (THAW) and Parental Complaints largely remain ongoing. The INTO is hopeful of progress especially as NISTR and THAW are included within the nine reviews areas. NITC remains of the opinion that the parental

complaints procedure is unfair and needs to be amended.

From the INTO's perspective much of the business of the 2021/22 academic year, to this point, has again been overshadowed by Covid-19 and the emerging variants, including Omicron. In February 2021, the NITC voted in favour of accepting the pay award of 2% for 2019/20 and 2% for 2020/21. This was mostly paid to all eligible teachers during the summer of 2021.

The Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC), in pursuance of its objective to improve the terms and conditions of its members in schools and colleges in Northern Ireland, in April 2021 agreed to submit a claim a 6% uplift on all pay and allowances, including the leadership scale.

When Covid-19 arrived at schools and the wider society in March 2020, it resulted in schools temporarily closing. Many teachers had to quickly adapt to a new reality of teaching remotely from home. Updated guidance has been forthcoming from the INTO in respect to all aspects of the changing situation.

1.3 Teachers' pay

In addition to incremental progression within salary scales, which for teachers is payable by contractual entitlement, teacher salary scale points have been revised as follows:

With effect from 1 September 2019:

- A 2% cost of living pay award will be paid to all teachers; and
- Teaching allowances will be increased by 2%.
- With effect from 1 September 2020:
- A further 2% cost of living pay award will be paid to all teachers; and
- Teaching allowances will be increased by 2%.

Both of these uplifts will be backdated, and a working example has been made available in a joint statement which will be sent to all teaching staff via C2K.

The Transition Group, which was tasked with providing a 'slow dismount' from the industrial action (ended June 2019), was tasked with easing teachers back to life without industrial action.

As part of that pay agreement all teachers were to be given a directed time budget. This was tasked to the Transition Group along with overseeing a pilot for joint consultation committees and an agreed formula in respect of the introduction of DE/EA new initiatives. Both management and the INTO provided training via webinars around drawing up a time budget. The INTO's webinar remains on the website.

1.4 Review in nine key areas

These key areas are to be either TNC led or management side lead with three reviews being tasked to DE specifically to lead. Kevin Daly was appointed by NITC as teachers' side lead on the project team tasked with coordinating the reviews. The nine ongoing reviews, in no particular order, are:

1) Review of employment model of teachers

This is a TNC led review and management side has taken the lead in this review. Tony Gallagher agreed to assist the group with further research, and he presented on the Education Employment Models in Estonia, Finland, Alberta (Canada), Singapore and New Zealand.

The group has discussed the merits of delegated autonomy to schools as opposed to centrally held control. They have reviewed the most significant parts of the terms of reference focussing on the areas to be considered and potential outcomes. The group recognise that if there

is to be a significant proposed change to the employing authority model it will require legislative change.

The working group has produced an options paper which will be used to consider the range of options for change and assess viability, cost/savings, merits, benefits, disadvantages, and risks. Terms of reference has been agreed and a range of employment model options collated and are under consideration.

2) Review of the use of temporary and substitute teachers

Management side have taken the lead in this review. A call of tender to supply the NISTR replacement system is expected to go live from September 2022.

The review group has been involved in the NISTR Tender Group assisting in development of the specifications for this contract and will engage again at design stage. The discussions have identified additional areas that the review group will now consider for possible inclusion in the planned guidance for schools on effective engagement of supply teachers for example, need for minimum cancellation periods and definition of a half day. The guidance will also include best practice examples around good induction which are being sourced.

The group has developed a survey to issue to all teachers on NISTR which aims to improve understanding of the supply workforce capacity in terms of how often they are available to work and why they are registered on NISTR.

The group has considered a draft outline options paper. Work is underway to supplement the evidence within the paper for example through the survey results and with new data from the NISTR via eTeach.

3) Review of workload agreement

A joint management/NITC review examining the 2011 Workload Agreement. This is a TNC led review and the trade union side, chaired by Kevin Daly, INTO, has taken the lead in this review. The group have reached agreement on potential amendments to the Workload Agreement TNC 2011/8 and have draft Teachers' Terms and Conditions.

There has also been discussion around potential development of software to support improvement of effective Directed Time Budgets (DTB). This idea has been delivered by New Education Union (NEU) to Trade Union Side.

The group continue to work toward development of a dedicated webpage related to the Workload Agreement with associated resources and documentation for ease of access and use, and an agreed Directed Time Budget 'checklist' example and DTB pro-forma for inclusion in Workload Agreement. It is likely to be recommended by this group that such a webpage should ultimately act as a central point for all documentation pertaining to all teachers' terms and conditions of employment similar to the provision of same in neighbouring jurisdictions (for example the burgundy book in England).

The proposed amendments to the Workload Agreement will be put to Oversight Group (OG) for consideration along with proposals around consistent application and regular training in the provisions of the Workload Agreement.

The working group are also reviewing potential 'scaffolding' arrangements that may be put in place to support the TNC agreement and to maintain reasonable workloads and a decent work/life balance.

4) Review of workload impact on school leaders

This is to examine current practices and the impact on the workload of principals and vice-principals. It is a TNC directed review and the trade union side will take the lead in this review.

The group have had four scoping group sessions with representative practitioners, facilitated by Dr Noel Purdy and the group gathered written submissions from trade unions and principal locality groups. A first draft of the report has been written and submitted to the working group. A second draft has been written to include additional submissions. The working group have met on each section of the draft for further detailed scrutiny, discussion and agreement.

The working group have discussed the workload problems and their causes and impact. The amendments from the working group will be returned to the writeup lead for redrafting.

When a final draft has been agreed, Dr Noel Purdy will be invited to review and write a foreword.

It is intended that this next phase of the review will focus on making recommendations around dealing with the workload issues that will be highlighted in the report and to monitor the implementation of any agreements arising from this work stream.

5) Review of workload associated with Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision

This review is a DE led review of the end-to-end administrative processes associated with special educational needs (SEN) provision and in particular the statementing process. This will be led by DE in collaboration with trade union side and will have practitioner involvement. The working group comprises 10 members, including representatives from each of the five recognised unions, EA, DE and CCMS. Arrangements are in place for the working group to engage quarterly with DE and EA nominated officials to receive updates on programmes for change and discuss workload implications.

The initial focus has been on agreeing a developed Terms of Reference (ToR) following receipt of the NITC paper which set out a detailed list of issues which impact on workload in supporting pupils with SEN in schools.

It is expected that the working group divides into sub-groups to identify issues and proposed solutions within each of the areas to be considered and report back to the main working group monthly with updates on progress.

The group hope to have a full report for presentation to the oversight group by September 2022.

6) Review of accountability framework

This is a DE led review into the accountability and governance within the education sector and will be led by a core working group chaired by DE. Membership includes up to five MS representatives and up to five TU representatives.

The review will seek to identify where any of the processes within the Accountability Framework create excessive workload and provide recommendations for reducing this without losing quality. The key focus will be on school support, development, improvement and inspection.

Given the broad scope of this review, to maintain focus and manageability, it has been necessary to determine a discrete, priority number of issues to be considered. It was previously agreed that it would be helpful to focus the review around specific areas that appeared to be drivers of excessive workloads: school improvement, development, support and inspection.

- It is expected that the review might have the potential to achieve the following outcomes:
- Recommendations around an enhanced model for teacher learning and development that ensures TPL is a continuous, iterative process and consideration given to the need for a potential system for effective recording throughout a career.
 - A reduction in workload associated with the inspection process with clear guidance around what is and what is not required.
 - A clear picture around school improvement in respect of the roles and responsibilities and signposting for help and support.
 - Proposals for a revised, streamlined School Development Planning process with examples of good models provided in some form of desk-aid type guidance.
 - Proposals for a system that ensures effective, periodic review of School Development Plans that provides constructive feedback at a high level.
 - Proposals around how performance measures encourage improvement and are used to set targets/ensuring effective accountability at pupil, school and system level and impact on workload.
 - Development of an 'accountability framework user guide'.

7) Review of consultation arrangements

With the stated aim of promoting positive industrial relations, this joint management/NITC review will develop consultative arrangements in schools. This is a TNC led review and management side will take the lead in this review and will aim to set out the progress and key changes made in industrial relations since the agreement was reached in April 2020 and the ending of the industrial action including:

- The review of the TNC Constitution.
- The establishment of a Joint Secretaries Forum.
- The arrangements in place to ensure early consultation between management and teaching unions in respect of any new policies or proposals for change that may impact on teacher workloads (work has commenced on a pilot of joint consultative committees within schools).
- The establishment of the joint working groups to address the nine identified areas in the Agreement.
- Commencement of joint reviews of the programme of policy and procedures reviews.

Management side and NITC will jointly consider:

- The principles of consultation with an agreed understanding of what consultation means.
- Consultation machinery covering engagement with NITC on initiatives which potentially impact on teacher workload.
- The practical arrangements for establishing consultative arrangements in schools – local arrangements.
- The manageability of proposed arrangements both central and local.
- Training support for management and trade union participants in the consultative process.

8) Review of Statutory Assessment at key stages 1, 2 and 3

This DE led group, while working closely with NITC, will make policy recommendations regarding the purpose, nature and design of key stage assessment in Northern Ireland. The group will hope to benchmark against best practice and produce proposals and recommendations to support the development of fit for purpose arrangements for key stage assessment. This will be led by DE in collaboration with trade union side and will have practitioner involvement.

9) Review of initiatives to promote and support teacher health and wellbeing

A joint management/NITC review to promote teacher health and well-being. This is a TNC led review and the trade union side will take the lead in this review, chaired by Nuala O'Donnell, INTO. The group will review existing potential support for teachers in their role so that they have access to help, advice and practical intervention which promotes health and wellbeing.

It is intended that there should be a review of existing support services for teachers in this area. The review will identify good practice and seek to make recommendations to address gaps in support provision.

The group will consider:

- The availability of existing support services to teachers and school leaders across all sectors.
- Gaps within the current provision of 'help, advice and practical intervention' in relation to health and wellbeing for teachers including principals and vice principals.
- Specific consideration of gaps in provision of support, advice and practical intervention around health and wellbeing linked to equality issues and the need for greater awareness and training in this area.
- Specific consideration of the teaching workforce profile in relation to health and wellbeing.
- Health and wellbeing challenges faced by teachers and school leaders in relation to challenging behaviours and complex needs.
- Support available to improve health and wellbeing of staff experiencing excessive workload.
- The need for a revised TNC Strategy in relation to Teacher Health and Wellbeing (THAW).

The group do hope to commission a survey of teachers' health and wellbeing to establish a baseline 'health profile' of the teaching workforce and obtain views on helpful supports, develop a database of evidence around the key issues by an agreed date and prepare a full review report for presentation to the oversight group by an agreed date.

1.5 Teachers' pay and conditions – other issues

Additionally, in relation to teachers' pay and conditions:

- Work experience visits: The INTO have advised its members that the new policy (2019) is totally unworkable and sees benefit in consulting with EA to highlight issues. Kevin Daly has taken the lead for the INTO in this regard. However, all work in this area has, due to Covid-19 been affected.
- Code of Conduct: This document is still within the consultation period, however, INTO members have been instructed not to sign the document that was delivered to schools.
- NISTR: Substitute teachers who have been booked on NISTR must not be treated any differently from their permanent colleagues in relation to issues that have arisen due to Covid-19. Substitute teachers were hit hardest during the school closures because of Covid-19. The INTO was also successful in securing a furlough-hardship payment for substitute teachers based on previous earnings.
- EA contracts – Meetings led by Assistant Northern Secretary, Mark McTaggart, have taken place with EA officials in regard to hybrid contracts, essential car use, permanency delays and SEN allowances.

An NITC sub-committee was established as follows:

Mark McTaggart (INTO)
Maxine Murphy-Higgins (NASUWT)
Alastair Donaghy (NEU)
Jacquie Reid (UTU)
Gerry Cameron (NAHT)

This group has been very successful in securing many permanent posts for EA employees.

Much of the normal work of the TNC/JWP had initially been interrupted because of the pay negotiations. This was a concern for NITC and was raised to management as being possibly detrimental to the advancement of teachers' terms and conditions.

Sara Long, the Chief Executive for Education has welcomed the idea of re-establishing the full TNC and so with the reconstitution of the TNC, measures are now in place to upgrade policies and procedures using the Joint Secretaries' Forum. The first two areas, as already noted, that have been agreed as being priority are in regard to the Attendance Procedure and the mix of family friendly policies.

Teachers' terms and conditions continues to be a feature of the negotiating arrangements. The INTO remains of the view that such a review should only commence when sufficient funding has been secured and an agreed process has been developed.

1.6 Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (Northern Ireland) 2016

The work of the NITC sub-committee to review this Act and provide guidance is ongoing. The members of the group were:

Justin McCamphill (NASUWT)
Paul Groogan (INTO)
Carney Cumper (UTU)
Gerry Cameron (NAHT)
Gordon White (NEU)

Objections to the introduction of the Act were raised again in January 2021 at NITC and it was agreed that the detail of the act was, among other things, bureaucratic and not conducive to teacher/parent relations.

While the review of TNC 2011/1 Teacher Health and Wellbeing Strategy (THAW) was finally completed in 2016, the revised and updated document still (2022) remains under consideration by management side. As previously noted, this document will be considered under the review of initiatives to promote and support teacher health and wellbeing.

Redundancies continues to be a subject of discussion at the negotiating machinery. Because of the Covid-19 crisis identification of potential redundancies has temporarily ceased.

As previously noted, all of the five NITC affiliated unions formally ended all of their individual industrial actions short of strike, however, in agreement with management side, DE's decision to defer new Assessment Arrangements was welcomed.

1.7 Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC)

NITC has the following representation from the recognised teachers' unions.

NEU	3
INTO	5
NAHT	1 (with one observer)
NASUWT	5
UTU	5
Total	19

1.8 INTO representation on NITC

INTO representatives on the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council in 2021/22 are:

Marie O'Shea (Chair)
 Siobhán McElhinney (Vice-Chair)
 Gerry Murphy
 Mark McTaggart
 Tommy McGlone

1.9 NITC officers

The NITC officers were re-elected in September 2021 and are:

Chair:	Gerry Murphy (INTO)
Vice Chair:	Jacque White (UTU)
Honorary Secretary:	Justin McCamphill (NAS/UWT)
Minutes Secretary:	Mark Langhammer (NEU)
Treasurer:	NAHT nominee (Graham Gault)

1.10 Teachers' Negotiating Committee (TNC)

Each NITC union has two representatives on the teachers' side of the TNC. The INTO representatives in 2017/18 were Gerry Murphy and Tommy McGlone.

NITC side of the TNC:

NEU:	Mark Langhammer, Susan Parlour.
INTO:	Gerry Murphy, Tommy McGlone (Mark McTaggart).
NAHT:	Helena Macormac (Graham Gault).
UTU:	Jacque White, Stephen McCord (Rebekka Gilpin).
NASUWT:	Justin McCamphill, Raymond Beggs (Annelies Taylor).

NITC Issues

DE Strategic Forum

The INTO continues to engage in the Strategic Forum to promote education partnership and planning. The INTO is represented at the forum by Gerry Murphy, Northern Secretary.

1.11 Education Authority (EA)

The Education and Library Boards (ELBs) were dissolved on 31 March 2015. The Education Authority was established under the Education Act Northern Ireland 2014 and became operational on 1 April 2015. EA is a non-departmental body sponsored by the Department of Education.

It employs over 39,000 people across Northern Ireland in a wide variety of roles. This includes teachers in controlled schools, school-based support staff and staff in administrative headquarters. EA remains responsible for all of the operational functions previously carried out by the five ELBs in accordance with the education orders. The Chief Executive, Sara Long and Director of Education, Michelle Corkey both remain in post.

1.12 Department of Education

The INTO held several meetings with departmental officials in the past year. In particular, the INTO raised a number of ongoing concerns including:

- Covid-19.
- Investing in education.
- The governance of schools.
- Teachers' pay.
- School inspections.
- Refreshing the teaching workforce.

1.13 Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI)

The Northern Ireland Teachers' Council's withdrawal from the previous regular termly meetings with the ETI, due to a lack of engagement by the ETI and the repeated side-stepping of the issues raised by the NITC, continues. The ETI maintain that they wish to resume these meetings and NITC are of the view that genuine engagement may be possible. Fustian Graham remains in the role of chief inspector. Because of a mix of issues including Covid-19, school inspections have not, at time of press, been carried out.

Pensions

2.1 Northern Ireland Teachers' Pension Scheme Pension Board (NITPSPB)

There were four NITPSPB meetings in 2021 (23 March, 9 June, 15 September and 8 December), all of which were conducted online, due to Covid-19 restrictions. Nuala O'Donnell, senior official, is a member representative on this body and is now in her second term of five years on the pension board which will end in 2023.

A new independent chairperson of the NITPS Pension Board was appointed in April 2021, Lindsay Todd, following the conclusion of Michael Burton's period of office.

For each meeting a quarterly report on performance and governance is produced to enable board members to monitor the administration and management of the Teachers' Pension scheme. Minutes of meetings are published on the Department of Education (DE) website.

Items discussed at the pension board meetings include:

Covid-19 contingency arrangements

Due to Covid 19, the Teachers' Pay and Pensions Team (TPPT) continued working in line with business continuity measures and was no longer fully staffed. A number of key staff worked remotely to take forward urgent and essential changes on teachers' pay and teachers' pensions databases.

Pension applications

338 applications for August retirement were received at 31 August 2021. Delays commencing this exercise were encountered due to a number of issues with the new IT system and processing applications was slower than in recent years, however 201 lump sum payments were processed for payment on 1 September 2021. All of the 338 August retirements were processed by the end of October 2021.

Quality of information

The board were informed that the quality of information received from some voluntary grammar schools continued to be a cause for concern. These should be received in TPPT by the seventh working day of the month. Any late returns may result in a financial penalty to the employer. The board were informed of a number of schools which made late returns in the period, including one hitting the three strikes rule for the second time. In this case, the chair of the board and the DE head of education workforce development contacted the school to inform them of the seriousness of the breach and the potential outcome of any future breaches.

The teacher's pension system project team will include a statement on the importance of timely payments with the new procedures for employer portals. Go-live of the portals has been postponed until early next year.

Risk register

A risk register is updated regularly to ensure that all risks to the teachers' pension scheme are identified, monitored and addressed in a timely manner.

Annual Benefit Statements (ABS)

The sixth ABS were due to be issued to all active members of the teachers' scheme in March 2021, however, due to ongoing issues with bulk processes the 2021 ABS exercise was delayed. In line with the *Public Service Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2014*, the Department has a legal statutory deadline of 31 August 2021 for issuing ABS. The DE updated their website and NI Direct to assure customers that they were working at full capacity to get the statements issued as soon as they could ahead of this deadline.

Out of an expected 25,396 statements, 17,711 (70%) were issued by 31 August 2021 and a further 2,854 statements were issued by Friday, 3 September 2021, taking the total to 20,565 (81%). Of the remaining 4,831, around 400 were processed by TPPT and issued week commencing 6 September 2021, the remaining cases were due to technical issues requiring input from the system provider.

By 22 October 2021, 22,887 out of a total of 25,709 ABS had been issued. Of the remaining 2,822 ABS that had not been issued, 950 required manual updating and 1,872 were unable to be identified from the overall bulk print.

The Department of Education made the decision to contact teacher unions, updating the internet and the phone line responses to advise members of a dedicated mailbox for teachers who had not yet received a statement, further advising them to contact Teachers' Pensions Team (TPT) and the team would issue them an ABS which can be run off the system on an individual basis. Teachers' pensions staff are continuing to issue these as necessary.

This breach was reported to the Pensions Regulator (TPR) with the undertaking that the 950 cases requiring manual updating will be fixed and reissued by the end of January 2022. TPR have responded and confirmed that based on the information supplied, TPR will not take any action against the trustees at this current time for the late provision of the ABS, providing the target date of January 2022 is met.

The exercise to resolve the 950 cases is underway. 730 errors have been identified and early indications are that these will be relatively straightforward to fix. In respect of the 1,872 cases that could not be identified due to the technical issues, which have prevented the DE from identifying those teachers, TPT have set up a dedicated mailbox for those teachers who did not receive an ABS to contact the team. This is to ensure urgent requests can be addressed. 353 statements have been issued by December 2021 in response to requests to this dedicated mailbox.

TPT established a team to work through the 950 ABS that were still to be issued, rectifying the errors and preparing the accompanying letters for members to ensure that they meet the 31 January deadline agreed with the regulator.

Annual pension increase

The board were advised that the annual pension increase had been applied in April, however, outstanding bulk process exercises including ABS and pension revisions remained outstanding due to ongoing IT system issues.

Dealing with queries from scheme members

Telephone issues and the current level of performance that falls well short of expected standards was discussed at length. An update on the steps taken to date to address this was provided by DE. The board voiced concerns around customer service and indicated that a recovery plan was needed to rectify current under performance.

NI Direct's software was incorrectly logging missed calls a full 10 seconds earlier than it should. This is artificially inflating missed calls and call volumes through repeated attempts by switchboard staff to get through. NI Direct cannot currently give a timeframe for this fix, but this issue has been raised by multiple departments.

September saw the DE answer 690 calls and October 553 calls, both considerable increases from August (323 calls).

Any queries should be sent in writing to Teachers' Pensions Team, Waterside House, 75 Duke Street, Gbomascale, Derry, BT47 6FP or by email to nitpsabsqueries@education-ni.gov.uk.

Scheme finance

The DE internal audit finalised a report on teachers' pensions which was issued in June 2021 confirming a satisfactory audit opinion. A copy of the report was provided for board members.

Legislation

Premature Retirement Compensation Regulations/Miscellaneous Amendments to 1998/2014 Pensions Regulations/Additional Voluntary Contribution Regulations

Work continues on a number of areas of legislation. In the event of an emerging case in the interim period, which falls within the intended legislative updates, the DE will consider the application of the policy intent.

Consideration is being given to the impact of the McCloud consultation outcomes on current legislative update requirements and the potential to amalgamate current updates with the prospective updates.

McCloud

On 25 February 2021, Department of Finance (DoF) published a response to the consultation, on transitional protection, which confirms the intention to proceed with the deferred choice underpin approach for the handling of benefits accrued by eligible members during the 'remedy period' from 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2022.

From 1 April 2022, all members who continue in service will do so as members of their respective reformed schemes. Legacy schemes will be closed in relation to service after 31 March 2022.

Major initiatives – replacement pensions system

The new CIVICA UPM system went live at the end of 2020. There were a number of issues identified prior to launch and a remediation plan was put in place to address the difficulties faced by pensions operations staff around training and the difficulties encountered as a result of remote working and the supplier not having floor walkers on-site.

A number of notable issues remained unresolved and bulk processes such as the revision of pensions and the issue of ABS were slow to be progressed.

The introduction of the online portals has been postponed until next year.

Training

All members of the NITPSPB are required under legislation to keep themselves up to date with developments in public sector pensions. This year, due to Covid-19 restrictions, the NI Public Service Pension Schemes conference was held online on 25 March 2021. Topics covered included:

- McCloud and state of play – Department of Finance
- Current issues for GAD – Government Actuaries Department
- TPR update – The Pension Regulator
- Practitioner’s view – HSC Pension Scheme

2.2 Northern Ireland Teachers’ Pension Scheme Advisory Board (NITPSAB)

Four meetings of the NITPSAB took place in 2021 (9 March, 28 April, 9 June and 12 October 2021), all online due to Covid-19 restrictions. The INTO is represented on the NITPSAB by Nuala O’Donnell, senior official, and Kevin Daly, official.

The meetings dealt with the following issues:

DE Circular 2021/05 – Changes from 1 April 2021 to salary bands for contribution rates for members of the NI Teachers’ Pension Scheme (NITPS)

This circular sets out changes from 1 April 2021 to salary bands for contribution rates for members. On 1 April 2021, the salary bands applicable to member contributions for the NITPS will change in line with an increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

The appropriate percentage increase to salary bands from 1 April 2021 is the same percentage as the percentage increase in CPI in the year to September 2020. CPI rose by 0.5% in the year to September 2020, therefore, the salary bands for contribution rates for members will increase by 0.5% with effect from 1 April 2021.

These arrangements apply to all members i.e., both those who remain in final salary arrangements and those in career average arrangements.

Member contribution rate

Actual annual pensionable earnings*	Member contribution rate
Up to £28,309.99	7.4%
£28,310 to £38,108.99	8.6%
£38,109 to £45,185.99	9.6%
£45,186 to £59,885.99	10.2%
£59,886 to £81,661.99	11.3%
£81,662 and above	11.7%

*Contributions are based on a member’s annual salary rate (actual earnings).

Opt-out data

The number of teachers opting out of the teachers' pension scheme in Northern Ireland remains low and to date has given no cause for concern.

Scheme valuation

2016 cost-cap un-pause

The Government, in an update on 4 February 2021, confirmed that, as a result of the cost control un-pause for the 2016 valuations, should any floor breaches occur, they will be honoured, with members benefits increased and any ceiling breaches will not lead to a reduction in member benefits.

On 22 March 2021, the DoF issued draft directions on the cost control element of the valuation process, which have been shared with SAB members.

At the extraordinary SAB meeting on 28 April 2021, SAB members provided agreement to proceed with scheme specific assumptions outlined by GAD, based on the current draft DoF directions. Finalised directions from DoF are awaited, in order to confirm results for the 2016 valuation.

2020 valuation

In terms of the 2020 valuation process, the Government (HMG) advises that any resulting changes to employer contribution rates will be delayed from April 2023 until April 2024, due to interactions with wider pension policies including implementation of the McCloud remedy and completion of the 2016.

GAD has been commissioned to commence work on the NITPS 2020 valuation and we await a key actions timetable.

Scheme specific assumptions

Members provided their agreement to proceed with the scheme specific assumptions outlined by GAD in the "NITPS data and assumptions" presentation, based on the current draft DoF directions, for use in the cost cap aspect of the 2016 valuation.

GMP

On the 2 April 2021, the DoF published a direction, shared with SAB members, which makes permanent the GMP interim solution in place since 2016. This direction ensures that all public service pensioners, who reach state pension age on or after 6 April 2016, will have their GMP entitlements uprated by their scheme as appropriate, and will not be disadvantaged.

DE guide to ill-health retirement

In June 2021, following a request from INTO for further and better information, the DE published a guide to ill health retirement. This guide is available on into.ie and also via the DE website.

2.3 Legislation and recent legal cases – public sector pensions

Goodwin

As a consequence of the breach of the non-discrimination rule in the Teachers' Pension Scheme in GB (under s61 of the Equality Act 2010), a male survivor of a female scheme member will now have entitlements equal to those for a same sex survivor.

Updated legal advice now provides scope for schemes to apply retrospective action in the same way as those GB schemes – i.e., to April 2005, which is when pension related amendments for civil partnership took effect. This takes account of the likely fact that had the 'post-Walker' amendments been taken forward in line with the normal approach for devolved schemes to consider changes with reference to their GB counterparts this would be the likely outcome.

McCloud litigation cases

There was a discussion on McCloud related litigation cases across the schemes. NI cases remain postponed in respect of claims lodged in the schemes for health, police, CSP and teachers. A preliminary hearing was listed for 26 May 2021 for the single claim now lodged in LGPS(NI) and where the intention was to request a postponement pending the outcome of the GB remedy litigation.

TUS stated the position in relation to the remedy, it is the government that should be required to pay for the cost of the solution. In accordance with previous provisional 2016 valuations, in most, if not all cases, scheme members could have accrued additional benefits for the next three years. TUS believe government should pay and TUS members should not suffer as a consequence of the pause that was implemented.

The Public Service Pensions and Judicial Offices Bill

The bill contains proposals to:

- Close legacy schemes from 31 March 2022.
- Reaffirm 2015 schemes for all members from 1 April 2022.
- Establish arrangements for compensation in relation to over payment and underpayment of benefits (including for tax purposes) during the remedy period, and
- Implement a proposed waiver of any cost cap ceiling breaches which emerge from reworked 2016 cost cap valuations.

The group discussed proposals for secondary legislation under the Bill to implement remedy to be taken in two tranches – prospective and retrospective:

- Prospective – prioritise delivery of the changes required to close all legacy scheme accrual from 31 March 2022 and move all members to reformed arrangements from 1 April 2022.
- Retrospective – flexibility will be provided to schemes to have changes on handling remedy period benefits in place in secondary regulations no later than 1 October 2023.

2.4 ICTU pensions

The INTO, along with other public sector trade unions, through NIC ICTU, continue to meet with Department for Finance (DoF) personnel and other public sector government department officials. Nuala O'Donnell continues to represent INTO, and the NITC, on the NIC ICTU/DFP Public Services

Pensions Bill Collective Consultative Working Group (CCWG).

This group met regularly during the year to address issues of concern in relation to the implementation of the Public Sector Pensions Act NI.

A small group of trade union side representatives, including Nuala O'Donnell, senior official, represented NIC ICTU in briefings to the NI Assembly Committee for Finance in April and September 2021 on public sector pension reform.

NIC ICTU/DFP Public Services Pensions Bill Collective Consultative Working Group (CCWG)

The CCWG met on six occasions in 2021, with pre-meeting of the trade union side on 10 February, 12 March, 30 March, 27 May, 2 July, and 17 November 2021.

Issues discussed at CCWG meetings included the transitional protection remedy and resources required to implement in each of the public service pension schemes:

Transitional protection remedy

On 19 July 2021, the Bill received its first reading at Westminster. The second reading was held on 7 September 2021 in the House of Lords. The main points raised in the second reading debate focused on the judicial elements of the Bill. On 11 October 2021, the Bill passed through committee stage in the House of Lords. Proposed amendments were either withdrawn or not moved.

The main issues raised at committee stage were:

- The cost of the remedy being a members cost.
- Issues with the police scheme.
- Financial advice to members (tax issues).
- Payment of interest by members.
- Communications to members on their benefit entitlements.
- Use of directions, and
- Retirement age for judiciary.

The Bill moved to report stage in the House of Lords on the 29 November 2021. Third reading was in early December 2021 before moving to the House of Commons. The Bill remains on schedule to receive royal assent in late January 2022 or early February.

Legislative consent motion as the legislative option to implement the (McCloud) remedy

The timescales to implement the prospective remedy by 2022 were extremely close. For this reason, subject to the final consultation outcome, the department saw merit in the proposal for the LCM as the most practical approach to take. As provisions in NI schemes are, in most cases, practically identical to those of the analogous schemes in GB this approach would ensure the changes are introduced to the same timescales and assist in managing the risk for further legal challenges. The final approach remained subject to the agreement of the executive and the assembly.

The LCM was laid in the assembly on 6 September 2021. A copy of the legislative consent memorandum was emailed to members on 7 September 2021. The memorandum was then referred to the finance committee for scrutiny. The committee finalised its report on 8 October 2021, and a link to the published report was issued to members on 13 October 2021. The LCM was debated in the assembly on 1 November 2021 and the motion was agreed without division. The NI clauses for the McCloud remedy will now be carried in the Bill.

TUS is disappointed with the outcome of the LCM. TUS view remains that scheme members are being asked to pay the cost of the remedy solution. TUS noted the decision of the NI Assembly. TUS is currently considering whether joint Legal action is necessary.

Scheme valuation

HMT now intends to delay any requirement to change employer contribution rates as a consequence of the 2020 valuations from 2023 to 2024. This is due to additional burdens of implementing the McCloud remedy reforms, completing the 2016 valuation process and finalising the review of the cost control mechanism. As the same burdens and priorities to deliver on remedy and to complete 2016 valuations apply in respect of the NI schemes, the department proposes that an equivalent position will be adopted here.

Draft 2021 directions

The consultation on draft directions occurred earlier in the year. It was noted that a paper was with the minister of finance on approval to publish a full departmental response and to proceed with the making of the directions. The department has now also completed its consultation with the government actuary. Subject to minister's approval, the consultation response, directions, and exchange with the government actuary will be published on the DoF website.

The responsible authorities for the schemes were then in a position to finalise valuation reports. This was completed end November/early December. As per the provisions of the PSP&JO Bill any breaches of the cost cap ceiling which emerge from these valuations was waived – ceiling breaches are anticipated for police and fire schemes. Floor breaches, where they occur, will be honoured.

Cost control

Alongside the consultation response, HMT also announced that any cost cap ceiling breaches which occur as a consequence of the reworked 2016 cost cap valuations will be waived. Conversely any scheme breach of the cost cap floor arising from the reworked 2016 valuations will be implemented. It is intended that this waiver on ceiling breaches will be legislated for in the forthcoming Westminster remedy Bill.

Pensions dashboard

Further dashboard development and testing will be ongoing throughout 2021 until the programme moves to “voluntary on-boarding” from 2022. From 2023 the programme will be more widely available for “staged on-boarding”. In this phase, schemes and providers will begin to be compelled to connect to the system by law. There will be a requirement for further regulations (made by DfC) in relation to any requirement for NI public service schemes. BS invited comments and questions from members on the pensions dashboard.

Annual pensions Increase and CARE revaluation for 2021

The Pension Increase (Review) Order (NI) 2021 and the Public Service Pensions Revaluation Order (Northern Ireland) 2021 means that:

- Public service pensions that have been in payment for a year will be increased by 0.5% from 12 April 2021.

- Benefits being accrued by active members in public service CARE schemes for the scheme year ending 31 March 2021 will be revalued by the % amount as specified in their scheme regulations plus 0.5% from 1 April 2021.

GMP – Guaranteed Minimum Pension

On 2 April 2021, the DoF made a direction under Article 69A of the Social Security Pensions (Northern Ireland) Order 1975. The direction came into operation on 6 April 2021 and means that, similar to the position in GB, public service pension schemes in NI will continue to provide full indexation to public servants with a GMP entitlement who reach state pension age beyond 5 April 2021. This effectively implements the permanent solution on GMP handling until all remaining entitlements have worked their way out of the system. DoF officials provided oral evidence on the GMP Direction to the finance committee on 14 April 21. The committee was content with the direction as made.

2.5 Consultations

Consultation on Transitional Protection Arrangements

On the 25 February 2021, the DoF published a response to the consultation which confirms the intention to proceed with the Deferred Choice Underpin (DCU) approach for the handling of benefits accrued by eligible members during the 'remedy period' from 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2022.

Legacy schemes will be closed in relation to service after 31 March 2022. From 1 April 2022 all members who continue in service will do so as members of their respective reformed schemes.

When an eligible member reaches retirement, they will be given the choice as to whether they want service for the remedy period to be treated as legacy final salary or reformed career average.

In the NITPS there will be a number of cases which will require revisiting, in particular eligible members who have had a pension event during the remedy period. This work will be taken forward in line with HMT/DoF timelines.

Additional staffing has been approved for pension policy in response to additional work pressures including McCloud. McCloud impacts are also being considered in terms of resourcing for pensions operations and details will evolve in due course.

SCAPE methodology and cost control mechanism reform consultations

The Superannuation Contributions Adjusted for Past Experience (SCAPE) methodology consultation and cost control mechanism reforms consultation were launched respectively by HM Treasury on 24 June 2021 and closed on 19 August 2021.

The discount rate is the rate that is used to convert the cost of future pension entitlements to a present-day value. It is a key part of how employer contributions are set in the present day in order to meet the pension liabilities which will be payable over future decades. HMT previously undertook in 2011 to review the fundamental methodology of SCAPE every 10 years and to review the level of the discount rate every five years. The current discount rate is set by reference to the assumptions used by the OBR (office of budget responsibility) in relation to long term GDP.

In the consultation there are two main options on SCAPE methodology. The first is to retain the current GDP methodology. The second will be framing the discount rate by reference to STPR. Both of the options were considered when the methodology was reviewed 10 years ago. At that time, the government decided to use the GDP methodology. A guarantee was given that any changes in the methodology would not impact the 2016 valuations.

NI Teachers’ Pension Scheme (NITPS) prospective remedy consultation

The DE launched the NI Teachers’ Pension Scheme (NITPS) prospective remedy consultation on 21 December 2021. Responses are to be submitted by 13 February 2022. The INTO will be responding to the consultation and making the response available to members in advance to inform their responses if they so wish.

2.6 Responses

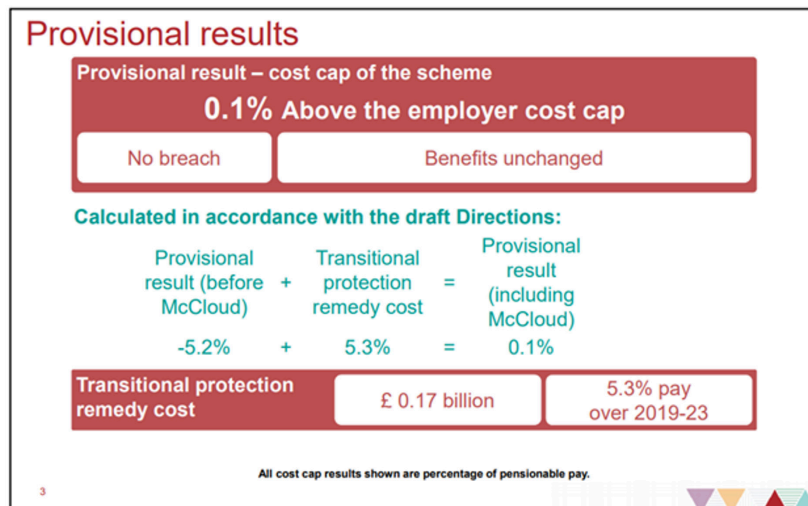
INTO submitted responses to the treasury, the Department of Finance, the NI Assembly Committee for Finance in relation to the proposed changes to the public sector pension schemes. Responses were submitted on behalf of INTO members, NITC and joint responses from INTO/NEU and UTU. A summary of the responses is below and the full responses can be accessed on the INTO website.

McCloud remedy

The Government’s position is that any associated cost for the McCloud remedy will be considered as a ‘member cost’ under the cost control mechanism, a position which is currently the subject of litigation. NITC totally refutes the government’s view that members should have to pay for the government’s proven unlawful age discrimination, either directly or indirectly as an employer cost, which will be a cost to the scheme and impact members down the line.

This is especially so for young members who joined the NI Teachers’ Pension Scheme after 1 April 2012 and are not deemed eligible for the remedy but will find the cost included in the cost sharing mechanism, which may or may not mean that the scheduled improvement in the accrual rate is cancelled. The only way to mitigate this impact is for the government to bear the cost of its own unlawful actions.

The table below illustrates how scheme members are being asked to fund the government’s discrimination:



Government consultations on SCAPE methodology and cost control mechanism reviews

On 4 October 2021, the Treasury published its response to the consultation on proposals to reform the cost control mechanism.

The Treasury response signals its intention to proceed with the three reforms set out in its consultation. This approach would mean that:

- The cost control mechanism would adopt a reformed scheme only design: to remove legacy schemes from the mechanism so that it only considers past and future service in the reformed schemes.
- The cost cap corridor would be widened from +/-2% to +/-3% of pensionable pay, and,
- An economic check would be introduced, linked to expected long-term GDP, so that a breach of the cost cap mechanism would only be implemented if it would still have occurred had long-term economic assumptions been considered.

The INTO/NEU/UTU joint response opposed widening the cost cap corridor and the introduction of an economic check. The unions do not believe a widening of the corridor would be appropriate. The reality of the situation is that the government did not expect the floor to be breached (which delivers benefits to scheme members) therefore we believe this is a potential detriment to scheme members. The unions believe the economic check would in practice preclude improvements to public service pension schemes if costs fall below the corridor.

A date has not been set yet for Treasury to publish the response to the consultation on the SCAPE discount rate methodology. It is hoped it will be published by the end of December or early new year.

Education

3.1 **Special Educational Needs (SEN)**

Department of Education (DE) consultations on the new draft SEN regulations and Code of Practice

In January 2021 INTO responded to the two formal DE public consultations – one on the new Special Educational Needs (SEN) Regulations and one on the new SEN Code of Practice. The response was made available to members on the INTO website at this time to inform their own responses as the deadline had been extended to March 2021. At the time of writing this report, the DE has still not published the findings of these consultations.

Education Authority (EA) consultations on a Draft Framework for Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools and a Draft Special Schools Area Planning Framework

INTO responded to the EA consultation on a Draft Framework for Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools and a Draft Special Schools Area Planning Framework. These responses were made available for members on the INTO website. At the time of writing this report, the EA Strategic Area Plan 2022-2027 and the Special Education Strategic Area Plan 2022-2027 had just been published with responses to be submitted by 12 April 2022. INTO will be responding to both plans.

Children and Young People's Service (CYPS)

The quarterly CYPS/ Teacher Trade Union Consultation meetings took place virtually in March, June, September and December 2021. Issues discussed included:

SEN Specialist Setting Support Team (SSST)

The SSST is a multi-disciplinary team established following the 2020 SEN placement project as a means to support children and staff in specialist provision settings. The EA has received earmarked funding for the SSST up to March 2022. Initial plans were to include health workers and classroom assistants within the team. However, due to the effect of Covid-19 on health and staffing pressures on schools, the health and classroom elements will not be populated before March 2022.

Opportunities within the team have been offered to staff within existing pupil support services. A key element of the pilot will be to assess outcomes in March 2022 against baselines, and to seek extension of the pilot beyond March 2022. If feedback from schools is positive, CYPS would look to extend the multidisciplinary approach, even within existing resources.

Education Welfare Service (EWS) Transformation Project

The Transformation Project, a recommendation from both the Northern Ireland Audit Office and Public Accounts Committee, was initiated in June 2021. Its overall aim is to design a service which efficiently and effectively addresses the changing and complex need surrounding absence in schools.

The project consists of six fully functional work streams with the main area of focus being model of delivery. The project has undertaken extensive engagement with stakeholders, receiving approx. 9,000 responses.

Project priorities include the analysis of engagement feedback in order to define a model of delivery, progressing digital transformation and continuing to engage with and support staff working in the service. The project is scheduled to conclude during summer 2022 with implementation commencing from the beginning of the new school year.

Children Looked After (CLA) advisory service

The CLA Service is a new service to support CLA in primary schools following a successful pilot during 2020/21. DE statistics (NI School Census 2018/19-2019/20) identify that CLA are significantly outperformed by their peers in the general school population. Evidence indicates that CLA do not have the same level of academic, emotional, social and wellbeing outcomes as non-CLA pupils.

The CLA service is to be delivered in response to the joint DE/DoH *Looked After Children Strategy - A Life Deserved: Caring for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland*, the commitment to the emotional health and wellbeing framework and ultimately, the need to support CLA in a more effective way. The minister has indicated a budget of £1,776,189 to support the development of the programme initially to the foundation, key stages one and two, a significant extension of reach and scope of the pilot project.

Literacy service exit testing (raised by TUS)

Nuala O'Donnell, Senior Official, raised the issue of pupil assessment within the literacy service and advised that there is a lack of consistency and agreement within the service on the approach taken and indicated that there are changes being made within the service without staff members being consulted, which damages relationships.

CYPS advised that they were aware there was consultation within the literacy service on support assessment testing previously and that this will be revisited through the SEND SDP, stating that it was clear that there are different views on assessment which is why this area of work has been included within the OBC for the SEN Strategic Development Programme. The literacy service will be considered holistically as part of the programme, with service design based on sound best practice rather than personal opinions or legacy practice. The EA is keen to get the funding for the OBC so the pupil support work stream can begin.

Education Safeguarding Forum

The forum was set up in 2021 and at the first meeting reviewed its terms of reference and possible outcomes. Membership of the forum is to include teacher training colleges. Themes raised at the first meeting included domestic violence, sexual violence, abuse of young people and online safety.

SEND Strategic Development Programme

In recognition that the overall SEND change agenda is extremely complex and needs to be developed and progressed in partnership, bringing together families, schools, government agencies and other stakeholders to deliver the services and supports that our children need, the SEND Strategic Development Programme (SEND SDP) has been established.

It is to provide a single structure through which the entire NI SEND change agenda can be managed strategically, ensuring that all stakeholders are meaningfully engaged in the process. The programme will draw together development work which is already underway across various

agencies and will also deliver a range of new projects to address additional SEND priorities.

The programme vision is that:

“All children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities and their families are receiving the tailored and effective supports that they need to secure the best educational outcomes, delivered by a child-focused, responsive, co-ordinated, transparent, efficient and sustainable system.”

The SEND SDP is governed by a board, which is chaired by the chief executive of the Education Authority and includes senior officials from the DE, the Department of Health, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and the Education and Training Inspectorate. The NI Commissioner for Children and Young People also has an advisory role on the board.

An initial Programme Reference Group has been established drawing in representation from wider education bodies and the community and voluntary sectors. Other mechanisms are currently being developed to engage families, teachers and school leaders, trade unions and other key stakeholders in the programme’s development. That engagement will then continue throughout the programme’s lifespan.

There are four major SEND change projects which are already underway. They will continue to be delivered, but they have significant implications for the wider SEND system, so it is important that they are co-ordinated by the same governance structure – the SEND SDP board, including:

- Implementation of the SEND Act (NI) 2016.
- SEN Area Planning Frameworks.
- SEN Placement Project.
- Statutory Assessment Improvement Project.

A further 10 new projects could be prioritised for inclusion in the programme’s first wave (to be implemented over the next 18-24 months).

3.2 **Executive’s Children and Young People’s Strategy published**

Education Minister, Peter Weir, launched the Northern Ireland Executive’s *Children and Young People’s Strategy 2020-2030 for Northern Ireland* in January 2021.

The strategy is the strategic framework through which departments will work together to improve the well-being of all children and young people. It lists eight outcomes to be achieved for all children and young people. These cover many aspects of children’s lives including their physical and mental health, play and leisure, learning and achieving, safety and stability, economic and environmental well-being, contribution to society and rights and equality.

Issues which children, young people and stakeholders have identified as requiring particular attention are also highlighted as the ‘40 areas of greatest focus’.

The issues identified include matters central to the lives and well-being of children and young people. They include early intervention, emotional well-being and mental health, inclusion of children and young people with a disability, tackling bullying, improving educational achievement and experience, improving support for rural young people and supporting the rights of all children, particularly those who experience any form of discrimination.

Following on from the publication of this strategy, a three-year delivery plan will be developed setting out the key actions that departments will take to help achieve the outcomes.

3.3 Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI)

Inspections

There were five meetings between ETI and NITC in 2021 and Inspections continued to be paused throughout 2021, due to the pandemic.

At the request of the DE, ETI carried out monitoring visits of the eight schools in the formal intervention process and the 23 schools in the follow-up inspection process during the summer and autumn terms of 2021. These monitoring visits were not inspections as they were intended to be supportive to schools.

A summary note was prepared for DE and given in feedback to the school. There was no published report. In one case, a school in formal intervention requested a formal inspection. This was granted and the school was able to exit the formal intervention process following a successful inspection.

Chief Inspector's report

There was a change to the format of the Chief Inspector's Report in 2021. Based on the district inspector engagement with schools and the ETI survey of post primary schools, the ETI published 'phase specific' progress reports similar to the report they published in June 2020.

The four reports were:

- September 2018 – March 2020.
- Lessons learnt March 2020 – June 2020.
- Lessons learnt DI engagement/activities September 2020 – December 2020, remote and blended learning.
- Summary of key considerations moving forward.

ETI priorities for engagement in 2021 were:

- The effectiveness of school's monitoring of remote learning (ETI wanted to test this at a system level and not at individual school level so there were no reports).
- Curriculum delivery, the impact of Covid-19 and factors to influence policy going forward.
- Effectiveness of mental health and well-being provision in schools for pupils and staff.

ETI questionnaire

In June 2021, ETI Issued a questionnaire for pupils in primary six, primary seven and a questionnaire for pupils in post-primary about learning experiences during term two, January-March 2021.

The information that was provided was not be used in any way that would identify a school or a respondent.

A total of 28,790 year six to year 14 pupils completed the online questionnaires. The report was published on the ETI website in November 2021.

Throughout the autumn term, ETI's work focused on engagement, capacity building and high-quality thematic evaluation, across the education system.

There were five main strands to ETI's work during the autumn term:

- District engagement and monitoring visits.
- Thematic evaluations.
- Capacity building.
- Policy advice.
- Corporate development.

Empowering Improvement – Stepping Forward Together

In October 2021, ETI committed to wide-scale, meaningful consultation and engagement with all stakeholders in order to support schools and organisations as they move forward during this challenging time.

Through this project, ETI aims to work alongside schools and organisations with a particular focus on sustainable capacity-building of leaders and teachers in the key area of self-evaluation in order to improve the educational provision and attainment of all pupils/learners.

ETI invited all pre-schools, primary, post-primary and special schools to become involved in the Empowering Improvement – Stepping Forward Together project. This capacity-building project will focus mainly on the key area of self-evaluation leading to improvement.

All schools and pre-schools were offered the opportunity to participate in ETI-led professional learning activities and/or to take part in consultations around the design of the project and the development of an inspection strategy.

Over 900 schools/organisations expressed an interest in capacity -building engagement with ETI inspectors and over 500 want to talk about inspection strategy going forward. The first consultation groups were due to commence in December 2021/January 2022 and the professional learning will take place between late January to May 2022.

Stepping Up and Stepping Forward

In October 2021, ETI commenced publication of its *Learning Insights* as part of the Stepping Up and Stepping Forward series which draws on learning from the education and training system's response to the pandemic.

The Stepping Up and Stepping Forward series of 10 learning insights focuses on how well Northern Ireland's education system is responding to the Covid-19 pandemic and other challenges.

It is informed by inspectors' direct first-hand observation and collation of evidence from: their visits to schools and colleges as part of district engagement; and thematic evaluations, questionnaires, focus groups and interactions with practitioners across all education sectors.

Each of the learning insights acknowledges the exemplary efforts made by NI's leaders and practitioners. They discuss how we can all work more collaboratively to address the ongoing challenges.

The series presents and explores a range of topics designed to begin a system wide conversation on how we can step forward confidently and collectively, including: the additional risks to wellbeing posed by Covid-19; improving provisions by listening to, and acting upon learners' views; increasing positive outcomes for learners by tackling educational disadvantage; the importance of support for leaders and teachers through effective professional learning; working collaboratively to create purposeful networks; creating a curriculum that enriches experiences and life-chances; the need to unlock the use of new technologies and the implementation of an innovative and cross-sectoral strategy for Careers Education Information Advice and Guidance (CEIAG).

Evaluation of the approaches and challenges around preventative safeguarding practices

In November 2021, ETI had been asked by the DE to undertake an evaluation of the approaches and challenges in delivering effective preventative safeguarding practices in schools and EOTAS centres. As part of this work, the ETI invited primary, special and post-primary schools, and the EOTAS centres, to support the work through the optional completion of a questionnaire. The questionnaire went live on 2 November 2021.

The questionnaire was followed up by some visits to schools by their district inspectors to discuss with school leaders and relevant key staff the approaches and challenges around preventative safeguarding practices.

Promoting improvement in the interests of all learners

In November 2021, ETI published two reports to detail aspects of the significant work undertaken by the special schools sector during the pandemic.

As part of the district inspector role, information had been gathered on the special school curriculum and the adaptations school principals have made in relation to the changing needs of their pupils as a result of the impact of Covid-19 related events and changed routines at home and at school and in response to the increase in the number of pupils presenting with highly complex learning and physical needs.

The first report – an evaluation of the multi-disciplinary approaches to meeting the needs of pupils in special schools – provides a range of case studies from special schools which highlight the benefits to the pupils of a multi-disciplinary approach, along with reflections from school staff and parents.

Despite increased demands for the time and skills of therapists, there are noteworthy examples of highly effective holistic support for pupils involving a range of therapists, school staff and outside support agencies, for example from the Middletown Centre for Autism.

The second report – an evaluation of the curriculum, with a particular focus on life skills and play in special schools – details the adaptations and changes made by principals of special schools to the curriculum as a result of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and in response to pupils presenting with increasingly complex needs.

3.4 **DE/NI Assembly consultations**

DE consultation on the Review of the Statutory Criteria for Pre-School Education Admissions and Pre-School Session Times

On 9 November 2021, the DE launched an eight-week public consultation on proposals to permit deferral of school starting age for the youngest children in the year group born between 1 April and 1 July. The consultation closed on 4 January 2022. The INTO submitted a response which is available to members on the INTO website.

Period Products (Free Provision) Bill

The INTO responded to the Northern Ireland Assembly's call for evidence in relation to the Period Products (Free Provision) Bill.

3.5 DE initiatives

Healthy Happy Minds pilot 2021/22

All primary schools, including special schools and EOTAS with a primary school cohort, participated in the Healthy Happy Minds pilot of therapeutic and counselling services in primary schools which will operate until the end of March 2022. Transitional arrangements will also operate beyond the end of March 2022 to ensure that no child engaging with counselling/therapeutic services is left unsupported.

A sum of £5m was earmarked to deliver this pilot and schools received allocations directly – 50% immediately and 50% in January 2022. Many schools were already providing counselling and therapy provision from their delegated budgets at a time of significant pressure on budgets and were informed that appropriate existing provision could be funded from their allocation for this pilot alongside newly secured provision.

The EA is also working to put in place a primary schools therapeutic and counselling framework by January 2022 for schools to appoint providers directly. However, until this is in place schools should engage appropriately qualified and accredited providers as outlined in the guidance document.

3.6 School development planning

In June 2021, the DE provided guidance to boards of governors and schools on school development planning for 2021-22 in the context of Covid-19. It stated that the DE and ETI recognised the need for a flexible approach to school development planning in the coming academic year.

They advised boards of governors and schools to continue to take a pragmatic approach to school development planning, ensuring that the process is useful in supporting the work of the school and that it is manageable.

Schools were offered the options for a transitional plan for 2021-22, or to amend or extend their current SDP. Where schools extended their three-year plan in 2020-21, it is acceptable to extend it for a further year in 2021-22.

3.7 Curriculum

DE Circular 2021/30: Curriculum Planning – March 2021 – Return of Years 1 to 3 to face-to-face learning

The DE suggested that the starting point for all schools should be how best in these unique circumstances to continue to deliver the spirit of the statutory Northern Ireland curriculum in each area of learning to meet the needs of children and young people. Schools were able to consider how they tailored and adapted delivery of the curriculum to support recovery as pupils returned to the school environment.

The flexibility of the curriculum aimed to empower schools to make the decisions needed to provide a curriculum that is adaptable and responsive to the needs of individual learners. The curriculum is designed to have limited prescription, giving schools as much flexibility as possible in what they choose to teach, for how long and how often and to use approaches that best suit their pupils.

Schools, therefore, continue to have the freedom within the minimum entitlement of the statutory curriculum to develop content they believe is best suited to meet the needs and interests of the pupils within their school community at this particular time.

School leaders and teachers were able to use their knowledge and professional expertise to adapt their usual plans and practice to suit their own unique circumstances providing the content they consider is best for their pupils, informed by their inherent understanding of the children in their school community.

3.8 Remote learning

On 4 January 2021, the DE issued Circular 2021/01: Further Guidance For Schools on Supporting Remote Learning to Provide Educational Continuity. On 9 February 2021, the DE issued *Effective Practice in Remote Learning – Quick Glance Document*.

The documents were designed to bring together what we were learning about good practice during this unprecedented time for our education system. They were not intended to be prescriptive but to support schools as they refine and review their practice around remote learning.

Different approaches to remote education suit different types of content and pupils. The age of pupils, levels of ability, access to equipment, broadband and family circumstances all vary and have to be taken into consideration.

The emphasis was on effective pedagogy and in recognition that quality of teaching is far more important than how lessons are delivered. Consequently, there was no expectation of live lessons or of a minimum duration of lessons each day rather the focus was on the high-quality teaching and learning experiences that schools were providing.

From Thursday, 7 January, all mainstream education providers, including pre-school education settings, primary and post primary schools, were required to provide remote learning at home to their pupils rather than face-to-face teaching in school, until the half-term break in the middle of February.

INTO survey on remote learning

In October 2021, the INTO conducted a survey of members on planning for the use of remote learning going forward. There were 790 responses, with 55% of respondents stating that they had provided remote learning for individual pupils/whole classes or both since their return to school in March/April 2021.

A majority of 71% stated that the current expectations of remote learning at that time were unmanageable, with only 16% stating that they had been given time to prepare for remote learning.

Some 37% of all respondents had concerns around their online personal security. In addition, 73% stated that they require training that focuses on the pedagogies for remote learning.

In terms of tech/equipment and working environment, 55% of respondents were using their personal laptop, 51% were using their personal phone and 40% of respondent did not have a quiet place to work from; 69% did not have appropriate furniture for work purposes, while 90% saw their bills increase (mainly heating, electricity, phone and internet bills); 85% of respondents felt that their work-life balance was negatively impacted whilst providing remote learning.

From this survey, the INTO has identified the need for:

- Realistic cut off points for all teachers, which are made clear to pupils and parents alike.
- Appropriate and essential equipment for all teachers: All teachers should have their own laptop/iPad that are fit for purpose.
- Additional time given: directed time budgets which include remote learning.
- Extra staffing: teachers can't do two things at once – they can't provide remote learning while supervising children (of key workers) or while teaching their own class.
- Appropriate training provided to all teachers on: a) remote learning platforms and b) pedagogies for remote learning.
- A remote learning policy – consulted and agreed upon.
- Importance of the DE communicating with school leaders directly (as opposed to key messages being presented via the media) and timing of key information.
- Communication from parents and pupils must go through the proper channels as agreed through school policy.
- Sufficient time given for teachers to become competent with the new ways of working.

3.9 **Assessment**

Statutory assessment

The DE made legal provision to disapply all requirements for schools to carry out key stage assessment during the 2020-21 academic year. This reflected the very limited time to carry out such arrangements following the period of remote learning and was designed to reduce burden and support flexibility for schools as pupils return to the classroom.

In regard to key stage assessment for pupils in year 10, the disapplication also recognised the additional work for post-primary teachers in carrying out GCSE and A Level assessment to inform centre determined grades.

Pupil reporting arrangements

The Education (Pupil Reporting) Regulations (NI) 2009 apply to all grant-aided schools except nursery schools or pupils in primary schools or special schools who have not attained the lower limit of compulsory school age.

The regulations require an annual report to be provided to parents by 30 June and also set out what the report should contain at each key stage. The DE made legal provision to suspend the requirement to provide an annual report for pupils in years 12, 13 and 14 in 2020/21.

The requirement to provide a report remained for pupils in all other year groups, however, schools had complete flexibility in regard to the content and format of the report provided to parents. The requirement is to provide one written report annually only.

3.10 **Examinations**

In March 2020, the minister announced that, in line with other jurisdictions of the UK, GCSE, A/S and A level exams would not proceed in Northern Ireland in summer 2020.

On 16 April 2020, the minister announced arrangements for summer examinations, outlining the process for students completing CCEA GCSE and A level qualifications in 2020.

The key points included:

- Calculated grades to be issued for those completing their A level, A/S level and GCSE qualifications based on a combination of information provided by schools and colleges and statistical information.
- A/S level grades to count as a stand-alone qualification; they will not contribute to a final A level grade in 2021.
- Grades to be awarded for GCSEs due to complete in 2020 (mostly year 12s), but not for GCSE units where GCSEs are due to complete in 2021 (mostly year 11s). In the latter case, pupils will have the option to take any outstanding units in 2021 and have missing components calculated using statistical modelling and/or to sit all units in 2021 and be awarded the higher grade from either option.

The INTO responded to the consultation on proposed changes to CCEA GCSE AS and A-Level qualifications for summer 2021. The union was first and foremost concerned with the impact of changes to assessment arrangements on the workload of our members. This in turn has implications for industrial relations in centres, health and wellbeing of our members and so on. The chaos caused to the present suite of qualifications offered by CCEA by the lockdown has exposed a fragile and outdated mode of assessment in this jurisdiction and should result in a root-and-branch review of qualifications aimed at producing a fit for purpose, modern and robust system that meets the human and economic needs of learners and society and which opens more career pathways, not fewer, as students' progress through it.

On 11 November 2020, the INTO welcomed and supported the comments and views of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, Koulla Yiasouma, calling for an alternative to academic selection and summer examinations in this academic year, acknowledging that the disruption to schools was likely to continue and thus the vicious cycle of uncertainty, additional worry and lost classroom contact time would lead to further detriment to the mental health, wellbeing and workload demands on pupils, teachers and school leaders.

The INTO called on the minister to take decisive, timely and clear action to move toward an alternative to traditional examinations.

3.11 Transfer at 11

On 19 May 2020, the INTO welcomed the call from Éamon Martin, Archbishop of Armagh, to suspend the use of academic selection as an entrance criterion for entry to post-primary school.

Earlier in the summer, the Assembly Committee for Education launched an online survey into post-primary transfer. The survey was targeted initially at parents and guardians with children in Primary 6 or Primary 7. Around 7,000 respondents completed the survey – 80 per cent of which were parents from the target group. Many different views were expressed, and these are currently being analysed. A young persons' version of the survey was circulated.

The committee strongly felt that the opinions of teachers were of critical importance in the evaluation of education and DE policy. The committee therefore agreed to target the final phase of the online survey towards teachers and, in particular, those with responsibility for children in Primary 6 and Primary 7.

In November 2020, the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC) responded to the debate on how the transfer process should be administered if AQE and PPTC tests cannot proceed as planned in January.

The NITC were increasingly concerned at the apparent lack of contingency planning for the transfer process, in light of the debate at the Assembly on Monday, 2 November 2020.

It remained the case that AQE and PPTC assessments were going to be administered in January of 2021. Given the current context and the predicted trajectory of Covid-19, NITC stressed the urgency of planning for the potential eventuality that these unregulated assessments cannot take place.

On 18 December 2020, the INTO reacted to the statement from Minister Weir, where the minister had expressed his preferred option that unregulated selection tests be hosted by the candidate's primary school. The INTO are totally opposed to this suggestion and instructed members to ignore any request from the DE to facilitate this non-statutory testing on behalf of private companies.

On 5 January 2021, both of the providers of the unregulated tests appeared to announce that this year's tests would be cancelled. By the time of the BBC's evening-news broadcast, the AQE group had reneged on this decision and announced that there will be a single test for pupils on Saturday 27 February 2021.

On 12 January 2021, the INTO welcomed the decision by the Association of Quality Education to finally cancel the proposed selection test on 27 February 2021.

It is now more urgent than ever, given the debacle around this year's procedure, that the use of academic selection as a criteria for transfer from primary to post-primary school be reviewed, as part of the major review of education that was announced last term. It is important that there is clarity for all in relation to this, as the continued uncertainty serves only to heighten the levels of stress and emotional wellbeing of the pupils, parents, teachers and principals involved.

3.12 School closures/amalgamations

CCMS continued its consultations with governors, teachers, ancillary staff and parents about the closure/amalgamation of a number of small primary schools and post-primary schools. Due to Covid-19, the number of school closures/amalgamations were reduced and consultations were delayed as they were unable to take place.

The northern secretary continues to have overall responsibility in the INTO for issues pertaining to closures, amalgamations and mergers. Further work remains to be done regarding a review of the School Closure Agreement to address the issues of phased closures.

3.13 INTO National Education Conference 2021

The 2021 Consultative Conference on Education was a hybrid event held online on Friday, 12 November and in person at the Clayton Hotel, Galway, on Saturday, 13 November. The dual themes of the conference were *Digital Learning* and *Wellbeing*. Due to restrictions in place at the time of delegate registration, the number of delegate places were reduced by a third with over 200 delegates attending the Saturday sessions.

A total of approximately 250 attendees were present on the Saturday, including registered delegates, national committee members, guests and presenters. Delegates were emailed after the conference with a link to a short online questionnaire and 67 completed the evaluation. Of those that submitted an evaluation, 28 per cent were first-time attendees and 72 per cent had previously attended an Education Conference.

The Friday and Saturday opening sessions were addressed by Joe McKeown, INTO President and Aidan Gaughran, Cathaoirleach, Education Committee. On Friday, the online session continued with speakers Dolores Killian (EDC, District 7) and Rachel Poland (NI intern) who gave an overview of current research being undertaken by, and on behalf of, the Northern Committee.

A live workshop by Jane McGarrigle of Webwise on internet safety for young children then took place, the first time INTO have incorporated a live workshop into the conference agenda. Four other pre-recorded workshops were made available online at the same time on a separate page to the live feed.

3.14 **National Education Committee**

The Education Committee conducted its work by considering relevant education topics, conducting research and preparing for the annual Consultative Conference on Education.

Nuala O'Donnell, Senior Official, was nominated to participate in the working group to prepare the Special Education Conference for 2022.

The following topics were discussed during the year:

- Teacher workload.
- Curriculum and assessment.
- Teacher education.
- Special Education and inclusion.
- Distance learning in primary school.
- Covid-19.
- Sustainable development.
- Education conference.
- Digital learning.
- Wellbeing research regarding teacher workload

The Education Committee contributed to the design and piloting of questionnaires which were circulated to principal teachers and a random selection of classroom teachers on the subject of workload. The findings of these questionnaires were due to be published early in 2022.

General Teaching Council NI (GTCNI) Report

4.1 Council of the GTCNI

The Minister of Education, Michelle McIlveen, took the decision that the Council of the GTCNI would be stood down from noon on 13 December 2021, with Council members and office bearers having no standing after this time. The Department of Education (DE) from that date had oversight of the executive of the GTCNI.

The core business of the GTC is focused on the establishment and maintenance of a register of teachers. It also evaluates and approves qualifications for the purpose of teacher registration.

The GTCNI has currently limited regulatory powers which were transferred to the GTC from the DE. This means that the GTCNI, after full investigation, can remove a teacher from the GTC register and therefore effectively remove their entitlement to teach in a grant aided school in Northern Ireland.

The GTCNI will only investigate if the issue has already been dealt with by the employers. Employers now have the duty to report any teacher who has been dismissed or teachers who were likely to have been dismissed if they had not first resigned. A three-stage process has been established and there is an ultimate right of appeal by a teacher who is about to be de-registered to the High Court.

INTO representatives

Up until December 2021, six INTO members were on the GTCNI council. Siobhán McElhinney held the position of vice-chair until November 2021 and is also a member of Northern Committee. John Kelly is the INTO nominated NITC (Northern Ireland Teachers Council) representative and was a member of the HR committee.

Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) Report

5.1 ICTU overview

The INTO is an affiliated member of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), which is based in Dublin and, like the INTO, has a northern section, located in Belfast. In the north, it is led by the Assistant General Secretary, Owen Reidy.

Patricia King, General Secretary, ICTU, provides leadership across the whole of the island. The current ICTU president is Kevin Callinan, General Secretary of FÓRSA. He has held the position since July of 2021 and succeeded current INTO Northern Secretary, Gerry Murphy, in the role. Mr Callinan's period as president will be slightly reduced due to the Covid-19 pandemic, necessitating a delay in holding the previous All-Ireland BDC.

The NIC-ICTU is currently chaired by Alison Millar, former general secretary of NIPSA. The NIC of ICTU has a number of subcommittees in areas such as global solidarity, disability, human rights, health and education, dedicated to working on advancing the ICTU's trade union and social-economic policies on which there are a number of INTO nominees.

Elections are held every two years to the NIC-ICTU and currently the INTO is represented on this body by the Gerry Murphy, Northern Secretary, who is the former chairperson of the NIC-ICTU. The northern secretary's term as chairperson of the NIC ended at the NI BDC, which was held in March of 2021. This was an online event.

5.2 Congress officers

- Alison Millar (retired), NIPSA (chair).
- Paddy Mackle, UCU (vice chairperson).
- Owen Reidy, ICTU (assistant general secretary commenced November 2016).
- INTO elected representative, Gerry Murphy (INTO northern secretary).

5.3 Key issues

Economy

The local economy continues to be in some distress having been directly impacted negatively in the last year by two primary factors: Brexit and the continuing effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.

These two factors have imposed themselves on top of the established structural issues already impairing economic growth and stability, inhibiting the economy in the north. The NIC-ICTU continues to be active in seeking to represent the interests of workers effectively in these circumstances and to contribute to various initiatives and efforts on the part of the Department of the Economy and the NI Executive to resuscitate the economy in the north.

In particular, the northern secretary of the INTO has contributed to the ongoing work of the

NIC led by ICTU Assistant General Secretary, Owen Reidy, around engaging with the NI executive and its various departments and associated bodies as well as local politicians, from all the political parties, to promote trade union policies and support initiatives to assist in protecting and enhancing workers' rights.

The NIC is continuing to meet monthly, engaging in meetings with various executive departments, the NI Executive Forum, arms-length bodies and political parties.

The NIC-ICTU started an initiative last year, contributing a major policy document, *No Going Back*, to the public discourse on the shape of a post pandemic economy. More recently, the NIC's focus has been on seeking to ensure that commitments on trade union rights are enacted, including those made in the political settlement that led to the re-instatement of Stormont and the executive in 2019, following a three-year hiatus, included in the *New Decade, New Approach* document. This work seeks to build on the verbal commitments given at the 2021 All-island BDC by the major local political parties.

The NIC is seeking to ensure not only are these commitments reflected in the manifestos to be issued by the political parties in advance of the 2022 Stormont elections, to be held on 5 May 2022, but are included in any programme for government which will follow these elections.

The manufacturing sector in the north continues to suffer from the absence of any meaningful industrial policy from the Department of the Economy. The NIC-ICTU was encouraged to see this policy deficit identified as one of the areas to be targeted in the *New Decade, New Approach* deal, but it continues to be disappointed that the Department of the Economy has not yet developed a policy paper on this issue. NIC-ICTU continues to see this as a priority area for engagement by the NI Executive and the Department of the Economy with the trade union movement if the NI economy is to recover from Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic and develop into the future.

The out workings of Brexit remain unclear and the associated protocol impacts are, as yet, not known. It is clear there is an imperative on the part of all parties to the protocol to employ all the mechanisms it encompasses to mitigate the obvious and expected consequences of Brexit. The limited foreign direct investment, which was a brief positive feature of our economy, has dried up despite what appears to be ideal circumstances in the lee of the protocol, while under-investment in developing and promoting local enterprises remains a challenge for local manufacturing businesses.

The large retail sector continues to experience a downturn as a consequence of Brexit along with the on-off restrictions arising from efforts to control the pandemic. The workers in this sector – already the victims of low wages and poor hours – are continuing to experience increased employment instability.

The outdated and negative economic doctrine of austerity continues to underpin the approach of the Conservative government in London. ICTU's policy document, *No Going Back*, provides a detailed and considered alternative economic strategy and it remains the trade unions go-to text in providing arguments to challenge the current status quo.

The expectation following the *New Decade, New Approach* deal that additional funds were to be made available to support public services remain to be met due in large part to the pandemic and also because the executive has yet to lay out even a draft economic strategy. Jobs across both public and private sectors and services continue to be pared back as Stormont departments attempt to balance shrinking budgets against demand.

Currently, the trade unions and ICTU are consulting on a three-year draft budget. It offers a series of financial commitments up to 2024-25 which are essentially flat in terms of recurrent spending and reflect a fall over the same period in terms of capital spending. Public services, society and the economy will continue to suffer the negative consequences of under-investment and cuts as a consequence over the period ahead.

The NI economy is clearly in serious trouble, having regressed to 2008 levels and, with tens

of thousands of workers still in receipt of various employment subsidy schemes, the fear is we are storing up an employment crisis and further economic problems.

NIC-ICTU will continue to challenge the decision makers to bring forward more progressive policy solutions that place workers and societies needs ahead of the demands of an economic elite.

Brexit

The leaving of the European Union by the United Kingdom government on 31 January 2020, against the democratic will of the people of Northern Ireland, remains a matter of deep concern for NIC-ICTU.

In recent times, the ill-informed political agitation fuelled by the British government's attempts to renege on its treaty commitments with the EU, regarding the application of the NI protocol has further exacerbated an already complex situation.

It is NIC-ICTU's view that all the parties to the protocol need to find a solution that allows the situation to de-escalate in order that stability can be returned to the economic and social spheres for the good of everyone. It is clear that the positive opportunities the protocol presents have not been fully seized upon or even promoted and this must become a priority as soon as the ongoing negotiations between the EU and the British government are concluded.

NIC-ICTU remains deeply concerned that much of current EU law will cease to be enforceable in the post-Brexit era and that Stormont may not exploit the devolved authority it has regarding workers' rights that would allow it to maintain these rights in line with EU developments in this area.

While the majority of EU legislation has now been transposed to UK law, there does, however, remain the possibility that key rights and obligations, derived from EU directives, will be removed in future. NIC-ICTU remains strongly of the view that Brexit must not be used as a pretext to dismantle hard-won rights and protections or to drive down employment standards generally. The NIC-ICTU, with the support of our trade union comrades across the island, will continue to campaign and lobby to prevent these potentially negative consequences happening.

The implications for employment and the labour market generally remain as yet unclear, dependent on the form of trading relationship that finally emerges between the UK and the EU now that an agreement on withdrawal has been reached.

The Irish government provides one of a number of conduits for the trade unions to have their views on Brexit heard. Meetings continue on a regular basis with the political parties, north and south, to this end by the leadership of the ICTU. The NI Protocol also allows for direct input from the trade union movement to the joint committee established to monitor the protocol and NIC-ICTU will seek to use this mechanism as appropriate.

NIC-ICTU will continue to seek to maintain the unity established in the run-up to Brexit with the business, agriculture, voluntary and community sectors to protect workers and their families from the inevitable economic fallout of it and to seek to exploit any opportunities that may arise. To this end the ICTU north and south will continue to develop and adapt our policy positions, which in addition to describing the negative consequences of Brexit, outline practical proposals both for the short and longer terms to enable the necessary protections for workers and their families to be maintained and continue to be allowed to evolve in line with EU policy developments in these areas.

The trade unions in the north, led by Owen Reidy, Assistant General Secretary, ICTU, continue to work hard with the business, agricultural and community sectors to make sure that the Irish government, the current NI secretary of state, the political parties and civic society generally are all fully aware of the challenges the aftermath of Brexit poses.

The INTO has been central to these interactions and will continue to support the efforts of the trade union movement in attempting to protect our society from the negative effects of Brexit now

that it is a reality.

One way in which this can be achieved is to ensure the proposals in *No Going Back* concerning the public finances and taxation policy are eventually implemented by the executive and the government in Dublin. The other significant step NIC-ICTU can take is to continue lobbying the politicians and parties in NI to fully exploit the flexibilities incorporated in the NI Protocol to minimise the impact on the economy of Brexit.

The INTO will continue to be central to ICTU's efforts to achieve these objectives. These objectives will continue to be a feature of ICTU's approach for the years ahead.

5.4 Sub committees

The INTO continues to play a full part on the various sub committees of the NIC-ICTU.

The INTO is represented on the Education Trade Union Group (ETUG) by the northern chairperson of INTO's Northern Committee, Siobhán McElhinney, and the Assistant Northern Secretary, Mark McTaggart. This group has dealt with a range of issues affecting the education sector but mainly Covid-19 related issues in the last year. It is made up of trade unions representing all the workers employed in the education sector.

ICTU's Equality and Human Rights programme is ensuring that these issues remain central to workers, despite the official neglect by government of the Bill of Rights and a shared future.

INTO representation on ICTU Committees include:

ICTU Women's Committee	Anmarie Conway and Caroline McCarthy
ICTU Health and Safety Committee	Paul Groogan
ICTU Black and Minority Ethnic Committee	John Kelly
ICTU Global Solidarity Committee	Dorothy McGinley/John Kelly/Kevin Daly
ICTU LGBT Committee	Brian Adams (South Antrim Branch), Seán Kelly (Belfast West)
Youth Committee	Shauna Rafferty

5.5 May Day

NIC-ICTU is once again working in co-operation with Belfast Trades Council in 2022 to ensure the May Day celebrations continues as a family-friendly event as part of a week-long programme of events. It is hoped these events will be in person but plans will be in place to move online if public-health circumstances dictate that in-person events are not possible.

5.6 Training

Nuala O'Donnell, Senior Official, continues to work closely with the ICTU Officials in Belfast on the improved INTO trade union representative training and additional courses designed to promote trade union effectiveness and address professional and other issues.

The numbers of members taking part in courses continues to grow and credit is due to Nuala O'Donnell and the ICTU staff in Belfast, who are ensuring the courses on offer are relevant and topical. Further courses, the majority of which come with accreditation, continue to come on stream for members.

We will hold another principals conference with our UTU and NEU colleagues in 2022 either online or face to face depending on public health.

INTO training opportunities continue to be organised and run by the Northern Office under the direction of Nuala O'Donnell, with the assistance of INTO intern, Rachel Poland. Attendance at these accredited courses is being hampered by the overall lack of financing across the education system in the past year.

There has been an increased level of internal INTO co-operation north and south in the past year and members are attending courses in significant numbers on matters of a professional nature and related to health issues of interest and concern, whether the member is located north or south.

Internal

6.1 Query management

Northern Office receives telephone queries from members from 9am to 5pm (Monday to Thursday) and until 4pm on a Friday, with an answering machine service available between 1-2pm each day and at weekends. In addition, officials, through the mail and email systems, receive queries and requests for advice and support from members.

General queries relating to issues concerning membership, training courses, the supply of information leaflets and seminars are dealt with separately by administrative staff. Queries are also received by the Northern Office via emails sent to the infoni@into.ie email address.

Members can now submit queries through the portal on the INTO website. Members need to be registered on the portal to use this facility. Members log in, click on 'raise a query' and enter the details of their query in the box provided. Once submitted, the query is automatically logged in the the INTO database and is also noted on the members' own record. The query is then assigned to an official for a response.

Active cases continue to be managed by officials in the Northern Office. Cases may relate to individual members or indeed in some cases, the entire membership of a school. Each case is different in terms of the level of complexity and the professional skills required to address it.

Managing casework effectively demands a significant investment of time and resources. Officials aim to ensure that members are kept up-to-date regarding all details relating to cases and are apprised of all developments/opportunities at each stage of the process. In addition, Northern Committee and CEC members are briefed on developments pertaining to casework in their area.

Members receive advice on a range of professional and employee relations issues, including representation at grievance, disciplinary, bullying or harassment investigations and in preparing and taking industrial tribunal cases. With the increasing cost of legal cases, the INTO has produced guidance to assist members who are considering referring their case for legal support and advice. Support for legal cases is the subject of consideration by a prima facie committee. The prima facie committee has expressed the view that generally more effort at a local level should be pursued to resolve disputes before they become legal issues.

Where appropriate, and after consideration by a prima facie committee, consideration may be given to potential legal support to progress cases. This, however, would only be considered where all other industrial relations or negotiation avenues have either failed or been exhausted. Members who engage their own legal representatives do so at their own cost. In addition, a failure to disclose the use of independent legal advisors to the INTO may have an influence or impact on the decision of the INTO to support a case for referral to our own legal advisors.

The INTO relies on a rota of officials to respond to member queries. Kevin Daly was appointed as an official in September 2021. As he had already been appointed staff side lead in progressing the nine reviews stemming from the 2017-19 pay deal, he will remain seconded through NITC. Caroline McCarthy was seconded to Northern Office in September 2021. She joins Paul Groogan, Tommy McGlone, Nuala O'Donnell and Mark McTaggart who manage the query and casework load of the Northern Office.

6.2 Representation

Members continue to be supported to pursue legitimate grievances, and in response to all disciplinary and contractual matters, through the agreed procedures.

Representations, while made more challenging during lockdown have, where possible, continued either by virtual meeting or in person observing social distancing protocols.

In assisting individuals to resolve grievances, the INTO has supported members through mediation, conciliation and arbitration stages of the agreed procedures. The INTO continues to recommend to our members that mediation and conciliation should be undertaken by independent practitioners selected from the LRA.

6.3 Mediation

There has been considerable emphasis on the use of mediation to resolve personal difficulties in schools. Where appropriate, the INTO has encouraged members to engage in such a process.

The INTO has concerns about the independence of Employing Authority mediators, selected from panels but has agreed with CCMS (Council for Catholic Maintained Schools) that the teacher will be advised of an available internal mediation service. The choice of mediator rests solely with the claimant. The INTO supports the use of independent mediators from the LRA.

6.4 Conciliation

Members continue to avail of the use of conciliation services provided by the LRA, as part of the agreed procedures.

6.5 Arbitration

Members are supported to an independent appeal panel where other mechanisms have failed to resolve the grievances. Members have been supported to this stage in relation to:

- Grievances.
- Redundancy/dismissal.
- Bullying/harassment.
- Disciplinary matters.

In 2020/21, the INTO brought a number of cases to independent appeal. The INTO continues to pursue more cases than any other teaching union and has a significantly high level of success at these appeals. The INTO, however, is concerned that there is a serious delay in implementing arbitration decisions, which can lead to further frustrations by the member and potentially result in further claims. Cases were presented to independent appeal hearings in respect of redundancy appeals, grievances, bullying and harassment claims and unfair dismissal issues.

6.6 Industrial tribunals

The INTO continues to support members taking cases to industrial tribunals following a positive recommendation by a prima facie committee and a supportive legal opinion. Representation of members is provided by a senior official and the relevant Northern Committee member. In all cases legal assistance is sought.

6.7 Equality

The INTO prioritises equality of opportunity and responds to equality consultations from a variety of education providers. The INTO has worked with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and other statutory agencies to promote equality of opportunity.

Regular reports of ongoing equality matters are presented to the Northern Committee and the INTO Equality Committee. The INTO is represented by Seán Kelly and Gráinne McAleer on the INTO National Equality Committee.

6.8 Bullying/harassment

Members continue to report increasing cases of bullying/harassment in schools. This remains of serious concern. Members who wish to raise formal complaints against other members of staff or who are accused of bullying behaviour are supported. The union also raises concerns that in a number of cases involving only INTO members at a school, employers have a view that the responsibility for resolving disputes can be ceded to the the INTO.

It remains of concern to the INTO that despite the workload agreement, the issue of excessive workload remains a significant feature of members calls to the Northern Office. The re-prioritisation of individual teacher time budgets through the 2018/19 pay settlement should alleviate many of the issues. The union will continue to monitor the issue.

6.9 Health and safety

Since agreement was reached in 2015 on NITC representation on a range of health and safety committees, Tommy McGlone has coordinated these committees on behalf of NITC. The group has also been charged with the implementation of a revised THAW strategy.

The lack of genuine progress in this area remains of concern to the INTO. It is hoped that progress will be made in this very important area as it sits firmly within the realm of the upcoming nine reviews.

6.10 Violence at work

The INTO is concerned at the rising number of assaults and battery upon teachers by pupils, parents and other adults involved in schools. The union raises individual issues with schools and has supported teachers who are the victims of violence.

The INTO has also raised the issue of violence in schools through a range of articles in *Printout*, local press and appearances on local television and radio. Members who are the victims of assaults remain a priority for the union. The importance of appropriate risk assessments is a factor and is also a frequent topic of calls to the Northern Office.

The all-Ireland dimension of the issue has been highlighted, and an advice leaflet has been developed and published for INTO members who are a victim of assault, which can be adapted to satisfy the needs in each jurisdiction. The leaflet *Advice on Dealing with Assaults and Violence at School* was published in September 2017, and is available from Northern Office and on the INTO website.

6.11 Risk assessment

The need to develop the practice of a risk assessment process, as part of good management practice, has been highlighted by the INTO and remains a priority. The need for effective, setting-specific individual and general risk assessments has been highlighted by the Covid-19 pandemic. It is the use of such risk assessments that will inform the decision-making process regarding a school's fitness to remain open.

6.12 Administration of medicines in schools

This guidance is available on the INTO website and reaffirms that teachers cannot be directed to administer medicines to pupils. The move towards mainstream schooling of children with specific medical needs has also highlighted the importance of support for teachers who are faced with children who have complex medical requirements.

6.13 Health and safety committees

The INTO is concerned at the lack of strategic structures for the negotiation of health and safety issues, relating to teachers in Northern Ireland. The union has been successful in agreeing that the overseeing body for implementing the Teacher Health and Wellbeing report (THAW) will now be designated as a health and safety committee, responsible to the Teachers' Negotiating Committee (TNC).

The health and wellbeing subcommittee has been tasked with commissioning a report in relation to stress at work and its causes, which will be informed by a survey of teachers through the C2K system. Training of the INTO, UTU and NEU Health and Safety School representatives in current legislation, risk assessments and the role of the representative was successfully rolled out by Tommy McGlone, Senior Official.

6.14 Recruitment

Students

The INTO, UTU and NEU jointly attended St Mary's University College, Stranmillis University College and Queen's University freshers' fairs, which were held in person. To enable a quicker registration process and to keep in line with Covid-19 protocols, students registered using a QR code and

completing an online form. The students found this an innovative and seamless way to join the INTO.

University of Ulster at Coleraine held a virtual freshers' fair, which the INTO also attended. The INTO attended Stranmillis teacher recruitment fair. The student membership figure on 31 December 2021 is 747.

Rachel Poland (intern) held a seminar in St Mary's University College on teachers' wellbeing and how the INTO can support student members whilst on teaching practice and then in the early years of their careers. The union has met with St Mary's Students' Union on several occasions and we are working closely together to plan for upcoming webinars to support our student members in 2022.

The INTO continued to support student members via sponsorship of student handbooks and sponsorship of the women's GAA teams in both St Mary's University College and Stranmillis University College. In addition, the INTO sponsor the men's hurling team in St Mary's University College and the men's Gaelic football team in Stranmillis University College.

Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs)

The INTO initiated an online recruitment process for NQTs inviting them to join as full members by using young member testimonies and a video message from current members explaining what their membership means to them. NQTs were contacted in July and again in October.

On the INTO website, there is a section dedicated to NQTs. NQTs can access advice that is pertinent to them including an updated *College to Classroom* handbook.

Each year the union sponsors awards to newly qualified teachers in St Mary's University College and Stranmillis University College who have completed the four-year B.Ed. honours degree. However, due to Covid-19, these awards were not presented in 2021.

Membership

All INTO school representatives were circulated with recruitment materials in April and August. Despite a large number of redundancies and fewer jobs for NQTs, INTO membership is continuing to grow. The membership figure at the end of December 2020 was 6,916.

Members no longer need to apply in hard copy via post as there is now a quick and easy online application system. Once registered members can also update their details via their account on the website and access the member-only content on the website.

Youth Conference 2020

The INTO held a virtual youth conference in January 2020. Delegates were welcomed by Northern Committee Chairperson, Caroline McCarthy and INTO General Secretary, John Boyle. Northern Committee representatives, John Kelly and Rachel O'Hare, spoke about the importance of the union and Northern Secretary, Gerry Murphy provided delegates with an update on current issues and Covid-19.

Delegates could choose to attend any two workshops from the below list:

- Directed Time Budgets (presented by Caroline McCarthy).
- Substitute Teachers and Temporary Contracts (presented by Kevin Daly).
- Accessing Information (presented by Nuala O'Donnell).

Assistant Northern Secretary, Mark McTaggart, addressed all delegates and provided information on how negotiations work within education. Delegates then formed discussion groups and the conference ended with a Q&A plenary.

Appointment of Northern Office Intern

The position of intern was advertised on 30 April 2021. Rachel Poland was successful in her application and was seconded from her teaching post for the school year 2021/22 to work in the INTO Northern Office.

As INTO intern, Rachel has worked closely with the officials throughout the year, answering members' queries and dealing with members' cases. In addition, Rachel has focused on education, recruitment, increasing participation between all members at school, branch, and district level with a special focus on the INTO's younger members. Rachel worked closely with the teaching colleges/university and is strengthening the links between the colleges and the INTO.

In her role as intern, Rachel attended the INTO education committee. At the education conference, Rachel presented results from a recent survey of members in relation to remote learning and working from home.

Youth Committee

The INTO Youth Committee consists of members throughout district 1 and district 2 across a range of sectors. Representatives of the Youth Committee met on 1 December 2021 in the INTO Northern Office.

Committee members:

- Alexa Grudgings Down Branch
- Caolán Byrne Newry Branch
- Emmett Hackett Enniskillen Branch (Youth Committee chairperson)
- Pádraig Mag Riabhaigh Belfast West Branch
- Shannon McCloskey North Antrim Branch
- Shauna McNamee Strabane Branch
- Sorcha Martin South Tyrone Branch

Representatives of the Youth Committee met on 1 December 2021 in INTO Northern Office. The meeting was facilitated by Rachel Poland (intern) and John Kelly (Northern Committee representative). The overall aim of the Youth Committee is to increase participation of younger teachers within the union. The Youth Committee plan to host a youth conference on 20-21 May 2022. The theme of the youth conference will be 'empowerment.' The youth conference will provide a platform for younger teachers to discuss matters that are pertinent to them in their jobs. There will be a variety of workshops available for members.

6.15 INTO training

Menopause awareness

In March 2021, the INTO held a webinar entitled *Raising Awareness of the Menopause* with 50 attendees, both male and female. The webinar highlighted the symptoms of menopause and the potential impact on women in the workplace, their families and colleagues. Advice and support in dealing with menopause in the workplace was provided by a consultant gynaecologist and specialist in the menopause, INTO and ICTU officials and an officer of the Education Authority.

The webinar was very well received and will be followed up in the future with information for members and possible further events. The recording of the webinar is available to view on the INTO website.

Following this, the INTO held an all-Ireland webinar entitled *Menopause, HRT and Women's Future Health* in September 2021, featuring Dr Rebecca Lewis. Dr Lewis is a clinical director at Newson Health Menopause and Wellbeing Centre, which is the largest menopause clinic globally. This was a very informative webinar and the presentation and recording of the webinar are available on the INTO website.

Value My Skills webinar

This virtual workshop was held on 24 March 2021 and was attended by 28 members. Packs of the 'value my skills' cards were sent out in advance of the session. The workshop was very well received and members felt they could go away and use the cards to develop their own career goals and CVs, etc. for promotions/new jobs. However, it was generally felt that this workshop would be more productive if run face-to-face.

INTO school representative training

Training for INTO school representatives on accessing and messaging their member list via the INTO portal was held in October 2021. Fidelma Heston, INTO Head Office, took members through emailing and texting the INTO members in their school via the INTO portal without having to use their school or personal email/mobile accounts. This portal also allows INTO school representatives to check who their members are for information and voting purposes.

Branch training

Newly appointed branch and district secretaries attended the national training in June 2021.

In addition, all branch secretaries and chairpersons were invited to attend the national branch training for branches in districts 1 and 2 in The Nuremore Hotel in December 2021. This was part of the national training for branch officers who were addressed by the INTO president, general secretary, deputy general secretary, northern secretary, chairperson of the Northern Committee and INTO officials, north and south. This followed an initial webinar with the branch secretaries in the north in May 2021 to ascertain training needs of branches.

Northern Committee training

Throughout the Autumn term of 2021, Northern Committee representatives received training on logging and accessing members queries on the INTO database. All member queries to Northern Committee representatives and officials can now be recorded on the members' records on the INTO database.

Union Learning Fund (ULF)

In 2021 INTO successfully bid for funding to develop learning opportunities for members. Career Learning Reps (CLRs) are union representatives trained to support learning at work and to work with course providers and employers for the benefit of all. They can provide initial advice and guidance to individuals and signpost them to educational organisations for additional support.

Career Learning Representatives have statutory rights to carry out their roles and they work to identify learning and skills needs in the workplace. They provide learning advice and guidance on the latest training and initiatives and programmes, and they can work to secure equal opportunities in learning and training. In 2021 branches were asked to elect a CLR for their branch to be trained and work with Northern office in further developing the training programme for INTO members.

6.16 **INTO/NEU/UTU**

INTO/NEU/UTU board representatives

INTO	UTU	NEU
John Boyle	Stephen McCord	Mark Langhammer
Gerry Murphy	Jacquie White	Alastair Donaghy
Siobhán McElhinney	Alison Steen	Susan Parlour
Marie O'Shea	Louise Creelman	
Mark McTaggart	Rebekka Gilpin	

The INTO/NEU/UTU relationship continues to develop. The board has decided to prioritise integration at CEC/NC level. A range of events is organised, including retirement courses, an annual leadership conference, and general benefits for members.

Partnership agreement

The partnership, established in June 2011, with the Ulster Teachers' Union (UTU), National Education Union, (NEU) and the Educational Institute of Scotland, (EIS), continues to develop. The four unions are working together in partnership, to the benefit of teachers in their respective countries.

Joint training

INTO, NEU and UTU officials met on a number of occasions during the year to plan and agree a joint programme of training for members, school representatives and health and safety representatives from the three unions. Some courses were delivered in person by the union officials and others were delivered virtually in interactive webinars.

School representatives

Induction training for INTO school representatives took place in person in October and November 2021 in the INTO Northern Office with numbers limited due to Covid-19 regulations on social distancing. The courses were very successful with many new INTO school representatives receiving their initial training.

Following the induction training a webinar for school reps was held in November on Representing members at school level to inform and update school representatives on their roles and responsibilities. Alastair Donaghy, NEU, delivered the presentation and questions were answered by Alastair, Nuala O'Donnell, INTO and Leigh Cooper, UTU. The presentation and recording of the webinar are available in the school representative section of the INTO website.

Health and safety training

An induction course for new health and safety representatives was held in person in the INTO Northern Office in October 2021. A small number of new INTO reps attended.

One-hour webinars for all members

The first in a series of joint INTO, NEU, UTU information webinars for all members was held in December 2021 to inform and update members on important matters relating to their rights and responsibilities and teachers' terms and conditions of service.

This first webinar was on sick leave and attendance procedure, with an initial presentation by Nuala O'Donnell, followed by a Q&A session answered by Nuala and Alastair Donaghy of NEU. The presentation and recording of the webinar is available for members on the INTO website.

Retirement planning seminars

The INTO/UTU retirement planning seminars, in conjunction with Platinum Financial, were once again very well attended. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, these seminars have taken place as virtual events. There were four pre-retirement webinars delivered for INTO and UTU members by Platinum Financial. All the webinars have been very well attended by almost 300 INTO members.

The success of these webinars is demonstrated by the polls used by Platinum at the start and end of the webinars, where members are asked to rate their knowledge of pensions. At the 31 March 2021 webinar, 70 INTO members stated that their knowledge of pensions at the start was – good: 4%; average: 32%; and poor: 64%. By the end of the webinar, they rated their knowledge of pensions as – good: 57%; average: 47%; and poor: two%.

Further pre-retirement webinars/seminars will be held in the new school year.

Mid-career financial review webinar

This webinar proved very attractive for INTO members with over 200 members registering for it in just a couple of days. Platinum Financial, the independent financial company with whom the INTO has developed a relationship over the past 16 years, delivered pension, mortgage and general financial information to INTO and UTU members in this webinar on 3 March 2021.

Members were able to ask questions, which many did, and were answered by the financial advisers during the webinar. This was the first webinar aimed at teachers in midcareer and it was such a huge success that the INTO ran a second one in October 2021, which was also very well attended.

Annual leadership conference

Due to Covid-19, the annual joint INTO/UTU/NEU leadership conference did not take place.

Membership Plus

All members received their new Membership Plus cards in August 2020. The next date for issuing cards will be August 2022. The Membership Plus card entitles members to over 600 offers and discounts on many different products and services. Members can use the search facility on the Membership Plus website to look for a specific offer, or to look up offers by category or area, with more offers being added all the time. An app was developed, which enables members to search for offers on the go.

6.17 National committees

The two representatives on the INTO National PDC from the north (Henry Duffin, district 1, and Brian McGrath, district 2) attended six meetings of the PDC during 2020, along with Mark McTaggart, Assistant Northern Secretary.

The two representatives on the INTO National Education Committee from the north (Lisa Magennis, district 1, and Dermot Gallagher, district 2) attended meetings of the EDC during 2020 along with Nuala O'Donnell, Senior Official.

The two representatives on the INTO National Equality Committee from the north (Seán Kelly, district 1, and Gráinne McAleer, district 2) attended six meetings of the EQC during 2020 along with Tommy McGlone, Senior Official.

6.18 Communication

The INTO website has been operating for over two years now and it is fully responsive, making it easy to navigate on a wide range of web browsers, mobiles and tablets.

Members can log in to:

1. Check and update your member record ('My INTO' page).
2. Register for INTO courses and events (events – seminars and workshops).
3. Update your preferences for communication from the INTO ('My contact methods').
4. Access all INTO information and services in the members' portal (information area).

A new feature in the members' portal means that once you log in you can now email in your query, and it will be registered with Northern Office and an official will respond to you within 48 hours.

During the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the website has been and continues to be invaluable in the provision of important facts and guidance to members with constant updates of the dedicated Covid-19 page and FAQs.

In order for members to get the full use of the website, they must be registered on the new database. If a member is not registered on the new database with up-to-date details, they will have limited access to member-only information on the website. Email infoni@into.ie if you need assistance getting registered.

The Northern Office Facebook and Twitter accounts have also been providing members with facts and up-to-date guidance on Covid-19 and relevant issues. Members are encouraged to follow the accounts for daily news and updates.

GDPR

Following Brexit, the UK is no longer regulated domestically by the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which governs processing of personal data from individuals inside the EU. Instead, the UK now has its own version known as the UK GDPR (United Kingdom General Data Protection Regulation). The new UK-GDPR took effect on January 31 2020, and it is almost word for word completely identical to the EU's GDPR.

Following on from this, all members should note that from now on there will be a notice displayed regarding the use of photographs and videos at all INTO events. Any member who does not wish to give permission for the use of their image will be asked to inform INTO staff at the event.

6.19 **Annual Vere Foster Lecture**

The annual Vere Foster Lecture was held on Friday, 15 October 2021, in The Malone Hotel, Belfast, and was delivered by Dr Caitlin Donnelly, Senior Lecturer, School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work, Queen's University Belfast. It was entitled: *Managerialism in a post-Covid world...has it run its course?*

6.20 **Annual INTO art competition**

The 2021 winners of the INTO art competition were: Susan McMullan (Down branch), Ryan McCabe (Newry branch) and Gavin Fox (north Armagh branch). All of the competition entries were displayed in Northern Office and in *Printout*.

Northern Conference 2021

Resolutions passed/remitted

Following Covid-19 restrictions, business critical has dominated practice at the employing bodies and Department of Education. Progress in relation to the conference resolutions has, where possible, continued.

Resolution 1

Conference:

1. Notes with grave concern the education minister's lack of clear, adequate and prompt guidance to school leaders during the Covid-19 pandemic.
2. Deplores the failure to consult in a timely fashion with the teachers' unions and school leaders on decisions which have had major implications for schools and the education of our young people.
3. Conference instructs Northern Committee to inform the education minister that he no longer enjoys the confidence of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation.

Action

Letter sent to minister of education informing him that the INTO had no confidence in his role.

Resolution 2

Conference notes the move toward pay restoration through the negotiated uplift in pay for the years 2019/20 and 2020/21.

Conference commends the work of NITC in securing these uplifts.

Conference calls on Northern Committee to work, through NITC, to ensure that progress is maintained in securing full pay restoration as expediently as possible.

Action

A salary uplift demand was agreed at NITC and sent to management side in September 2021. Unions are awaiting a response to the demand.

Resolution 3

Conference notes that the Special Educational Needs Review has been issued for consultation during a pandemic.

Conference, welcomes the findings of the NICCY report, *Too Little, Too Late* with its 53 recommendations all accepted by EA, validating the experiences of SEN stakeholders across the North.

Conference, notes with concern that over the past five years this and other reports have yielded 153 recommendations for change to the practices of the Education Authority.

Conference calls on Northern Committee to work through the NITC to:

1. Demand that EA and DE publish the consultations on the proposed SEN legislation and engage with stakeholders in addressing concerns which have been raised in these.
2. Demand that EA produce within their SEN action plan the steps they intend to take in addressing the 153 recommendations.
3. Demand that EA and DE publish any proposed changes with a narrative and rationale supported by robust evidence-based research.
4. Seek assurances from EA and DE that high quality provision provided by EA Support Services is, where necessary, expanded to meet the needs of those who need it.
5. Seek representation on the SEND Strategic Development Programme Board.

Action

Representation made by NITC Through the SEN review in the nine reviews agreed through the 2017/19 pay award.

Caroline McCarthy (INTO) NITC representative on the SEND Development Programme Board

Resolution 4

Conference notes the INTO's long established policy of opposition to academic selection in Northern Ireland.

Conference further notes the added difficulties created by the Coronavirus pandemic in relation to the testing associated with academic selection.

Conference calls on to continue to campaign against academic selection and in particular to work with all appropriate bodies to call for a suspension of all entrance tests for post-primary schools in the academic year 2021/22 in light of the disruption being caused to education by the pandemic

Action

INTO opposition to academic selection and calls for an end to unregulated tests is included in the submission to the Independent Review of Education.

The INTO made a presentation to the education minister in September 2021 outlining concerns and reiterated its opposition to academic selection.

Representations were made to Stormont Education Committee.

Resolution 5

Conference commends the work of teacher and school leaders in facilitating remote learning for children and young people during the current pandemic.

Conference notes with concern, the lack of leadership by, and the disregard of, staff and pupil welfare from the education minister and his department in the implementation of remote learning.

Conference further notes the underlying concerns of members regarding the potential of new technologies to replace fundamental areas of their work.

Conference calls on Northern Committee to:

1. Investigate potential areas of risk posed by new technologies to job security.
2. Work through NITC as a matter of urgency, to develop agreed policies with management side in relation to the use of technology for the delivery of learning, which protect the rights of members in schools.

Action

Advice given to members through the frequently asked questions section of INTO website.

Representations made at Covid-19 restart group.

Resolution 6

Conference:

1. Notes with concern the profound and potentially long-lasting impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on our children and young people.
2. Supports the DE Engage Programme and its aim 'to limit any long-term adverse impact of the Covid-19 lockdown on educational standards by supporting pupils' learning and engagement on their return to school through provision of high quality one-to-one, small group or team-teaching support in every.
3. Calls on Northern Committee to campaign for the extension of the Engage Programme, or similar, into and for the duration of the next academic year, to address the adverse impact of the pandemic and meet the needs of all children.

Action

Issues regarding the Engage Programme are raised at the Covid 19 restart meetings.

Extended Engage Programme requested as a mitigation included I NITC document to DE and employers prior to ministers statement.

Resolution 7

Conference:

1. Finds that principals' and deputy principals' duties, responsibilities and workload far exceed the role of the principal and deputy principal as set out in the Education and Libraries (NI) Order, 1986 and in the Teachers' Terms and Conditions of Employment Regulations (NI) 1987, to the point of having a detrimental effect on their work/life balance, mental health and wellbeing.
2. Notes with concern that the further additional workload currently on principal and vice-principal teachers, as a result of Covid-19, has gone beyond reasonable expectations.
3. Instructs to:
 - Initiate a review of the duties and responsibilities of principal and vice principal teachers.
 - Ensure the PDC and Fora be central in the consultation of any such review.

Action

Principal and Deputy Principal Fora are now active, and available for consultation.

Issues raised through the 'Review of workload impact on School Leaders' workstream.

Resolution 8

Conference notes with concern the fact that money promised to support schools as Covid related costs has not yet appeared in school budgets.

Conference calls on Northern Committee to seek assurances from the Education Authority that costs due to mitigations around the Covid-19 pandemic will not be reflected in final school budget outcomes, nor be used when calculating the requirement for reducing staffing to ensure individual school budgets remain within the agreed parameters.

Action

Request made for clarification through the Covid-19 restart group and continuing to lobby through this group to extend funding to ensure no detriment to schools.

Resolution 9

Conference calls on Northern Committee to work, through NITC, with EA to develop a system of procurement that better reflects the needs of schools, and that is demonstrably fit for purpose.

No progress made due to NITC engagement with EA on Covid related issues.

To be raised in EA/NITC engagement forums.

Resolution 10

Conference:

1. Notes the rapid expansion in the use of social media and website sharing platforms in education during this pandemic.
2. Further notes the absence of clear, sector-wide agreed expectations of pupils, parents and carers with regard to social media.
3. Calls on Northern Committee to lobby the Department of Education for a sector-wide social media code of conduct for parents, pupils and carers.

The INTO continues to lobby DE and employing authorities on this matter.

Resolution 11

Conference notes that there has been an apparent slowing of the pace of school closures throughout the current pandemic.

Conference further notes that this pandemic has reinforced the importance of the contribution that all schools give to their local communities.

Conference calls on Northern Committee to seek the formation of a forum to examine the school estate, with a particular onus on small schools, to collectively explore strategies to retain the current school estate and to reject school closure as the only option.

Addressed in the INTO submission to 'Independent review of Education.'

Addressed in the INTO response to the draft consultation of the Strategic Area Plan documents.

Resolution 12

Conference notes with concern that opportunities for teachers' professional development within the profession have decreased to a point that the chances of receiving high quality, relevant training is at a premium.

Conference further notes that the personal, financial and time costs associated with enrolling for further professional qualifications such as an MEd is unattainable for many teachers.

Conference acknowledges the value and worth of this additional training would have a positive impact on the knowledge and professionalism evident within our schools.

Conference calls on to:

1. Lobby the Education Authority to make more professional development opportunities available for teachers.

2. Explore the opportunities of a grant scheme from the Department of Education for teachers to go towards postgraduate qualifications in order to further the expertise of the teaching workforce.

Raised in EA/NITC engagement forums. No progress due to focus on Covid-19.

Resolution 13

Conference notes with concern communications from the Education Authority with regard to budget enhancements due to proposed changes in requirements for SEN, prior to the outcomes of the current SEN consultations by DE and EA, and the contradictory advice with regard to the final date for spending of same.

Conference further notes that where schools have requisitioned goods and services with regard to changes in requirements for SEN, the EA has been unable or unwilling to process those requests.

Conference calls on Northern Committee to work, through NITC, with EA to ensure that schools have the necessary funding for proposed SEN changes and are able to spend when required.

Action

Representation made by NITC Through the SEN review in the nine reviews agreed through the 2017/19 pay award.

Resolution 14

Conference requires that Northern Committee communicate with schools and DE to ensure that online digital learning provision does not become an additional burden for teachers, rather that it is afforded due acknowledgement and consideration in time budgets.

Action

Issues raised through the Review of the Workload Agreement workstream.

Remote learning survey conducted. Findings shared at INTO National Education Conference. Remote Learning Policy under development.

Resolution 15

Conference notes with concern the inadequacies of a majority of buildings housing children across education.

Conference calls on Northern Committee to:

1. Survey members to gather evidence in relation to the poor standard of school accommodation.
2. Use evidence from this survey to lobby DE, the Department of Finance and political representatives with a view to an increase in the capital building grant out with the current funding for education.

Action

Survey has been held back due to other surveys in relation to Covid 19 restart and principal workload.

Resolution 16

Conference deplores both the poor timing of emails about key issues sent by DE to school principals and the lack of prior notice from DE about key decisions before public announcements.

Conference calls on Northern Committee to demand from DE that the timing of communications to school leaders are improved and that communications are issued within normal working hours.

Action

Issue raised at the Covid-19 restart meetings and Workstreams Oversight group.

Resolution 17

Conference notes the continued solidarity with, and actions being carried out, by INTO members and officials in relation to the plight of Palestinian children in the occupied territories of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Conference reiterates the policy position taken by this organisation in support of the BDS movement at Congress 2018.

Conference calls on Northern Committee to:

1. Publicise its confirmed position on BDS on the INTO website and INTO publications.
2. Inform conference of the actions taken by the INTO in relation to this position since Congress 2018.
3. Engage with CEC to bring formal recognition of the group of members who have attended delegations to Palestine through the Trade Union Friends of Palestine in support of this policy position, as an official grouping within the INTO, to be known as the 'INTO Palestine Ambassadors' Group'.

Action

Motion to Congress 2022.

Resolution 18

Conference notes the successes of the INTO Northern Youth Conference in both 2019 and 2021 in encouraging and nurturing participation of our younger members into activism in the union.

Conference calls on Northern Committee to:

1. Ensure that the Northern Youth Conference is a regular bi-annual event in the INTO calendar.
2. Develop a Northern Youth Committee, to mirror the format of Northern Committee, to be formed and to meet twice a year to discuss issues particularly pertinent to recently qualified teachers.

Action

Youth Committee established and met December 2021.

Youth Conference 2022 to take place May 2022.

Resolution 19

Conference commends the continued work carried out by INTO school representatives in our schools.

Conference notes the number of schools with no INTO school representative.

Conference reiterates its call on Northern Committee to devise a strategy to raise the profile of the role and to recruit new school representatives.

Action

Article in *Printout* calling for school reps.

Branch officers/NC area reps made aware of the schools in each branch that have no school reps.

Number of branches have called meetings in schools, attended by Northern official/area rep. to elect reps in schools.

Remitted To Northern Committee

Motion 17

Conference notes with concern the large number and high stakes nature of examinations, and other qualifications undertaken by pupils from Year 11 through to Year 14 in post primary schools along with the associated workload for teachers and students.

Conference further notes the practice of a transition year available to students in the Republic of Ireland and calls on Northern Committee to work with the appropriate bodies towards the establishment of similar provision for students in Northern Ireland.