

Good morning everyone,

I too wish to welcome all our guests and I extend, on your behalf a particular welcome to the new INTO President Joe McKeown. Joe will be a great President and is just the person to lead INTO into a changed educational landscape, post Covid. His instinctive understanding of our situation here and his desire to promote the INTO as one voice for teachers in whatever sector and in whatever part of this island is most welcome. His task of course has been made much easier as he is following the wonderful Mary Magner who was robbed of her chance to address Northern Conference by the pandemic. Mary's Presidency may have been virtual but her contribution to INTO north and south was and is very real. I am delighted she can join us today.

We are also joined, for the last time as an official delegate, by our great friend and mentor Noel Ward who will shortly step down from INTO. Noel we truly appreciate your work on behalf of the INTO members in the north through your illustrious INTO career and I personally will miss your insight and sage advice. We look forward to working with Deirdre O'Connor who steps into your role. Deirdre will be a brilliant AGS, and I can think of no one better to build on Noel's legacy.

Unfortunately, we cannot get together in the traditional INTO fashion due to the continuing fall-out from the pandemic, nevertheless we will battle through and get our business done. The work ethic our General Secretary established from the get-go in this Covid era has inspired us to continue to represent you, the members, fully despite the difficult circumstances we find ourselves in.

I am grateful to you all for the effort you have all made to join us and to the Minister for taking the time to record an address to Conference. Minister Weir is quite unique in several ways, no other Minister has served twice in the same Ministry and even more uniquely was central to the beginning of an industrial dispute during his first period in office which he was then also central to resolving when he returned for a second run in the Ministry of Education. We may not agree with the Minister on many of the big issues and in particular his continued support for the educationally unsound and socially divisive transfer procedure but I acknowledge he has always been available to INTO. Hopefully, the next Minister will be just as accessible and hopefully open to take advantage of the benefits of greater partnership working with INTO and our trade union colleagues.

We have all endured much over the course of the pandemic to date, but we have evolved and learned from the experience and I know you all join with me in hoping we have turned a corner and seen off the worst of Covid. The price we have all paid for the Covid experience is such that we would be silly to not seek to maximise the opportunities it has created. We have been thrust into new ways of working, we have seen that schools can function effectively without the excessive bureaucracy that has characterised them in recent years, we have discovered that our curriculum is ripe for renewal and our examinations regime is no longer fit for purpose. These things mean we cannot return to the way things were pre pandemic.

That said, there are changes afoot in the world of education. The review of education arising from the NDNA Agreement, something INTO was instrumental in promoting, is an opportunity to develop a new vision of our education system. We are actively engaged in reviewing nine areas concerning the teacher's contract, the working atmosphere and environment: and the broader educational context with the Department of Education and the employing authorities. There are voices in broader society ranging from respected academics, former senior educationalists, representatives of business, community groups and lately former political prisoners all calling for change to a system which we all, INTO members and our distinguished guests, know needs fundamental reform. We at INTO are determined that we take the opportunity we have now to support the bringing about of the necessary reform. Our members, the children and young people they teach, and society more generally deserve better than what is available to them at present, working together it is possible for us give it to them. INTO has been instrumental in promoting a changed atmosphere amongst the education stakeholders, it's now more productive and we are learning to trust each other again. We recognise and accept there are competing agendas and wider mostly political considerations to be overcome but we are willing to be imaginative and prepared to take risks to achieve the change we need. I invite our guests to consider this, we are not naïve but as the old Chinese proverb says, "a journey of a thousand miles begins with one step". Who among you is prepared to take this first step with us?

That first section of my speech is a familiar topic to you, the approach I have outlined has not changed in the almost decade I have been Northern Secretary. It is my belief that partnership working along with risk taking and perseverance are key to our continued success. The other central plank to being the most effective teachers' union is to not lose sight of the members' needs and to learn from past experiences and it is this that I want to talk about now.

Between 2010 and 2019 we experienced the consequences of a series of Labour and in particular Tory, British governments hanging their hats on what we can now confirm was a negative and destructive economic doctrine, neo liberalism. The cuts to public spending were deep and we have yet to recover fully from them but the place we saw the worst effects were in the two areas close to every INTO members' heart, pay and terms and conditions.

In the recent past we have made some progress in recovering some of the losses which you experienced in terms of pay and we are committed to redressing the erosion of your terms and conditions which suffered serious undermining over the same period. Our salary strategy has changed in the course of the last two pay deals. It changed because we learnt from our approach to salary protection and growth during the height of the Tories neo liberal heyday. Our approach then was to come out swinging early and then tuck in behind a piece of industrial action and wait things out. It can be argued that this strategy has been ultimately successful, but it took a long time again almost a decade to see any real progress. It also created a whole generation of teachers who have known nothing but endless industrial action and who have never worked in a school free of it.

What we need now is a different approach and we need it because the world is a different place and because you, our members, want different things than those who came before you. The contract that governs your employment, the Jordanstown Agreement, is over 40 years old, think about that. Just think about the number of changes in your life over that period of time, think about how the world has changed, consider the way you live your life compared to how your parents have lived theirs. It is time we shaped our working environments in a way that reflects this changed world and which compliments how we live our lives. Jordanstown has run its course, it is out of date and fragmenting as it is swamped with ad hoc modifications.

I am proposing that going forward beginning with the pay claim we are lodging shortly for the next year we adopt a twin track approach. The first leg of that twin track, with the support of the NITC will be the lodging a claim which gives equal prominence to both a cost-of-living uplift, a pay rise in plain English and specific improvements to specific aspects of your terms and conditions. Such an approach comes out of the learning we benefitted from the deal we accepted by a huge majority last year, following the first ever electronic vote in INTO's history. The outworking of that deal is still unfolding and will do so for a couple of years to come and those out workings are mainly as I outlined earlier about the working environment and the terms and conditions which will govern your employment. This year's claim will target, in addition to a pay uplift one specific additional piece of your terms and conditions, the pathetic maternity scheme available to teachers', the worst in the public service.

The second track will be to push forward the 9 reviews from the last pay deal which are pointing the way towards two inescapable facts. Firstly, the Jordanstown Agreement is no longer fit for purpose and we need it replaced with a contract that reflects the lives of a profession that is 84% female and who have rights and expectations that cannot be denied any longer. In this the third decade of the 21st century a profession such as ours has to be populated by people who enjoy their work and are free to devote themselves to it without having to make a series of compromises in every other area of their lives. It will become clear to those in authority who have not yet realised it we need to sit down and re-negotiate Jordanstown. The second inescapable fact we need to address is that our system is hugely under resourced in terms of teachers. What we have been saying for the last decade about teacher numbers is about to be brought home with the implementation of time budgets across the education system.

So, our revised pay strategy going forward is about chipping away at Jordanstown until it eventually is swept away and the powers that be are forced to replace in negotiation with INTO while at the same time, we continue the battle to have teachers paid a salary that reflects their worth. We can do this. It will take time. It will involve the 3ps, patience, perseverance, and partnership. We can do it as I said, and we will do the entire education system and society generally a great favour in doing so.

That concludes my substantive remarks, but I want in conclusion to thank my colleagues in Northern Office for all their hard work over the course of the pandemic I am immensely proud to lead such a team. They have demonstrated an unswerving commitment to you the

members and the organisation as a whole, and I thank them on all our behalf. In the old world we used to say cometh the hour cometh the man but in our present world it has been the case of cometh the hour cometh the woman. The outgoing chair of the Northern Committee, Caroline McCarthy has been an inspirational leader who rose to the challenge of leading us all through our response to the pandemic in a manner which was both an example and at times almost overwhelming. Thank you, Caroline. Her successor Marie O'Shea will no doubt make an equally impressive fist of leading us forward, welcome aboard Marie, we will enjoy working with you.

That is all from me, enjoy the rest of this 153rd INTO Northern Conference.