**TUI Annual Congress 2015**

**President’s response to Minister  
8th April 2015 – please check against delivery  
  
Welcome**

Minister we welcome you and your officials to our Congress. This is your first TUI Congress as Minister and it is my first TUI Congress as President, so we have one thing in common.

However, while our welcome is sincere it occurs in very difficult circumstances. These circumstances include an educational landscape which has suffered from the scorched earth of relentless cuts, many of which have adversely affected the most vulnerable and marginalised teenagers. We have a teaching and lecturing profession in crisis, scarred by income poverty, particulary for younger teachers. It is also damaged by dangerously insustainable workloads. We are above international norms for our annual number of class contact hours. Yet the teaching profession is becoming increasingly bureaucratised and lecturer numbers decrease as student numbers increase. This damage requires radical, immediate intervention, not cosmetic surgery or medium term promises.   
These unprovoked wounds run deep but yet there are some government policy makers who apparently thought that we could be pushed around even further, that we could somehow be reduced to passive units of production rather than the proud and conscientious professionals that we are. But those policy makers were badly mistaken Minister as the current industrial unrest proves and if these policy

makers, under your direction, don`t learn from their mistakes then there will be more trouble on the

horizon. Minister let the message be loud and clear The TUI, locally and nationally, is on the move.

Minister, you have inherited many of these problems and in a sense you have been given a poisoned chalice. However, notwithstanding the history of how we have reached this juncture there is much within your power which can be done to correct the damage. This includes the necessity of improving the working conditions and morale of the teachers, lecturers and other educators in the TUI. Such changes are the cornerstone for real reform of the education system to improve the learning experiences of its students and the effectiveness of its

schools, colleges and education centres . There is the potential that you can become the contemporary Minister who truly reformed Irish education by beginning a process of renewal through investment and by winning the hearts and minds of its most important resource, its workforce. Because Minister, let us be in no doubt there is a huge amount of thinking and work that

needs to be done in this regard. Choose this path Minister, because trying to enforce unworkable measures such as forced mergers or measures for which there is no time, will not reform education, it will damage education and further alienate teachers and lecturers.

**St Angela`s.**

So I`ll begin by asking you to take a practical step and intervene with the management at NUIG who have continuously refused to speak to the TUI as representatives of our members in St Angela`s College in Co Sligo. Are we being discriminated against because

we are effective advocates for our members? The lecturers at St Angela`s face a difficult future when their college is incorporated into NUIG and they have been threatened that they will be demoted from lecturers to university teachers. This high handed, undemocratic and confrontational approach is the product of an elitist mindset and from a university which has a proven track

record when it comes to issues of gender inequality. TUI and its almost exclusively female membership in St Angela`s will not stand for this and they have already had a one day strike and another is planned for the 16th April. We applaud their principles, their courage and their resolve in this David and Goliath showdown. As an act of solidarity all of our Third Level branches will hold lunch time protests at every Institute of Technology throughout the country on their second day of strike. **Minister, intervene immediately and tell NUIG that their discriminatory behaviour is undemocratic and unacceptable.**

**Tell them that they have their work cut out for them in taking on the resilience and resourcefulness of the TUI.**

Tell them that their behaviour will not be tolerated by a union that is on the move.

**Education Cuts**

Minister we hear a lot about educational reform from Government and management sources.

Junior Cycle reform, Technological Universities and SOLAS are all part of the official lexicon which seeks to herald an apparently bright new era for Irish education. Yet none of this resonates with the teachers, lecturers and other educators in the TUI. Rather than a fanfare we hear the ominously slow drum rolls of DPER, private providers, technocrats and those who are generally opposed to public education and public servants. We have come to recognise educational cuts in whatever guise they might appear because we`ve become so accustomed to them. None of this is to suggest that these developments are completely devoid of any educational value because their architects know that decoys and smoke screens are required. But these decoys don`t fool anyone in the TUI and we look forward to a new dawn when good educational ideas, appropriate for the Irish context, can be discussed on their own merit.

Since December 2008 there have been at least 40 education cuts which have adversely affected students, parents, guardians, teachers, lecturers and other educators in the sectors where our members work. Ultimately these cuts damage Irish society and its economy too.

Minister, I gave some consideration to listing and briefly explaining all of these cuts today as a means of reminding you and your officials of the damage done by austerity to education. But on reflection I`m not in the business of making the longest Congress speech in TUI history.

All of these cuts have caused harm but I have selected two which are particularly damaging in their short, medium and long term effects. Firstly, in this rogues gallery is the 2011 Budget cut to Guidance Counselling which was removed as an ex-quota provision for schools. This cut has totally undermined the provision of this essential service for students. Audits conducted by the Irish Guidance Counsellors show that the cut resulted in a more than 50% reduction in the one to one time for Guidance Counselling. This one to one time is essential for First Year students who are experiencing serious transition issues from primary school, students who are experiencing difficulties with subject and career choices, and the huge increase in students who have personal problems because of the social and economic damage inflicted by the recession and austerity. While the need for early interventions with students has increased the capacity of schools to do has greatly decreased. The most recent report from the ESRI longitudinal study tracking the experiences of students from second to third level has highlighted the importance of guidance and counselling for the educational and personal well-being of students, particularly those from economically and socially

disadvantaged families. Children from these families are also dependent on *The School Completion Programme* which provides excellent services to children at risk.

This programme increases school completion, in many cases to 95%. Yet it has been cut overall by 33%. These two cuts are very real but also symbolic of the heartlessness of the cuts to vulnerable children who need and are entitled to education to improve their lives. For privilege and elites to survive unscathed in Ireland while these children`s education and futures are damaged is an indictment on all of those who are responsible for austerity.

Minister, the TUI stands with the most vulnerable in our schools and demands that these cruel cuts be reversed.

**Posts of responsibility**.

Minister, the moratorium on posts of responsibility has devastated middle management and leadership in schools. The moratorium must be lifted immediately and the number of posts increased to meet the administrative, pastoral care and leadership needs of schools.

Furthermore, posts of responsibility must be provided for the FE sector where the Quality Assurance apparatus that was imposed through Croke Park is a long way from the Mc Iver recommendations. The severe shortage of these posts is placing serious strain on the functioning of schools with teachers and students suffering the consequences as well as the obvious negative impact on school effectiveness.

We are hugely concerned about the regressive managerialist JMB/ACCS document “*A proposal for management structures for post primary schools.*” This document seeks that each school be provided with a sum of money, according to its size, and that the Board of Management i.e. the employer decides on the range of roles and the tier at which each role is awarded. If such a proposal were sanctioned it would lead to incalculable harm to the collegiality among teachers in a school.

School effectiveness depends on collaboration among teachers. International research shows that measures which promote individualism and hierarchical forms of management and leadership in schools are counterproductive. Career structures for teachers must be built on the systems which are in already in place and subject to constant review in terms of the fairness and transparency of candidate selection.

The model being proposed by the management bodies is used in England which has a greatly troubled education system with a high attrition rate of

young teachers. I worked there for while Minister and saw really good people crushed by the combined weight of bureaucracy and student indiscipline.

Minister don`t take us any further down that disastrous road. Be radical, be democratic. Support and promote teacher collegiality. Lift the moratorium and provide assistant principal and special duties teachers’ posts.

**Job losses and Casualisation.**

Minister, the cuts to education have also been borne more directly by teachers, lecturers and all the

other educationalists in the TUI. While these cuts undermine our collective capacity to provide an

excellent public education service, I want to draw your attention also to the unfairness of these cuts

in terms of job losses and casualised work which frequently doesn`t provide a living wage. Jobs have been lost by means of the Employment Control Framework at Third Level and by increasing the Pupil Teacher Ratio at second level and in the Further Education sector. These jobs must be restored. However, having a job does not necessarily bring all the benefits it might appear to do. One third of our teachers have casualised work with less than full hours or temporary contracts and many have both of these disadvantages combined. The proportion increases to 50% for those under 30 years of age.

In this regard we welcome the publication of the Ward Report and in particular the provision of job security for temporary teachers after two years. This is a significant step in addressing the corrosiveness of casualisation and we acknowledge your assistance in this respect Minister.

However, if the Ward Report can be described as a rung up the ladder then we`re several rungs away from the top where qualified, skilled and committed teachers can secure a proper career in education. Minister, you must now ensure that CID holders with less than full hours

are offered all hours which become available in their school, for which they are qualified. You have the power to do that and you must be ambitious for our teachers, lecturers and by extension the well-being of our students. Also you can insure that permanent jobs

are offered to NQTs in the first instance. It`s not good enough for your department to simply say that employers/management are free to do this

when they clearly are not. You must show leadership in this regard and ensure that permanent wholetime appointments are made.

**Workload and other professional challenges**

Minister, recent national surveys of teachers and lecturers have confirmed the worst of what many

of us knew from our experience as practitioners and trade unionists.

In second level, third level and Further Education Work overload, bureaucratisation which deflects from teaching and learning, and the increasingly challenging

behaviour from some students in schools are having a detrimental effect on the professional and personal lives of educators. This should be of huge concern to you

because these are the same issues which are driving people out of teaching in countries like England and the USA. Is it of surprise to anyone that these are also countries which are experiencing ongoing frustration with lack of educational progress despite waves of so-called reforms?

International statistics have separately shown that Irish teachers and lecturers in IoTs have class contact hours and student numbers well above the OECD average. Minister, this makes a mockery of any Government claims about educational reform because this is where reform must begin. Education`s most important asset is its human resource.

This is the foundation on which the school house is built and if this foundation is placed under unfair and unmanageable strain then the whole structure will not be as strong as it should be.

In terms of a holistic education there are many concerns about teacher work overload such as the capacity of teachers to continue to give voluntarily, at the previously high levels, for extra-curricular activities. Observers from prominent national sporting bodies have expressed their concerns about this and ironically this is partly because of the so-called Croke Park hours. It appears that instead of nurturing students` ambition for the Croke Park field of dreams many teachers are ticking boxes and compiling mountains of paperwork for the new uninspiring school based understanding and experience of Croke Park. Minister you must eradicate this bureaucratic absurdity which misleadingly usurps the name of something so valuable in Irish education and society.

Workload at Third Level is at a completely unsustainable point also. Lecturers in IoTs are delivering two additional class contact hours per week, the so-called flex hours. But it`s not just these two hours because there`s the preparation, planning and assessment which is necessitated by the additional lecturing. In total Third Level lecturers will have delivered, free of charge, approximately 100 million euro of lectures by the end of the Haddington Road Agreement. Minister, our members must be freed of this intolerable burden. This must happen and will happen because it is the right

thing to do. But also because if Government really does believe in job creation and if you really believe in educational reform then the flex hours will be discarded to the dustbin of history.

**Adult and Further Education.**

Minister, despite the absence of formal recognition, Adult and Further Education has been a success story of Irish education over the last 30 years. Teachers and other educators in this sector have been the drivers of its development. We are deeply concerned that this valuable education work which serves communities so well will be undermined by the excessive focus on training and business criteria by SOLAS. Courses delivered by private providers present a serious threat to the strong educational ethos enabled by public provision. Private providers duplicate some of what our members do but by neglecting the educational dimension. Minister you can greatly assist in the maintenance of educational standards and support for community cohesion and equity by undertaking that Government funding of education both directly by your department and indirectly through agencies such as SOLAS will be given to public providers.

Minister we are singularly unimpressed by your continued failure to allow TUI representation on the

board of SOLAS. By not doing so you are censoring the voice of the practitioners. This voice is collectively and democratically channelled through the structures of organised labour. And this denial couldn`t be happening at a worse time when education and the benefits of public education are under threat in Further Education. Minister, take a step for educational reform and appoint a TUI representative to the board of SOLAS.

**Technological Universities.**

Minister, the Institutes of Technology, with their regional mission, have a strong strategic role

in Irish society. Socially and economically they are vital to our regions and the achievement of some level of balanced regional development. The recognised apprenticeships have been an important part of this and they must continue to be supported and expanded in their natural home which is the IoTs. There are thousands of students who would never have attended a Third Level college but for the advantage of having an IoT relatively nearby.

These strengths remain as important today as they were when the Regional Technical Colleges were first opened.

We should not play fast and loose with structures of educational success because of short term rationalisation expediencies.

That is not to say that we are opposed to the concept of Technological Universities but considerable financial investment to meet the academic criteria and guarantees about wedding the best of the past with the promise of the future, are needed. What is also needed is a recognition that a one size fits all approach won`t work in a geographically disparate landscape. Therefore the proposed prerequisite that colleges merge before seeking Technological University status must be removed.

And minister ill-conceived mergers won`t work especially where TUI members vote overwhelmingly to oppose them.

The proposed Technological University legislation is dangerous in a number of other important respects and needs to be changed. Examples of this are; There should be no reference of transfer of staff to any employer other than that formed from TU designation.

The legislation should protect existing pensions, conditions of service and apprenticeship provision.

There should be no reference to TUs setting local pay and terms of employment.

Where TUs emerge from agreed and workable mergers federal governance structures with respect for the local identities of the incorporated IoTs should be put in place.

Also the heads of bill indicate that IT Tallaght and IT Blancherstown will be dissolved on enactment of the legislation. This is totally unacceptable given the imminence of the legislation and that consultation with TUI has been inadequate. Minister, don`t rush this legislation. Learn from the mistakes of your predecessor. Ensure that there is full consultation at all levels.

**The Junior Cycle Dispute.**

Minister, I want to talk a little about the nature of teaching and what makes it worthwhile. Making a

connection with a student, opening the curtains of confusion and letting in the light of knowledge

and comprehension is a reward in and of itself. So too is the observation that students are realising their potential and developing as people and citizens. Innovation in the modern Irish classroom is a regular occurrence as teachers compete with the myriad of media and contemporary social challenges in an attempt to engage the attention and interest of their students. There is probably no greater insult to teachers than to suggest that we are opposed to reform or that we would use opposition to reform simply as a means of protest. Shame on those, including the previous minister, who said that our opposition to school based assessment for a new junior cycle is posturing. Shame on those who have tried to misrepresent us as being opposed to educational reform. Shame on those who talk down to us about how to teach and who couldn`t survive for 5 minutes in some of our classrooms.

During the course of the Junior Cycle Dispute we were bombarded with selectively chosen and inconclusive research in order to justify school based assessment. Before Christmas *The Irish Times,* using the powers of the Freedom of Information Act, established beyond doubt that the previous cabinet considered dismantling the externally assessed SEC model for Junior Cycle

assessment, in order to save money. This was no more than what we suspected and we understood deeply the dangers such assessment poses for the pupil-teacher professional relationship, the objectivity of assessment and the reliability of grades. We also knew that the public understood this too.

We were told by your predecessor that his Junior Cycle Reform ship had departed and the only question was its arrival date. Well he obviously hadn`t heard about the Titanic. That would probably explain why he risked the future of history in his proposals.

I think the metaphor of a ministerial car would have been a better choice with Ruairi driving to his nirvana of Junior Cycle Reform egged on by one or two senior civil servants in the back seat. And of course we must not forget your loyal "interested parties" minister, the ones who have agreed with every decision of yours and your predecessor. These are the nodding dog in the back window and they just keep nodding away regardless of whether its Ruairi driving at high speed into the quagmire or you taking over and making a reasonable attempt at reversing out but still stuck.

On a more serious note the great educational thinker, Paulo Friere, who advocated, as we do, many of the ideas underpinning the reform proposals, such as critical thinking, said that you cannot expect positive results from an educational action programme which doesn’t “respect the particular view of the world held by the people”. “Such a programme [he said] constitutes cultural invasion, good intentions notwithstanding”. Indeed Dr Pauric Travers has said that his proposals stand little chance of success without the support of teachers. Minister, stand back , think of what the founders of the Labour Party would have thought of you trying to proceed hand in glove with management bodies to implement, in the words of Fereire, “a cultural invasion”, against the will of the workers.

Minister, you have already succeeded in strengthening our school system by restoring external assessment with state certification at Junior Cycle. In terms of being able to move forward to negotiate on the necessary issues of teacher time/workload and the resources required, further discussion is required. We need to ensure equity for all subjects and students by having projects externally assessed and state certified for all subjects. We need to address and solve the genuine professional difficulties of teachers of English who are in the front line in all of this. Forcing these teachers to compel unwilling and embarrassed second year students to make presentations to the rest of their class is wrong, as all teachers understand. That is not to say that communication skills or public speaking should not be cultivated, of course they should, but not in a manner which might cause distress for some students and damage the role of a teacher as a caring professional.

Our classrooms must be happy places where the dignity and well-being of young people are protected.

Minister, remove the preconditions and engage in talks to bring about a resolution. You cannot proceed with implementation as long as teachers willingly and enthusiastically implement the non-cooperation directives.

**Pay**

Minister, I mentioned earlier the scourge of casualisation and acknowledged your assistance in that

regard. Casualisation is linked to pay and pay is linked to a person`s ability to live with dignity. All of our members have suffered pay cuts and there are people in all grades and on all points of the pay scale who are suffering because of those cuts. Pay must be restored and restored for all without any strings attached. We have had enough of strings attached, or should I say

ropes which are tying us down, and the damage to education which it has caused. But Minister if there is one group that this Congress and our union would have me highlight it is those who were appointed since January 2011 who have suffered even greater pay cuts.

Equal pay for equal work is a fundamental principle of this union and for any employer to do otherwise is to engage in discrimination. Minister, don’t stand over discrimination. Minister stand Against discrimination and ensure that this corrosive practice is stopped and stopped immediately.

Minister, the Spanish poet Antonio Machado wrote:

‘Pathwalker, there is no path. You must make the path as you walk.’

Minister, make a path towards educational recovery which of necessity brings teachers, lecturers and other educators with you.